

*Fasting in Babylon:  
getting the life you want*

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*The Witness*

Volume 79 • Number 12 • December 1996



## The Christian Right

JUST WHEN I THOUGHT there'd be nothing to interest me in *The Witness*, you produce two thought-provoking and, to me, highly relevant issues in a row. "In need of a labor movement" was superb, particularly the article on Ms. DeSmet. Inspiring. I loved her unsanctimonious language and attitude. What a remarkable person. This current issue on the Christian right is equally powerful and timely. Michael Lerner's piece is a refreshing bit of confession, and it rings with truth. The great irony is that the mainline denominations of Christianity (and of Judaism) have worked so hard to be unexceptionable that they have become unexceptional. Yet they have the most to offer people searching for meaning and freedom.

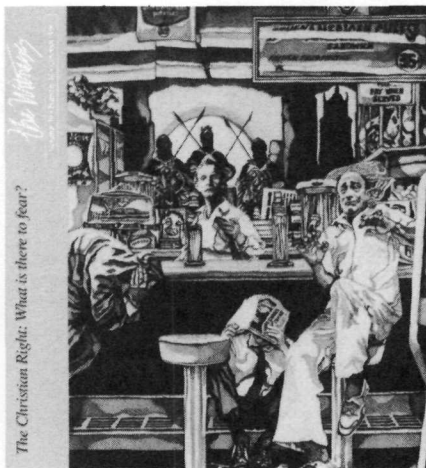
As a marketer and advertising professional (please don't hate me), I am reminded that the essence of good marketing is telling a story and telling it well. The liberal wing of the church (and synagogue) has been a victim of its own inept marketing — bad story-telling, which is highly ironic and not a little depressing, given the raw material we have to work with.

Perhaps the problem is the envisioning and selling of utopian futures that are as remote as heaven and as unpromising as a drunkard's IOU.

Certainly the stridency of the Left's rhetoric is no less tiresome than that of the Right. And behind it lies all too often the assumptions of a higher level of spiritual development, which Mr. Lerner deftly exposes. No less obnoxious — and prideful and inaccurate — than the Right's incessant call for "morals" and (God save most of us) "family values."

Anyway, thank you for two wonderful issues — and their calls to action, implicit and explicit.

**Terence D. Hughes**  
Akron, OH



Thank you for Marianne Arbogast's profile of Reta Finger in the October *Witness*. I wish to add my accolades for the fine work Finger has done as editor of *Daughters of Sarah* and for her scholarly interpretation of the Bible from a feminist perspective.

**Elaine Sommers Rich**  
Bluffton, OH

I ESPECIALLY APPRECIATED SARA Diamond's informative dissection of "dominion theology" in the October issue. Noteworthy, for a different reason, is Michael Lerner's speech in the same issue, a real *tour de force* even by his own standards of ceaseless self-promotion. Could anyone besides Lerner summon up the egotistical arrogance to place a bunch of empty clichés and banal platitudes, which he strings together as "the politics of meaning," on a level with the women's movement's struggle against patriarchy?

**David Finkel**  
Detroit, MI

## In need of a labor movement

"IN NEED OF A LABOR MOVEMENT" was a great issue. Like the one you did on prisons, it truly spoke the gospel in specific witness.

I knew I was in the right place when I read Marianne Arbogast's historical perspective on *The Witness* and labor issues. She mentioned Vida Scudder's articles in the early part of the century. I just finished reading

Scudder's 1937 autobiography, *On Journey*, and was thrilled by her passion for women, socialism ... and the church. Her support of Lawrence textiles strikers, which almost cost her job, particularly struck me.

**Molly Lovelock**  
Eastham, MA

YOUR MAGAZINE IS WELL-WRITTEN. I am always impressed by Jane Slaughter, of course. Your Editor's comments about "fear and pomp" separating the labor movement from organized religion was correct as far as it went. What the Editor fails to point out is that we need each other and we are becoming increasingly irrelevant to large numbers of people. Often the mainstream media ignores what we do or what we say. Our principles demand we side with the poor and the soon to be poor. The Media and those who enrich themselves while others suffer tend to look away from us, or look at us with jaundiced eyes. We are called names, assigned labels and risk further irrelevancy. This is not easy. But, the philosophical treatises which form the foundation of our principles do not include the word easy.

**George Searfoss**  
Labor in the Schools Program  
Indiana University

WHILE I CAN CERTAINLY UNDERSTAND that unjust labor practices in our nation, and indeed in the world, force us to take action, there is a larger truth which screams out to be heard in this arena where the church is concerned.

The institutional church, and those who presume to speak for it through magazines like *The Witness*, with its banner-carrying and speech-making, forget that, in order to see the speck in labor's eye, we must first remove the plank in our own. We belong to a church which has been ordaining women for more than 20 years, and yet we still have incredible double standards when it comes to deployment of priests.

It is no small wonder to me that the institutional church can do little more than pay lip service to the needs of those who are stripped of their worth by unfair labor practices. Until we grapple with our own justice issues as regards labor practices, we will never be

Letters

taken seriously in other segments of society. Perhaps *The Witness* might devote some time and space to our own labor issues in the future.

**Barbara Mays-Stock  
America on Line**

### Family history

I WAS PARTICULARLY IMPRESSED BY the "Family reunions/family history" [7/96] issue. In striking contrast to modern fads on genealogies, where we delight in tracing some of "the glorious past" in the lives of our ancestors, Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann's "'Are you blood?: Hope in race relations'" refers to some of the more bloody past of her white ancestors who were apparently responsible for the massacre of American Indian tribes, among other acts. She writes of both the good and the bad in her ancestral past — in other words, she tries to face up to the truth in her family history. In this respect, she is true to what is best in the Scriptures where both the heroic and the shameful deeds of the founding fathers such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are laid out in the open for all to understand.

I am convinced that the present in God's time can be dealt with creatively only as we are honest about both the good and the bad in our ancestors. Our facing up to the sins of our forebears in their times can do much to fortify us to participate in the divine process of repairing what is terribly wrong in our society today. Related to this, in the Hiroshima/Nagasaki anniversary issue [7/95], I was particularly impressed that Wylie-Kellermann dug up her late father's letters as an Armed Forces chaplain expressing his gratitude for the ending of World War II; he wrote to his family back home that dropping the A-bomb was necessary. The adult daughter and now mother Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann does not now agree with her father, who later was to become the dean of General Seminary and an Episcopal bishop. Nevertheless, she chose to publish her father's opinion as a part of reality of the past of one American patriot and Christian chaplain. Such honesty is what keeps *The Witness* such an outstanding publication particularly for the ecumenical reading public.

**Seichi Michael Yasutake  
Evanston, IL**

## Classifieds

### Travel education

Celtic Pilgrimages 1997. Prayer and study programs to Ireland July, Sept; to Wales May, August. Emphasis on deepening relationship with God through lectures by outstanding scholars; visits to holy sites, worship. Sr. Cintra, Convent St. Helena; 134 E. 28th St.; New York, NY 10016; Phone 212-725-6435; fax 212-779-4009.

### Position open

The Episcopal Evangelical Education Society, founded in 1862, seeks an ordained person as executive director. This officer is the Society's principal staff person and administers its innovative grants program, "Evangelism for the 21st Century." This person should have enthusiasm for the programs and work of the Society, experience in fund-raising, skill in writing, familiarity with the seminaries of the Church and be willing to do some travel. This position requires 20 hours per week with competitive remuneration. The Society's offices are in Arlington, Va., and applicants from the Washington metro area are especially encouraged to apply. For more information call Kenneth McDonald at 703-521-3264 or write to him at EEES, 2300 South 9th Street, Suite 301, Arlington, VA 22204-2351 by January 31, 1997.

THANK YOU FOR PUBLISHING my reunion story on reuniting with a daughter I gave up for adoption. Birth mothers speak a very specific language and this language is not taught or even acknowledged by the larger part of society. We are not seen as honorable mothers. We are not validated and many of us live lives full of shame, guilt and fear.

I am available to any woman who needs to be listened to, encouraged to search or validated as a good mother. Surrendering a child to adoption is an act of love, searching for that child — an act of courage.

**Victoria Gallucci  
570 Union Ave.  
Belleville NJ 07109**

### Episcopal Urban Intern Program

Work in social service, live in Christian community in Los Angeles. For adults 21-30. Apply now for the 1997-98 year. Contact: The Rev. Gary Commins, 260 N. Locust St., Inglewood, CA 90301. 310-674-7700.

### Vocations

Contemplating religious life? Members of the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood of Saint Gregory are Episcopalians, clergy and lay, married and single. To explore a contemporary Rule of Life, contact: The Director of Vocations, Brotherhood of St. Gregory, Saint Bartholomew's Church, 82 Prospect Street, White Plains, NY 10606-3499.

### Prisoners need stamps

California prison chaplain needs postage stamps to distribute to indigent inmates for use on Christmas cards. Send donations to Christian Williams, FSP-D18367, Represa, CA 95671-5071.

### Classifieds

*Witness* classifieds cost 75 cents a word or \$30 an inch, whichever is less. Payments must accompany submissions. Deadline is the 15th of the month, two months prior to publication.

### Faces of Islam

THE EXTENT OF THE INTEREST in your publication was illustrated to me when I shared my copy of *The Witness* with a member of the Islamic Community here at the Augusta Correctional Center. He was so impressed with the quality of your issue on Islam that he asked my permission to post several of the articles on the Islamic bulletin board.

You are doing an excellent job in supporting the views of those of us who feel that Episcopalians should be able to think for themselves!

**James Martin Brown  
Craigsville, VA**



# The Witness

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*The Witness* offers a fresh and sometimes irreverent view of our world, illuminated by faith, Scripture and experience. Since 1917, *The Witness* has been advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those people who have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." We push boundaries, err on the side of inclusion and enjoy bringing our views into tension with orthodox Christianity. *The Witness'* roots are Episcopalian, but our readership is ecumenical. For simplicity, we place news specific to Episcopalians in our Vital Signs section. *The Witness* is committed to brevity for the sake of readers who find little time to read, but can enjoy an idea, a poem or a piece.

Manuscripts: We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Poetry can be sent directly to Leslie Williams, 2504 Gulf Ave., Midland, TX. 79705.

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# Fasting and fulfillment

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Charles Williams observed that while there are religious orders that attempt to mirror nearly every attribute of Jesus there are none upholding Jesus as “glutton and wine bibber.” *The Witness* staff, in the main, could claim to be such an order. I state that at the outset in case any readers imagine that we thrive on moderation or that fasting comes easily for us.

Yet this issue is dedicated to the idea that for Americans who want a life with meaning, the very first step may be fasting (see page 8). We need to clear ourselves of the cultural imperatives to consume mindlessly.

Money managers are often preaching these days. A variety of them are attempting to teach us that if we reflect on our choices, we may actually be able to have much of what we desire. First, of course, we’d have to cut loose from the idea that there is something nebulous and ill-defined, some product, that we *need* to be whole.

If we pull back and reflect, the life that follows may be simpler and deeper than any we foresee. Marsha Sinetar (interviewed on page 14) writes books on self-actualizing and the spiritual dimension of entrepreneurship that promise to help readers get “the life you want.” She uses biblical language, speaking of discernment and vocation.

In all likelihood, we will learn that much of what we think we want, we don’t. (That’s the wisdom of the money managers who say if you see something at the store that you suddenly want, go home before making another trip to buy

it.) We may also find that our deepest desires are for things that we already have. All we need to do is free our lives of illusion and compulsion, so that we can re-order our lives intentionally.

The gift in such a life, the thing that makes it “what we want,” may be simply that we will be present to it. Like the Buddhist monk who practices simply drinking tea, not planning over tea, not reading with tea, not washing the dishes between sips. We can practice simply being present in our lives.

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*Our hope is that people  
will step back, practice  
discernment, name the life  
they want and tend to it,  
trusting God and creation.*

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The obvious question is: Does this invitation to get the life you want only apply to the privileged? Can it translate for people of color and people whose educational opportunities and means are deliberately circumscribed by the system? Interestingly, some politically savvy observers believe that this approach *can* cross class and race lines. But we have to acknowledge that *everyone* can only get the life they want through a nationwide simplification of lifestyle.

Whether people who get the life they want will move toward a sense of social responsibility is an open question. Discipleship, we know, is more than choosing for our *own* health in the swirl of a death-dealing imperial center. Several contributing editors stress that we have to acknowledge that people are dying; there is an urgency. And, they add, there is an

irony in heading back to the land for a simple life, by virtue of a stock portfolio.

*The Witness* staff is aware of the dangers inherent in this topic. Yet, we believe that given the enormity of the horrors and abuse we are all aware of, people *need* to find and shelter a sense of meaning and wholeness in their lives before they can act.

Julie Wortman often argues that we have to dig deep where we are. People who live in privilege may be able to help call in the kingdom; they too have a vocation. And if their social geography actually makes Christian discipleship so difficult that it is unlikely, there is still nowhere else from which they can begin their journey. They need, Wortman says, to dig deep, to learn the contours of their physical environment, to listen to their hearts and to their neighbors. For each of us, this is the first step.

It’s a first step that many are taking. Paul H. Ray identifies this as the rise of “cultural creatives” [TW11/92]. Ray notes that as many as 44 million Americans believe in community, environmental stewardship, family, feminism, altruism and voluntary simplicity. Even *The Wall Street Journal* recognizes this trend, though much more cynically, in its recent article describing Madison Avenue’s scramble to figure out how to sell to “oppies” (older professional parents) who are choosing to stay home with their children in the evenings and preferring durable goods to status-filled throw-away items. They report: “As many attempt to juggle career and family, any semblance

*continued on page 6*

*editor's note*

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Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is editor/publisher of *The Witness*.

# Upholding creation by praise

by Anne Cox

*Suppose benevolent praise,  
Coming into being by our will,  
Had a separate existence, its purple or azure  
light  
Gathering in the upper reaches, affecting  
The aura of morning haze over autumn fields,  
Or causing a perurbation in the mode of an  
asteroid,  
What if praise and its emanations  
Were necessary catalysts to the harmonious  
Expansion of the void? Suppose, for the  
prosperous  
Welfare of the universe, there were an element  
Of need involved.*

("Suppose," *Firekeeper*,  
Milkweed Editions, 1994)

**P**attiann Rogers says she wrote this poem to counter the feeling of despair, of saying that there isn't any meaning, that everything is accident and that we can't be significant,

**Anne Cox**, is rector of Nativity Episcopal Church in Bloomfield Township, Mich. and a *Witness* contributing editor. Artist **Constance Keith Alford** lives in Port Gibson, Miss.

## *Fasting, continued*

of a balanced life has become a status symbol. It helps to become a gourmet cook, play an instrument, rediscover religion and attend fund-raisers. It's also chic to chuck a stressful career" [*WSJ* 9/30/96].

Walter Wink introduces a harsh reality to this conversation. He notes that the boomer generation doesn't extend its resources very far beyond its own immediate gratification or debt (page 21). In the meantime, children are dying. There are real stakes.

*The Witness* will examine some of the Gospel's further claims in the January,



Constance Keith Alford

we're so tiny compared to the universe around us. But what if, she wonders, what if the universe somehow needs what we are capable of giving so that the universe might become itself? This would mean that we, as unique human creatures,

1997 issue on Jubilee economics. But, in this moment, our hope is that if people step back, practice discernment, name the life they want and tend to it, if they trust God and creation, they will be better able to imagine how they might respond to their neighbors' and the world's needs.

We were startled to receive a promotional copy of *Christianity Today* — just as this issue went to press. We applaud *Christianity Today* for tackling rampant consumerism in their "Why the Devil takes Visa: a Christian response to the triumph of consumerism."

matter a lot, that we have things, even small things we can do that contribute to the well-being of the universe.

Rogers writes about the power of praise. Do we choose to align ourselves with this particular power or do we join forces with other less harmonious emanations?

Children need praise, encouragement for jobs well done, for efforts attempted and for just being. And we know that without praise, we don't really blossom forth into our full potential.

There's also praising God, as in when we "praise God from whom all blessings flow." It's an attitude that comes from appreciation, from waking up one morning and noticing the world, noticing the beauty of last night's rain still clinging to the grass, delighting in reflections off the remaining puddles.

More than simply making us feel better, what if praise, many more times than negativity, were what the universe really needs so that it can become fully itself, just as children need praise to become fully themselves?

"We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves," Paul reminds us (Romans 14:7). The actions *we* take, the feelings *we* harbor, have consequences for others because in neither *our* living nor *our* dying are we separate.

From chaos theory, we know that the flutter of a butterfly's wing in one hemisphere can start a hurricane in another. We are connected; indeed, the whole universe is connected.

Not only does my behavior affect my relationships, but it also affects the expansion of the universe. So, too, can our attitudes affect everything. They're just as concrete.

The life I want is one guided by praise. And I am coming to believe that this desire is exactly the one thing that the universe needs so that it might become itself.

**TW**

## Destination

by Carol Hamilton

Through the desert nights  
we bump and doze with  
the Wise Men, study the  
heavens and secure the  
precious gifts in hopes  
of a destination.

With the Shepherds  
we face blazing  
darkness, cacophonous  
silence, shattered  
routine and leave  
our duties in shocked  
search for a reason.

With Mary we hear  
the mixed promise of  
a joy that will pierce  
with sorrow, of a tiny  
flesh which shall be scattered  
to fall like snowflakes,  
sustenance flung afar.

Open this small fist  
and unleash secrets.

**Carol Hamilton** lives in Midwest City, Okla.

## Reflection

by Lucy Taft

A child shines out  
like foil fresh  
torn from the roll,  
reflecting a face,  
making the sound of  
tambourines in motion.  
(Listen!) The  
shimmer slows to  
ear-ringing quiet  
when you are  
molded to a mask  
crazed with little  
worry lines, rigid,  
the light eclipsed.

**Lucy Taft** lives in Austin, Tex.





# Fasting in the imperial center: being restored to God's creation

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

A demonic flip takes hold of us in this culture and nowhere is it more evident than in Christmas.

Advertisements, which are relentless — the *New York Times* estimates that the average American sees 3,000 some ads a day — tell us that we are special. A media critic, who watched TV for a year as part of an experiment, says that the unvarying message is, “You are very, very special.”

Of course, there's a twist.

You are special *but* you are not getting what you deserve. “It's a shame,” the advertisers tell you, “that you don't have what makes these people so happy. You deserve it. And with credit, you can have it now.”

## God's promise

At *The Witness*, we suspect that this message is compelling because it is so close to what is true. In God's economy, we are all very special and God does want the world for us — in fact, God created it with an eye to us enjoying it and being in right relationship to it.

To gain clarity about what it is that God offers us, it may be necessary for those of us living in this most affluent country to fast. The remedy in other countries is, no doubt, different. But here, we have an acute need to untwine the voice of God from the voice of over-consumption. This applies even to Americans with the fewest resources, because we are all held captive by what Madison Avenue would have us believe.

Walter Wink describes the power of

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Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is editor/publisher of *The Witness*.

fasting in *Unmasking the Powers* (Fortress, 1986) when he examines Daniel 10. Daniel lives in the Babylonian court; he eats its fine food and is exposed to its gods. When he appeals to Yahweh for guidance, he begins a fast. At last an angel of the Lord appears to him, saying “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed me 21 days. So Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia and have come to help you understand what is to happen to your people at the end of days.”

Wink suggests that, as the angel explains, the powerful spirituality of the empire did keep the word of God at bay. But he adds that, at the same time, the ethos that Daniel lived in — the perfumes, the foods, the opulence — kept the word of God from Daniel. Daniel was captive to the imperial spirit.

As are we. And how could we not be? We live in the wealthiest nation on earth, which consumes about 40 percent of the world's resources although it holds only six percent of the world's people. We make this amazing grab at resources suc-

cessfully because we have the most powerful military in the world.

I remember hearing a story that may have been apocryphal, about three rabbis coming from Israel 20 years ago. When they reached the U.S., they recoiled because they found it such a very hard place to pray. Similarly, Malidoma Patrice Somé reports that when he accompanied his African tribal leaders into a city for the first time, they were upset. In their culture, truly great people worked hard not to draw attention to themselves. Gesticulating at skyscrapers, an elder said, “Whoever did that must be very sick!”

## Christmas

We're entering the sickest time in our cultural calendar. We are also entering one of the holiest moments in our liturgical year. Untwining the two is our challenge. How do we discern the spirit behind the tears that come to our eyes because Christmas carols recall home, resurrecting in our memories the faces and touch of people we love. Is it a right memory, as it often is, or a nostalgic

fantasy that strips the present of its value? How do we untangle the feelings that arise when we are shopping and, depending on our bio-region, the snow is falling and carols are piped through the loudspeakers? What is at work when we pause before the Christmas

displays where miniature people celebrate outside miniature villages that look German or Swiss, but are made in China by teenagers who are underpaid and sometimes hostage in factories?

It's enough to make one mad.

And perhaps we are. People running out their credit card debts to the limit to purchase toys that are supposed to pro-

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*The ethos of Babylon that Daniel lived in — the perfumes, the foods, the opulence — kept the word of God from him. Daniel was captive to the imperial spirit. As are we.*

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vide their children with wonder would know better if they were not surrounded by a thick, palpable ethos that whispers the demonic to them in the very words that God might use: "You and your loved ones are special. You deserve the best."

### Taking on Santa

A good-faith attempt at clearing the demonic from the sacred in this season requires, among other things, a stark look at Santa Claus. Like Jesus, Santa is coming. Unlike Jesus, Santa will make sure the rain only falls on the just. At Santa's invitation, we enter a cultural headlong rush toward all that we "deserve" if we have been good. This Calvinist idea underpins the entire capitalist system. It is the only rationale that can make us believe that we *should* claim toys from the hands of Asian children who manufacture them at such a high cost to their humanity. We have been good. We desperately need a God who offers this reassurance.

I visited Haiti in 1983. As with most people of faith who visit a third world country, I was in agony trying to figure out what it meant that people living in tin sheds over sewage channels were treasuring empty plastic bottles (which we would call trash) as prized vessels for water. The imperative to change the way resources are distributed was overwhelming. So, in a way it was small surprise that at the Protestant, English-speaking mission (not that of the Sisters of St. Margaret), the pastor literally preached, "God gives America such abundance because we are a Christian nation. If the Haitians would quit doing Voodoo, God could love them too." Simple remedy. The shortage that so many experience is God's work. We have so

much because we are loved by God. God would like to love them too, but they make this impossible.

Stepping up to our cultural figurehead for this belief, we step up to Santa. (Can you see Natalie Wood's dismay?)

The only remedy I can imagine is to pull Santa back into the council of hosts over which Yahweh presides. The Bible is straightforward that there are many spirits. The fact that Yahweh is one God

of persecution of Christians comes alive. (Nicholas was imprisoned for his faith by Diocletian).

In a children's book that I wrote for my daughters, Saint Nicholas is presented as a saint of God who overhears the needs of his neighbors and intervenes because he knows what it is to suffer, having been a wealthy, but orphaned child. This is the vocation of all the saints — a vocation that binds us to them and to one another.

Taking this posture is a good start. Holding it in the face of the onslaught of advertisements and store displays is tough and places one in danger of becoming rigid and losing the playfulness and joy that the season appropriately calls for in relation to the advent of Jesus.

So how do we cleanse ourselves further of the imperial spirit which has become our familiar? How do we break free enough to even see where it has laid its claims on us?

A fundamental step is to rebuke the voices that insinuate "you are so special you deserve more" by proclaiming that because we are loved by God, we *know* that God will provide. In fact, God *has*

provided.

The rewards that God intends for us are not being withheld. They are not something we must look to the future for — they are in our own histories, our own geographies, the landscapes we face, the neighbors in need and the interventions offered by the saints and by one another.

We need to examine the craven desires that are spoonfed to us, the impatience, the sense that something better is happening just beyond our reach, the sense that we are entitled and yet deprived. This attitude has been cultivated in us by the



Detail, *Temptation of St. Anthony* by Hieronymus Bosch

and claims our hearts does not mean that there are not a number of gods making competing claims. In repeated references (see Walter Wink's trilogy on the powers), God is described as presiding over a council of the hosts.

We do not have to destroy Santa. Saint Nicholas has a right vocation in the council. We can help by restoring him, as is possible, to his own historic roots in a geography, in a time. By that simple act, we dispense with the North Pole and a middle eastern landscape comes alive. The struggles of the poor and the reality

advertising industry. Cynics in the government and military may have consciously thought it could be used for population control — the ferment of the 1930s and 1940s made over into a tranquil and consumption-oriented 1950s.

### **‘Entitled, yet deprived’**

Today, of course, this attitude has flowed into rage. The combination of craven desire, gluttoning consumption and continuing dissatisfaction yields a population that has no patience and takes no responsibility. How many parish priests face vitriolic attacks from people who feel they weren’t adequately pastored during a crisis? How often is it true that the parishioners never felt responsible to even inform the pastor of their situation or to *ask* for help?

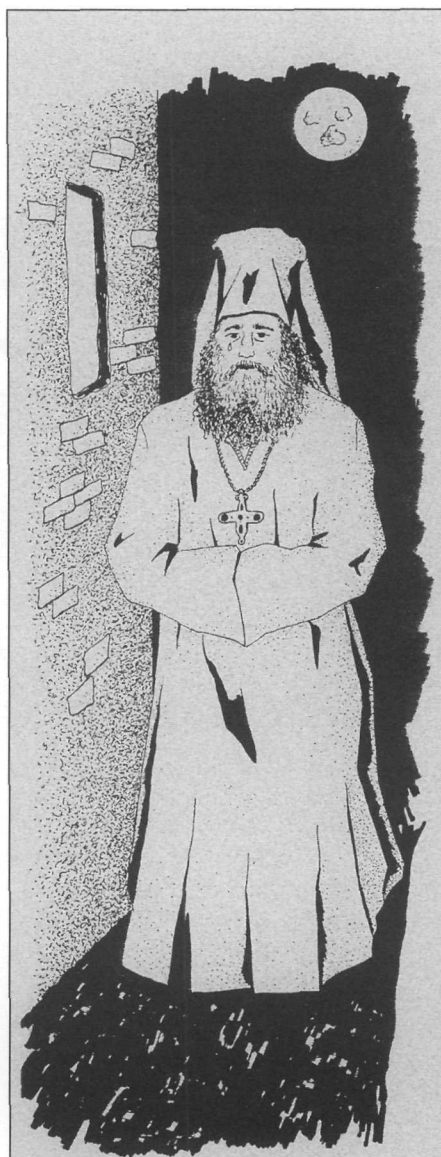
My sister teaches in New Jersey’s public schools. She says that her principal speaks of families as “consumers” and promises complete customer satisfaction. Why, my sister asks, can’t the principal say, “We have some difficult problems to engage and fewer resources. We will need to work together to decide where to put our resources and then acknowledge that some children’s needs will not be adequately met at this time”?

Actually we know why the principal can’t speak straightforwardly — there is no tolerance in the U.S. for delayed gratification or for sustained work toward a goal.

### **Rage unleashed**

What was intended to control the population has made it ungovernable and has fueled its feelings of being deprived, taken advantage of and in need of redress.

Rage makes the work of people in service professions practically untenable and it increases the hostility toward people with special needs or a past that includes criminal convictions. Prisoners, many suggest, are coddled — are they getting the elusive something to which the rest of



**At our house, we remember Saint Nicholas on December 6. We think of the good bishop listening in the night to the cries of those who are afraid or lonely or tired. We remember him searching his heart for what he might do to help.**

— illustration by Virginia Maksymowicz and text by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann.

us are entitled but deprived? End rehabilitative programs and throw away the key. Cut taxes because maybe the extra thousands of dollars in a household budget will buy that elusive thing that keeps us from being whole. If you are angry enough, you can join a militia or put on fatigues and shoot up a fast food restaurant.

The consumerism into which we are invited is utterly death-dealing. There is nothing benign about it.

So what can we do?

We can pull our sphere of reference down to a more local geography. We are not the generic American depicted on T.V. We have histories and local problems and orientations. We have histories that include working together toward community health. We have blessings we can count and histories that we must rehearse, just as the Jews in captivity sang the songs of Zion (and refused to surrender them when their captors called for a song).

We are a people of the Bible and the Bible has much to say about money and consumption. We can struggle with economics. (The January 1997 *Witness* will offer tangible interpretations of Jubilee economics.) We can try to shield ourselves with a litany of credos offered in Scripture, including, for one, that the rain falls on the just and the unjust — wealth is not an indication of God’s favor. We can remind ourselves that all that we are is God’s gift and one of which God has expectations.

And we can call for God’s help. We can cry out for God’s presence in this smoke-and-mirrors fun house of cravings, gluts and real need.

We can rebuke the power of the temptations by fasting. What forms a fast may take can vary. Most of our corporate experience of fasting is rooted in Lent — giving up desserts, giving up alcohol, smoking or swearing. Some fast one day a week from all foods as a continual



discipline. Any of these methods may help to free us.

### Sharpening our longing

Daniel's fast was long-term — it cried out, "Come or surely I will die." His was a fast that created a longing so great, so urgent that it was greater even than the imperially generated cravings and it was directed entirely toward God. Daniel intentionally linked the need in all of us to the source of our well-being. He redirected the needs through which he had been manipulated toward the One who can know us, form us, delight in us and ask the world of us.

Which brings us to a consideration of longing, but not without the insertion of an aside. Fasting from all foods can also be twisted into a manipulative idolatry, so it must be engaged in with discernment, prayer and community. One wonders if anorexics begin to refuse food from a right impulse to clear their bodies and hearts of the ethos that has created their despair. Yet, alone with it, the refusal becomes a means of exerting power over others and a way of flirting with death, multiplying the power of death in the hearts of all those close to the situation. A friend who leads vision quests, Debbie Mast, asks women to consider whether fasting is a healthy act for them. The transcendental quality in fasting might be the opposite of what many women need, she explains. The damage done by cultural stereotyping of female beauty and people's experience of having their bodies mishandled will make some women eager to shed their bodies in any way possible. In these cases, Mast encourages women to do whatever it takes, including eating, to ground themselves in their bodies by choice.

Whether one is refusing food or re-

quiring oneself to be fully present in one's body despite the fear or discomfort, one is creating an awareness of the longing that lives in human beings.

Longing does not have to be a desire that causes us to become involved in

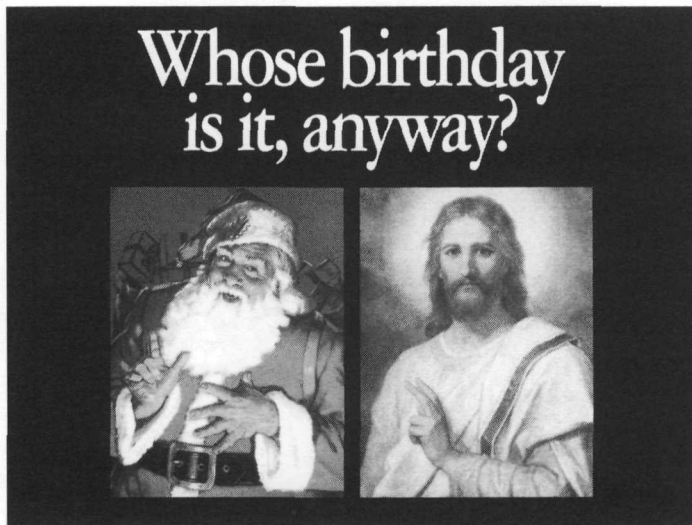
sexually explicit movies.

Longing arises when we have a moment apart, time with music, art or memories. Prayer is longing; it is calling our longing by its true name. Love is longing; it is an engagement with all that *is* while sensing what is being called into being by God.

The sense of almost, but not yet, is what sears our faith with ecstasy. We can almost see the way out of no way. We can feel in our feet the very pulse of creation singing God's praises, an ancient hymn that persists even as humanity fetters and poisons its powers. God's wholeness is promised and we believe. We feel its absence even while we trust its coming. We can wait and long for and glimpse it.

C.S. Lewis describes this longing as joy. In *Surprised by Joy*, he writes:

*"As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's 'enormous bliss' of Eden comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? not, certainly, for a biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past. Before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison."*



Church Ad Project

various forms of death. Unfulfilled desires can be holy.

In *Sense and Sensibilities*, the story is excruciating simply because two characters have so much longing for one another and so much discipline in their sense of virtue. Critics have noted that their abstinence is more erotic than the action in

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*We do not have to destroy Santa. We can help by restoring him to his own historic roots in a geography, in a time. By that simple act, we dispense with the North Pole and the elves. The struggles of the poor and the reality of persecution of Christians comes alive.*

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These moments of longing, Lewis finally realizes, are actually fleeting evidence of God, "not the wave, but the wave's imprint on the sand."

In this longing, we are affirmed. We understand that we are very special and that we can claim the biblical language that asserts that we are children and heirs of One who is all powerful. As heirs and stewards with dominion, we can *anticipate* fulfillment and we can work for the dream of God without a sense of deprivation. Presumably we can interact with teachers and pastors without expecting *them* to recreate and reward *us*. Beyond doubt, we can resist the urge to indefinitely lock up or annihilate people we are angry at.

Ironically, it is when we can give ourselves to longing that we suddenly are able to see and value what we have, to cherish those things given into our hands, as we would wood or stone that a hundred hands have smoothed.

In this effort to live in right relationship while anticipating the reign of God, we have an ally. The earth itself.

### Restoring creation

A tremendous number of people in this culture are finding ways to prepare with a group and then take time apart to sit with creation and to listen. In Scout campouts, Outward Bound programs and New Age vision quests, people are learning to recognize plants, to distill clean water, to light fires, to sleep on the ground. They are not just acquiring survival skills. Often they are also coming home with a changed sense of themselves, sometimes a new name.

The *Witness*' newest board member Jolly Sue Baker speaks of the trees and mountains in Washington state. "The spirits," she says, "are still alive. You *can't* ignore them." She suspects that overuse of the land back east has altered people's ability to recognize the spirits.

But Tom Brown, a naturalist and au-

thor of several books that weave survival skills with American Indian mysticism, grew up in New Jersey. He managed to learn the tracks of animals, to learn to trust creation, in the Pine Barrens — a wilderness area in the heart of industrial New Jersey.

The spirits are there for the knowing. The earth contains a pattern of the will of God, a rhythm, an ancient truth. Just as in C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* chronicles the trees are the decisive warriors in the Last Battle, creation is our ally and guide.

### New Age creeds

When Christians, conservatives and liberals, make disparaging remarks about New Age devotees, I suspect they don't really know what they are condemning. For all the self-centeredness that New Age spirituality can engender, it is also moving powerfully to restore people to their relationship to the earth and to a belief in an interactive dance between the universe and our lives. It is, in many quarters, making faith real for people. Sometimes it successfully recovers some of the ancient wisdom held by earth-based people around the world.

Conservatives screaming, "Pagan!" can't be heard by New Agers as offering anything more valuable than what they are learning about themselves and the earth. (C.S. Lewis, so widely respected among conservatives, doesn't hesitate to include in his children's books the river god, the wood nymphs and

Bacchus with the maenads in the victory romp when God prevails. In fact, Lewis writes that when he was searching for a religious tradition, he wondered, "Where has religion reached its true maturity? Where, if anywhere, have the hints of all Paganism been *fulfilled*?"

Christians may have more to learn

from New Age devotees than they have to teach. We in the church have willingly surrendered all ties between our feasts and the cycles of the earth. To a large degree, we have minimized miracles and direct communication with God. But what we do have to offer, if we watch and understand, is a limited intervention when beliefs begin to twist into idolatries. We can proclaim that in the heavenly host, Yahweh prevails. Petty sacrifices and intricate rituals are not *required* by God. No demi-god can claim our hearts. We do not *need* secret societies or handfuls of crystals. We can embrace creation and the heavenly hosts in full freedom.

### Matched praise

Earth-based people around the world attest to a spirit in the earth that welcomes us and provides. People experience a matched understanding, a matched longing. How else could "the very stones cry out" and "trees clap their hands for joy?" On the verge of starvation, people testify to being alerted to a food source or a spring. In the Philippines, where the dolphin is a Christ symbol, a friend reports that a man, clinging to the remnants of his storm-damaged boat, feared that he and his daughter would die of thirst. A dolphin approached, pushing a coconut. The man broke a tooth cracking it open, but its

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*Unfulfilled desires can be holy. The sense of almost, but not yet, is what sears our faith with ecstasy.*

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milk and meat saved his life and the life of the child. The remedies are always simple; no opulent banquets, just what we need.

To understand that a coconut is *life*, Americans need to strip down, to do without, to fast. And when we do, we will find an abundance that may have nothing to do with material security, yet it may be more than we had hoped for. God has decreed that we are special and that we can have what we most desire, now and always. **TW**

# 'Recognizing the deep movement of life'

by Steven Charleston

For those indigenous persons who still seek to follow the traditional ways of their ancestors, fasting is as integral to a spiritual life as prayer. Every tribal community in North America, from Hudson Bay to Baja and from Oregon to the Okefenokee, practiced fasting in its religious life. The variations were many, but the central spiritual theme was the same: Voluntarily abstaining from food was considered a pathway to follow to draw nearer to God. It was a path to vision and truth.

Fasting was part of both communal and private worship. It was part of the rites of passage for adolescent girls and boys. It was a vital aspect of the powerful experience of the "vision quest," the intentional search for a deeper communion with God through prayer, meditation and physical discipline. Fasting was also a common step in the novitiate of those who sought tribal ordination as spiritual healers, the medicine men and women of the Tribe.

In all of these ways, fasting was an expression of Native traditional theology. It was as respected in the "old testament" of Native America as it was in the "old testament" of Israel. Just as early Hebrew culture recognized the intimate connection between food and faith, so too did the original spiritual wisdom of Native People make this fundamental linkage. The simple act of eating, of taking in nourishment, became for both Israel and Native America a ritual understanding that had profound theological meaning. Certain foods were to be avoided, while others were to be eaten only on special

occasions. Communal or family feasts (the source of our Christian "Communion") were structured ways to integrate food with prayer and relationship. Both cultures spent time on the selection and preparation of certain sacred foods, especially those that would be thought of as offerings to God. And ultimately, abstinence from food itself became a subtle but sophisticated way of completing the circle between what we consume and what we believe.

Why all of this attention to food? I believe the answer escapes affluent America because for this culture food is a convenience, not a contemplation. But for wiser cultures, not only in ancient Israel and North America but throughout the indigenous world, the deep meditation on the meaning of life led religious men and women to consider the intricate bond between life in all of its subtlety. Life grows, life dies. Life emerges, life is harvested. Life moves through one part of creation to the next: from plant to person and then from person back to the earth. Life, therefore, is constantly transforming itself: moving in great cycles through all creation. The genius of the Hebrew tribes, just as the genius of Native American tribes, was in recognizing this deep movement of life through the everyday world for what it is: an access point for human beings to connect to the Creator who set all of this in motion.

Fasting is one way to step out of the natural cycle, even for only a brief time, to focus more clearly on the inner truth and beauty of the process that is sacred life. In doing this, a person gains a vision of life (of its many cycles and connections) that deepens human perspective and draws human awareness nearer to the intention of God. When Native People fasted, they did so for a purpose — for an

encounter with a God who is truly living and incarnate. Because God was not only the Creator, but the Sustainer of all life, then focusing on that sustaining-nourishing-transforming principle gave Native People a vision of God which could be fully appreciated in no other way.

Two quick images can help to illustrate the depth of the Native theology in both its Traditional and its Christian form. First, consider the creation story of the Hopi of Arizona. The Hopi People, called the Peaceful Ones, tell of God gathering all the tribes of human beings together at the dawn of time and offering them the *lifegiving nourishment of sacred ears of corn* to sustain them on their many migrations around the world. Those peoples who were greedy grabbed for the largest ears of corn, leaving only one small ear for the Hopi to take for themselves. But the Hopi, because they understood the wisdom which said "the last shall be first," were blessed by God for their forbearance and humility: because they knew that taking from the earth is a holy act which must only be done with great care and reverence, they became a holy nation in themselves, a chosen People.

Webster Wise, a Seminole man from Oklahoma, was once interviewed about how Christian Native People in his tribe understood the old ways of the vision quest. He explained that the thread to the past was unbroken; when the church needed wisdom, its members would fast together, seeking God's truth. In Webster's own words:

"Back in those days they all went out in the woods. If they had anything coming up in the church that was to be settled, they'd have to go out there, telling God to lead that business, whatever it may be."

Fasting opens the heart to wisdom. In both ways, Native America has offered us a reminder that the sincerity of the search for God can often be measured by the sincerity of the intention to fast. **TW**

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Steven Charleston, former bishop of Alaska, is chaplain at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn.



# ‘Life ever surpassing itself’: an interview with Marsha Sinetar

by Julie A. Wortman

In the course of participating in the planning of this issue of *The Witness*, I found myself thinking that a perfect cover image would be a photograph of surfers in southern California riding waves at dawn — a score or so of wetsuit-clad figures sitting on surfboards in the early morning mist like some strange species of gull or aquatic mammal, drawn to the same spot for the same reason, but each engaged in a solitary response to nature’s beckoning. Such a picture likely would have played into peoples’ knee-jerk expectation that the life people instinctively want is nothing more than a life of irresponsible self-indulgence, something no justice-minded publication should be espousing.

But there’s more to this image of early morning surfers than that, which was why I liked the idea of using it on the cover. I’m not a surfer, but I can understand the desire to be in tune with the metabolism of the earth’s larger rhythms, to give oneself over to the ocean’s power, to punctuate one’s days with an attentive tracking of wind, currents and tides.

I am aware that there is a dark side to surfing, like anything else, but I respect people who can figure out a way to regularly nurture their souls in such ways as this. Some give themselves over to the life so fully that they eschew work that might promise greater material benefits in favor of employment that offers more



Marsha Sinetar

flexible hours and a way to live close to the beach.

The trick, says Marsha Sinetar, is to honor one’s enthusiasms and live accordingly. Sinetar, who lives along a different stretch of California coastline than the one I’ve been describing, is an organizational psychologist, mediator and educator whose research in the area of “self-actualizing” has been the subject of numerous books, among them, *Do What You Love, The Money Will Follow* [Dell

*Inner health stimulates  
the need to express one’s  
God-given gifts. The  
healthier we are, the more  
compelled we are to follow  
the truth of our own being.*

— Marsha Sinetar

Publishing, 1987]; *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics* [Paulist Press, 1986]; and, most recently, *To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love* [St. Martin’s Press, 1995]. She would be among the first to point out that “enthusiasm” means “filled with God” and includes authentic vocation and the pursuit of wholeness.

“Wholeness exists to the extent individuals are conscious of and receptive to his or her innermost self,” Sinetar writes in *Ordinary People*. The call to wholeness involves, first, “an awareness that something in one’s customary way of living doesn’t work, isn’t health-promoting, isn’t life-supporting. This initial awareness is experienced in various ways and at different times and isn’t unusual even in the general population. What is unusual is that socially transcendent individuals *do* something, alter their lives, as a result of their awareness, in such a way that furthers the development of the person they sense they could be.”

These days I seem to be surrounded by such “socially transcendent” people. One friend took a dramatic cut in pay as an administrator for a large visiting nurse agency to join a smaller agency that was willing to let her pursue non-traditional forms of therapeutic healing. She has more “drudge” work to do, but finds the improved sense of personal fulfillment worth the sacrifice.

Another acquaintance, dispirited by the working conditions at her church communications job, finally quit to go it on her own doing freelance work. A single mother with a nine-year-old daughter to support, working for herself has given her more time for her daughter in addition to peace of mind — and a reasonable income.

I’m also impressed by two people I know who operate a small cleaning business. Both come from working class backgrounds and lack college degrees. They

Julie A. Wortman is managing editor of *The Witness*. Photographer Sandy Lejeune is an organic farmer in Santa Barbara, Calif.

dislike the work they are doing, but take pride in doing it well as long as they depend on it for paying their bills. The freedom they have as their own bosses makes up for the frustration they experience around the high cost of medical insurance and tax laws that seem to penalize them for their initiative. Both have been investigating coursework at a local community college in preparation for a change.

As Sinetar points out, the entrepreneurial spirit and the desire for self-definition are no respecters of social or economic privilege. Many people assume, she says in *Ordinary People*, "that in order to have the courage and ability to take on the so-called 'higher' needs of the personality, people had to be financially secure. In fact, that doesn't seem to be the case. They have to *feel* secure before facing the work, but that is another matter."

Several years ago I heard the social critic and scholar of American culture, bell hooks, say much the same thing. She told a standing-room-only audience of working-class students in Detroit — most of them men and women of color, and most of them juggling families and multiple jobs in addition to their studies — that unemployment can be one of the most creative times in a person's life.

"An unemployed person lacks a job," she said, "not a mind. You can use unemployment to strengthen yourself, to develop a sense of purpose, to *learn* something."

Why couldn't the community open an empty movie theater, hooks asked, and make it into a community education center — a place for people who can't read to learn how; a place to discuss history, politics and literature; a place, above all, where people can claim and cultivate their sense of dignity and purpose in the face of demoralizing circumstances?

Indeed, why not?

**Julie Wortman:** In preparing this issue our thought has been that people should be able to get the life they want — the "good" life, if you will — but that "fasting" of a special kind will be needed. Your latest book has a lot to do with both ideas.

**Marsha Sinetar:** I like the definition of the "good" life that Paul Tillich gives us. He says the good life is "life ever surpassing itself." My book is both stern and encouraging about this. It doesn't do for us to be brutal with ourselves when we're trying to hear what's needed. By "brutal" I mean overdoing the punitive messages that we give to ourselves or comparing ourselves in some measly way with people whom we admire. But at the same time it doesn't do to indulge ourselves. So what I've tried to say to people is, "Let's take the creative process one step at a time and be responsible to the obligations that we already have — but *also* responsible to the more abundant life that we want." It could be that less is more: Less fear, less striving, less pressure, less idealized achievement bring more order, discipline, gratefulness.

**J.W.:** You equate creating the life you want with finding your "authentic vocation." What do you mean by this?

**M.S.:** "Vocation" is a religious word — or it's a religious word to me. I define vocation as the process or summons of becoming whole and distinctive in a particular way *within our life in community*. I feel that one of the greatest services I can offer my community — whether you define that term by the household, the neighborhood, the village or the global village — is simply to develop a high personal presence, that functional wisdom or righteousness that we possess within our own hearts. That sort of prayerful state serves everyone. When you're at peace, you help establish peace in your community. By the same token, to the extent we are centered and give our full

attention to work, we serve the greater community. The Buddha, for example, taught that *right livelihood* was work done consciously, with pure intent and as service. A vocation helps us grow as persons while we meet our own needs and those of others.

**J.W.:** This seems like the basic call issued by the early Christian community — a call to Christian vocation.

**M.S.:** Yes, that's right. But the church usually defines only certain, legitimized roles as a "vocation" — ordination, being a member of a religious order. There's very little today of the early spirit of the church, the desert mothers and fathers, although I do see that coming as people catch "fire" to use themselves in a vocational way.

**J.W.:** Does this apply to only a specific profile of people?

**M.S.:** The books I have been writing are addressed to everyone. These say, in transcultural and intergenerational language, that if you have just average intelligence and average drive and average gifts, you, too, can have "the good life," even with economic or other limitations — it's not too much for us to expect that of ourselves. Neither is it enough just to think positively. The creative process is demanding. People who are building the lives they want demonstrate old-fashioned virtues: thrift, hard work, pride of workmanship; love of service and community. They've committed themselves to invest in their talents. They seem to work for something larger than self. These values — and not merely monetary aims — fuel their drive, raise self-esteem and ultimately insure occupational achievement. For this reason, what I'm writing about may appeal only to a specific profile of people.

**J.W.:** You say in *To Build the Life You Want* that a requirement for realizing authentic vocation is inner healthiness. Why?

**M.S.:** Inner health stimulates *the need* to express one's God-given gifts. The healthier we are, the more compelled we are to follow the truth of our own being. But some people may be too injured or too easily discouraged or depressed to build the skills they will need. They'll need to acquire soundness of mind first.

**J.W.:** How much of the population would you say has a sense of authentic vocation?

**M.S.:** Probably around 10 percent feels a radical, direct call to vocation — the rare experience of being their own person. Maybe between 10 to 50 percent fall somewhere in the middle. I'm fairly hopeful about that larger block of individuals — they feel something's "pressing" them. I find that people who feel restless about their lives and have begun a "searching" process long to embody the qualities and standards of their vocation.

**J.W.:** Some of your ideas make me think of a time when I did some academic counseling at a university and used to meet with students who were fearful about what would become of their lives. I used to ask them, "What gives you joy?" Often, they would act as if no one had ever asked them that before.

**M.S.:** I've asked that question, too, and get that same response. It's amazing to me.

**J.W.:** And it's heartbreaking, because it seems like this pursuit of authentic vocation is for the young.

**M.S.:** Vocation is for the young, but also for everyone. People in their eighties and older — close to death as they are, savoring every day — understand that joy is not the same as situational happiness. Joy is deep gratitude or enjoyment — rapture, really.

**J.W.:** Theologian William Stringfellow talks about humanity's vocation to celebrate God and serve human life. He talks about living humanly in the face of death. You speak of global eco-

nomic, social and political change and uncertainty as the context that calls for a pursuit of authentic vocation.

**M.S.:** In terms of this global rupture or transformation that we're experiencing, one kindness we can offer one another is to encourage each other to take the bull by the horns, vocationally speaking, and identify how we might serve ourselves and others, and how we can be ingenious enough to make a few bucks at it. Because it's from our ingenuity that we'll stabilize ourselves as individuals and stabilize our communities, too.

People will gain lasting "job security" only as they become self-reliant, creatively resourceful and fully engaged with their process of creative enterprise — all the more so as they tune into their lives' genuine purposes. We also gain job security by getting our mind to move beyond the notion that someone else should give us a job, find it for us, tell us what to do with our life. As we find authentic vocation, we transcend the idea that we lack unique gifts or service to offer others.

One of my enjoyments — it's both a luxury and a necessity — is the daily reading of Scripture. We read these exact promises in Scripture: that we have access to the mind of Christ and that the wisdom of God is formed within us. We find continual references to prayer being answered, read that we live in the midst

of an untapped wealth of divine resources and grace. The 21st century is here, now. It's time for people who pray and people who reflect deeply on God's word to

embody those promises, to rely on those spiritual resources as tools. Our old processes have disappointed many, and made victims of people who were easily crushed by the powers that be. But nobody can crush you, except physically, when you are in prayer. And that takes us back to building the life we want. The 21st century will introduce a major awakening: Larger and larger numbers of people will realize that within us lives a holy resource.

**J.W.:** It seems like much of what you speak about would be encouraging to people who are on welfare or unemployed.

**M.S.:** I agree. I'm interested in working with those in the helping professions: clergy, health care workers, teachers, etc. These people best serve the population you're describing. For individuals with an interest to function at the level of transformation, my work can be quite helpful. It is to this that I now turn my attention — to the mentoring of mentors.

Many unemployed people feel too discouraged to go "looking for jobs." Who

could blame them? Most human beings can take only so much rejection before giving up, especially when they don't really want what they're looking for. Ideally what we want is not simply a job, but to discover our life's vocation. A mere "bill-paying job" offers little genuine, intrinsic reward. True, a bill-paying job is fine if it supports our real pur-

poses as parents, artists or hospital volunteers. But after we meet our security needs almost all of us begin dreaming of our vocation.

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*I feel that one of the greatest services I can offer my community is simply to develop a high personal presence, that functional wisdom or righteousness that we possess within our own hearts. When you're at peace, you help establish peace in your community.*

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**J.W.:** Your involvement with business leaders interests me. I don't think of business, especially big business, as a spiritually based endeavor or as a context where you could do the work you are doing.

**M.S.:** Within every larger business enterprise exist people. And these human beings have hearts, feelings, aspirations, love and vital spiritual lives. I speak a language that is highly respectful of the frame of reference of the other — and, because I do, people sense that they can open up. And so we move from our conversations about strategy and planning to, “Well, what’s keeping me from doing this or that?” and to, “Well, if I really have the faith of my convictions, or if I really was a person of integrity ....” and then we are engaged in a spiritual dialogue.

**J.W.:** Why would big business pay you to lead workshops if you believe that the best chance for people to get fulfilling work is in small and medium-sized businesses?

**M.S.:** First, I don't lead workshops. In corporate settings, I function as a strategist and corporate development type. Next, I don't believe fulfilling work comes *only* in small and mid-sized business, but that fulfilling work relates to fulfilling the dictates of our vocation. To your point, corporations bring me in to help them become more entrepreneurial, to help them envision creative, responsive and resourceful solutions since we're in an era that demands these qualities from all who wish to be gainfully employed. The old, assembly-line mentality of following lock-step orders from above is gone.

As proof of that point, no one knows (not even the census bureau) how many people are working at home — in kitchens, in garages — starting up little enterprises. A case in point that we're only just hearing about is what's happening in In-

dia, whose laws are now favoring entrepreneurial outreaches. Computers are helping that happen. A whole new population of entrepreneurs in India is starting little businesses and serving U.S. ventures.

that such workers can't afford their own pension funds and benefits, nor can they unionize. How do you respond?

**M.S.:** I acknowledge that that is a concern, and the Mary-Martha debate goes on in me, too. But the body of my



*Witness contributing editor Ched Myers riding a wave*

Sandy Lejeune

The reason this entrepreneurial phenomenon is so promising is that it puts into the hands of the workers the processes and controls of their labor and doesn't render them slaves to impersonal bureaucracies. Assembly line workers or those who get fired just before they retire or who are let go from a longstanding position because a company is downsizing are often alienated in a big way from self-reliance and security. Even pension plans are taken away from some. So working in an entrepreneurial venture — either by yourself or in a family business or in a small start-up business or in a large entrepreneurial corporation — has the advantage of giving you more autonomy over what you do.

**J.W.:** Many people worry, though,

work emphasizes contemplative ascent — the purification and anointing that accompanies progressive union with God. You tell me: What do pension plans and benefits have to do with our journey to God? I write for people thirsting for the divine, for a richer, more abundant life. A vocation is, in my view, Christ — the sacred, hidden, haunting image within — summoning us to be real, knocking at our doors of perception. Can you imagine asking Jesus Christ, when he whispers, “Follow me,” “Yes, but who will pay my dental plan?”

Also, considering the increasingly depersonalized world we live in, where soon we'll be fingerprinted at every turn, where reliable friendships with trusted, old neighbors are a thing of the past, it's

# A vocation for churches

by Grace Lee Boggs

**W**e will have to create a new economy in order to renew our cities — an economy which meets not only the material but also the psychological and spiritual needs of human beings. I am convinced that we cannot depend upon large corporations to provide us with jobs. It is now up to us — the citizens — to put our hearts, our imaginations, our minds and our hands together to create a vision, and concrete programs, for developing the kinds of

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## *Sinetar, continued*

invigorating to preserve at least something under your authority, something close to your heart — and know that you can sustain yourself with it.

**J.W.:** In some ways it's a return to an old way.

**M.S.:** That's right. It's a return to pre-industrial times when people worked in villages, rode their bikes, apprenticed in little stores or service places or learned the family business. We're returning to that in some ways. And then also, on top of that, we have these multinational cities within cities of corporations. Realities within realities.

**J.W.:** Do you think that in those large multinational corporations it will be possible for people to save their souls?

**M.S.:** I'm not much of an utopian, yet I always know that within Alcatraz, a university, the IRS or the Pentagon exist people who shine. God is there, too. We tend to imagine corporations as spiritual

local enterprises that will provide meaningful jobs and income for all citizens.

We have been learning that there is nothing inherently progressive in large-scale, high tech production for the world market; it produces a permanent underclass for which the system no longer has any use and which resorts to drugs and violence to compensate for its powerlessness and irrelevance.

If we truly care about these human beings, we have to begin creating an economy for which they are needed and which enables them to meet their own needs and the needs of the community. The best economy for this purpose is a self-reliant economy of small enterprises,

black holes but I'm saying God is everywhere, even if it seems more in some places than in others.

**J.W.:** "You are always and only in business for yourself, no matter for whom you work or where," seems like one of your key concepts?

**M.S.:** For the spiritually emerging entrepreneur it certainly is. Young people who embrace that idea early will be well served by the business world. It's not just that they'll serve their corporate managers and shareholders by that attitude, but it's also that they'll serve themselves with it.

**J.W.:** And you also say that the kind of entrepreneurialism that is focussed on authentic vocation is also going to be quite socially transformative?

**M.S.:** Definitely. But the power of any transformation depends on the integrity of each individual. Spiritual transformation is not something one does according to a party line. Transformation happens

producing goods and services for the local market. Instead of destroying the skills of workers and making people expendable, these small enterprises will combine craftsmanship with the new technologies which provide flexibility and make small batch production economical. This alternative economy will not try to compete with GM, Ford, Chrysler etc., because its purpose will not be purely economic. Its purpose will be the holistic development of the person and the culture of the community. For precisely that reason I believe it can become the wave of the future.

We also need fundamental changes in our concept of education. Children are warehoused in schools for 12 years, with no function except to study and get good grades so that they can get the diplomas which will enable them to get a job. What kids learn in school has little if any rela-

as one stays wide open to the inner call, when one determines, "*I am* — I am a journalist, or an artist, or a parent, or a business leader." It's not that I wish I was one of these or that I'm going to exploit you so that I can be one of these.

*I am* God's workmanship — I like that phrase. And to the extent that I am, you benefit.

It's predicted that before long we'll live in a largely jobless society, without enough employment to go around. Futurists tell us the rise of part-time, temporary employment and job sharing are but symptoms of this trend, that profitable corporations "downsize," that is, terminate employees. I contend that even if finite, narrowly focused functions do grow scarce, our optimal life requires meaningful vocation — some active, contributive, relational engagement to help us become unique, whole persons. Until we achieve this integration, we live but half a life. **TW**

tionship to their daily lives. While they are growing up, they are like parasites doing no socially useful work, spending their time playing and watching TV. Then when they become teenagers, we blame them because they have no sense of social responsibility.

This kind of schooling has little appeal to most kids in the inner city because it requires that they blind themselves to the devastation all around them. Those kids who do well in the system are groomed to "succeed" by moving out of the community, which means more deterioration, while the nearly 50 percent who drop out express their frustration in acts of vandalism and violence.

We have to restructure schools so that they are no longer institutions designed to promote individual advancement but to serve the community. The core of the school curriculum should be the economic and social development of the community, with the faculty, citizens and students working together to achieve this goal. In this process children will learn through practice — which has always been the best way to learn. While they are absorbing naturally and normally the values of social responsibility and therefore developing morally, they will also be developing academically because they will be stimulated to learn skills in order to solve real problems.

Instead of just being fed information, they will be involved in solving problems which require value judgments as well as factual knowledge and skills. Working collectively, rather than as isolated individuals, they will discover that multiple answers are possible and therefore learn how to live in a pluralistic and constantly changing society. For example, how can we serve food in the school cafeteria which is both nutritious and environmentally friendly? How can we conserve energy in our school buildings and recycle

materials? How can we utilize local resources for products needed by people in the area?

The church is in a unique position to help build the movement to restructure

the spiritual and leaving the material to the economic and political power structure. The crisis of a city like Detroit provides the church with an extraordinary opportunity to develop and practice



**Lifeline: Creating a Healthy Community, mural in Los Angeles** David Fichter/Syracuse Cultural Workers

our cities, both practically and conceptually. In the first place, the church has never accepted the purely economic philosophy of human beings. Man/woman, it has always insisted, does not live by bread alone. The weakness of the church is that it has too often accepted the separation between the material and the spiritual, taking responsibility only for

a vision of a new economy and a new educational system which meets both the material and spiritual needs of human beings.

Churches remain the most stable urban institutions with human and material resources which no other institutions have. They are in an excellent position to develop small enterprises that provide models of how to meet the needs of the community and the city and at the same time teach young people the importance of skills, process and respect for nature. Young people in cities like Detroit, which have a lot of vacant land, could witness land being used by churches for organic gardens to supply produce for local needs or to plant Christmas trees for sale at Yuletide or greenhouses where vegetables are grown year-round. The idea of a self-reliant living economy to meet the material and spiritual needs of people would begin to come alive. **TW**

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*Churches are in an excellent position to develop small enterprises that provide models of how to meet the needs of the community and teach young people the importance of skills, process and respect for nature.*

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# What?! Did he say 'tithe'??

by Walter Wink

Each day, 35 thousand children five years and younger die of starvation, malnutrition, and related diseases. The death toll is almost 13 million a year. Compare that figure with the toll from warfare. In this entire century, wars have claimed the lives of some 109 million people. Horrendous as that figure is, it is eclipsed every eight years by the death toll of young children. A war with casualties so high would be denounced as genocidal. But these deaths go on, inexorably, day after day, and the public is silent. Dying children have few advocates, for their parents are dying as well. Our world may finally be saying no to war, but this evil beggars war. The most immense sacrifice ever perpetrated in human history is going on right now—a gigantic holocaust in which Mammon is killing far more people than Mars.

Deaths of that magnitude do not happen by accident. They are engineered by the mighty Powers that preside over the fate of nations. These Powers are not, for all that, mysterious. They are the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the United States and other First World countries, huge corporations and compliant politicians. All these Powers have been integrated into a single overarching system of Powers, the Domination System. It is characterized by unjust economic relations, oppressive political relations, biased race relations, patriarchal gender relations, hierarchical power relations, and the use of violence to maintain them all. And for that system,

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**Walter Wink**, who actually gets a kick out of giving, has written *Engaging the Powers* and other engaging books. Artist **Claudia Nietsch-Ochs** lives in Merching, Germany.

35 thousand children's deaths are an acceptable cost of doing business.

As Brazilian worker-unionist and presidential candidate Luis Ignacio Silva put it:

*I tell you that the Third World War has already started — a silent war, not for that reason any less sinister. This war is tearing down Brazil, Latin America, and practically all of the Third World. Instead of soldiers there are children dying, instead of destruction of bridges there is the tearing down of factories, hospitals, and entire economies. ... It is a war by the United States against the Latin American continent and the Third World. It is a war over the foreign debt, a war which has as its main weapon interest, a weapon more deadly than the atom bomb, more shattering than a laser beam.*

Most of those deaths are preventable.

There is enough food in the world to feed everyone, with food left over. A mere \$2.5 billion a year could end a majority of childhood deaths. Many countries have made headway with immunization; some Third World nations have a higher immunization rate than Washington, D.C. Deaths from hunger have actually dropped from 40 thousand a day 20 years ago to a still unacceptable 35 thousand today, and the only two places in the world where hunger has increased over that period are Sub-Saharan Africa and the United States. Bread for the World President David Beckman insists that hunger in America could be wiped out in six months by a relatively modest increase in the WIC

program (Women, Infants and Children's Supplemental Nutrition Program), Food Stamps, and the School Meals program. Everyone agrees that WIC works; it is Bob Dole's favorite program. Yet in 20 years it has never been fully funded. Everything else comes first. By the time farm subsidies and other items have been settled, there is simply not enough money left, and no clamoring constituency to mollify.

No constituency, that is, except Bread for the World, and Oxfam, and other marvelous nonprofit organizations that are attempting to reduce human suffering in the world. As governments have withdrawn funds for alleviating poverty, these nonprofits have stepped in to do what they can with far too limited resources. Remember how Ronald Reagan called for individual philanthropy to make up for government withdrawal of support? And how an examination of his income tax forms showed that he himself was giving almost nothing to charitable causes? According to the research orga-

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*Tithing is one of the best ways known for feeling solidarity with others in their struggles for justice and their full humanity.*

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nization Independent Sector, if the 258 thousand churches in the United States were to make up for what our government has withdrawn from the

social net, each church would have to increase its budget by some \$220,000.

For the time being, however, churches and individuals are going to have to make up for some of that difference. Yet the portion of the population that gives is dwindling each year. Leonard Sweet notes that the Baby Boomers are notorious for living beyond their means. Their credit cards are maxed out to the limit, their credit lines are used up, they are crushed under the weight of college loans, and many of them are finding less oppor-

tunity to increase their wealth than their parents had. They hardly give away any part of their income at all.

By contrast, their parents, whom Sweet calls the Boosters, have a deep abhorrence of debt. They try to pay with cash, or pay off their debts early, if they can. These Boosters have been big savers and givers. When these Boosters die, there is going to be the biggest transfer of wealth in the history of the world. And the Boomers, with their pockets full of credit cards, have already spent it!

Those Boosters are the main source of income for outfits like Bread for the World. Their kids are so deeply in debt that they can hardly imagine giving as a regular part of their check-writing regime. When the Boosters are gone, who is going to support these essential nongovernmental groups—outfits like Amnesty International, Habitat for Humanity, Handgun Control, or your local church's meals program? These Boomers need to learn to give, and it is none too soon to begin trying to persuade them of that fact.

When I speak of Boomers, I am thinking of my own kids. Given the enormity of the need worldwide, we can scarcely settle for halfway measures. A pittance—a dollar in the plate if they get to church—will not cut it. We need to be talking tithing, and not just to the Boomers, but to the Boosters as well.

Tithing? Surely not. Ten percent of our income, given away? Are we to base it on our net income, or our gross? Does giving to a political candidate count? Does it have to be tax deductible?

The intimates to whom I showed this article gagged on the word "tithing." It

apparently conjures up altar calls and hard-sell evangelists, preachers exhorting the flock to share out more of its fleece, legalism and quotas and obligations uncheerfully assumed.

Forget all that. We aren't talking law but grace. We are talking about the incredible satisfaction of knowing that

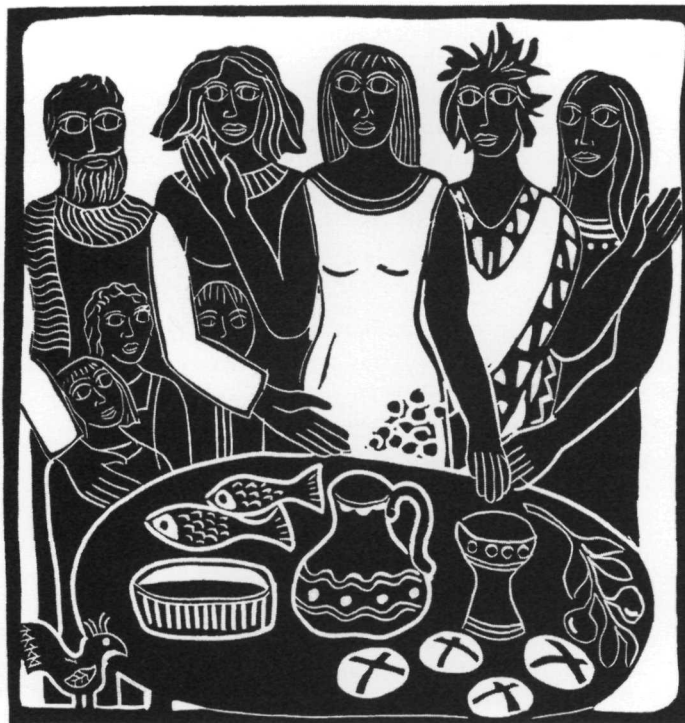
the phenomenon of corporate tithing. Companies like The Body Shop are giving 10 percent of their profits to environmental causes. We should be in dialogue with businesses and corporations to encourage more of this kind of giving.

I need to get personal about this. I'm not trying to lay a heavy discipline on anyone. For me it is a matter of great joy to be able to give. Each year we give a bit more. We are up to 20 percent of net income. Some give a larger percentage, others can only do less. It is a matter of record, however, that *ability* to give, and the actual amount given, do not correlate. Poorer people have consistently given a larger share of their income to charity, churches and social needs than the wealthy. In fact, as income rises, the percentage of giving shrinks. Those who can most afford to give actually give a smaller proportion of their income.

There are great benefits to be derived from tithing. I have already mentioned the sheer joy of giving. It is one of the best ways known for feeling soli-

darity with others in their struggles for justice and their full humanity. It is a way of expressing gratitude. In full awareness of how much has been given us by so many so often, tithing can be a way of responding with thanksgiving.

Some people argue that God will bless us if we tithe. I don't care for that kind of tit for tat. It's not that we obligate God. But it is true that God blesses us through our giving. And one of those blessings is to get our economic priorities in order. Tithing is an act of trust that God will sustain us even if we do not lavish all our earnings on ourselves. Like fasting, it is a way of experiencing liberation from the



*Singing passionately about life*

Claudia Nietsch-Ochs

our money is doing a little bit of good in the world. And that we are giving enough to really make a difference. It doesn't matter how you figure the tithe, but 10 percent is a nice figure to shoot for. Let's not call anything less than 10 percent a "tithe." ("Tithe" simply means "tenth.") I think it's valuable to keep it that large so that it is significant. We are not interested in obeying a biblical commandment (it's not found in the New Testament anyway), but in making a difference in the world. We want to alleviate suffering. We'd like to reshape the system so that it does less harm.

A new and welcome development is

compulsion to make and spend. It is a way of bringing ourselves under spiritual discipline, so that we get first things first.

Tithers have long known that the best way to handle one's tithe is to make it the first check you write, or the first automatic withdrawal you program. Never wait to see if you have something left that you can give. You won't. There's almost never anything "left." There are always other needs clamoring to be paid. But if

we pay the tithe first, we can usually juggle the other bills somehow.

But the real issue goes far beyond benefits. The reason we need to tithe is because the world screams out to us for help. We tithe because we care. We want to make a difference in the world's suffering, however small our own part might be. Joined with the giving of thousands, however, our part can be significant to a very high degree. Maybe then we can

help whittle that figure for childhood deaths down from 35 thousand a day.

So, Boosters (most *Witness* readers are Boosters, I'd bet), send this article to your Boomers kids and see if you can start a conversation. Perhaps in the process you will find yourself increasing your own percentage of giving. Try it.

It's a kind of liberation and exhilaration not often experienced in our consumerist world.

TV

## Campaign finance and human rights

Revelations that Bill Clinton benefitted from campaign contributions made to the Democratic Party on behalf of Lippo, an Indonesian-based banking and commercial empire, illustrate the ease with which corporate entities can attain access to elected officials and thereby influence policy in their direction.

Indonesia is not just another trading partner, but one of the most authoritarian regimes in the world. In 1975, Indonesia illegally invaded and annexed East Timor, killing one-third of the indigenous population—some 200,000 people. Tight political control, including arrests without warrants of dissidents, extrajudicial executions, and frequent use of torture, continues in both East Timor and Indonesia proper, according to Amnesty International and other watchdog groups.

Clinton won election in 1992 specifically promising to get tough with chronic human rights violators like China and Indonesia. While Clinton initially blocked some arms transfers to Indonesia and voiced support for UN resolutions regarding East Timor, the overall policy, especially in the past

two years, has been to increase trade. In February, 1994, Clinton's Trade Representative, Mickey Kantor, stopped a formal review of Indonesia's trade status; and in 1995, Clinton warmly received President Suharto, the dictator who has overseen political brutality in Indonesia for the past three decades, at the White House. Arms sales to Indonesia in Clinton's term now total some \$470 million.

A principled opponent might have taken a stand on both aspects of the scandal: the selling of access to the highest corporate bidder, and the policy result of helping to cement Indonesia's brutal human rights practices. However, Bob Dole was in no position to make either of these charges with any credibility. Dole in Washington was a living monument to the practice of inserting loopholes into legislation to benefit particular corporate interests contributing to his coffers.

So instead, Dole used the scandal as yet another occasion to bash foreigners. Tops on the list of his 4-point plan for campaign finance reform was banning contributions by foreigners (including those living in the U.S.), even though the total sum of such contributions is easily dwarfed by the hundreds of millions donated by American corporations, and even though the U.S. has historically felt little compunction about making large donations to influence other countries' elections.

The bottom line is that this scandal is likely to do little to bring about change in the deep problems of American politics. Clinton will bear at most a very marginal

political price, and Dole failed to illustrate in a principled way the manner in which corporate monies take policy-making out of the realm of democracy and into the realm of gladhandling and special-access cocktail parties.

— Thad Williamson  
New York, N.Y.

## CIA-crack-Contra connection

An investigative story in the *San Jose Mercury News* in late August detailed how massive amounts of cheap cocaine were funneled into South Central Los Angeles by a well-known CIA operative as part of a fund-raising plan for the *Contra* Army in Nicaragua. Since the story broke, outrage over the accusations has been swelling in the Black community. ...

The three-part *Mercury News* report was released just after passage of the welfare-reform bill. It was sandwiched between the rhetoric-laden Republican and Democratic Conventions, where speakers talked about living in a land of equal opportunity with liberty and justice for all.

The view from the street is different. The U.S. government has been working hard to keep you down by allowing massive quantities of cheap, highly addictive crack cocaine into your neighborhood, dismantling social programs and passing get-tough-on-crime laws that will put many Black, nonviolent drug offenders behind bars for life.

— Andrea Lewis,  
Third Force, 11-2/96

shoot takes



# Indigenous Anglicans: an Australian view

by Anne Pattel-Gray

The aboriginal branch of the Anglican church in Australia is in crisis. The strained relationship between Australia's churches and its indigenous peoples is a result of the oppressive role missionaries played in colonization. The Western invasion of the "Great South Land of the Holy Spirit" led to the dispossession, rape, genocide and domination of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. The churches enforced racist laws and legislation, and segregated aboriginal people into compounds where their lives were literally dominated, and their children stolen and locked away in other compounds. The Christian message became fraught with an oppressive and racist god imposed upon the indigenous people.

Today, in contemporary Australia, the indigenous people have not forgotten this history. This is made clear in their calls for justice, independence, and freedom from the dominant oppressive church and society.

It is also found in the struggle to develop the National Aboriginal Anglican Council, which has widespread community support amongst not only indigenous Anglicans but also indigenous members of many other denominations (i.e., the National Aboriginal and Islander Baptist Council of Australia, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, etc.). The council also has the tacit support of some dioceses, the Bishop's Council and

General Synod.

The National Aboriginal Anglican Council, however, has no power and it has no money. It meets, if it has the funding, once per year; it has no funding for indigenous staff, national programs or ministries. The Anglican Church professes that all churches should be self-determining, self-governing and self-sustaining — this, in the context of a people who, through colonization, have been dispossessed of any economic base and are marginalized and contained to "fourth-world" poverty in a hegemonic "first-world" society.

Each and every year, the only aboriginal bishop has to find even his own salary, because the Anglican Church does not ensure it. Over the past three years, the indigenous ecumenical body, the Aboriginal and Islander Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia, has helped provide the necessary funds to sustain the aboriginal bishop, providing one-third of his salary, most of his office equipment and supplies, and a significant portion of the costs of programs, travel and other expenses.

If finances are any kind of indicator of the Anglican Church's commitment to their indigenous brothers and sisters, then, sadly, they leave a great deal to be desired. Not only is the Anglican Church's aboriginal branch grossly underfunded, it also comes under enormous attack from all sides, particularly from the conservative sector.

The National Aboriginal Anglican Council also has to endure the paternalism of white staff appointed to serve it. It has to combat the racist attitudes and ideology found in the personnel and inherent in these structures.

Another crisis is faced by indigenous Anglicans in the area of theological education. A two-tiered system is offered: one (white) is bachelor-of-theology level, funded, resourced and recognized, while the other (indigenous) remains associate diploma level, under-resourced and under white, male control. The ideology behind this kind of "education" keeps indigenous people a subjugated underclass. It does not allow for the development of

indigenous exegetical or hermeneutical methodologies or praxis. It rejects the notion that indigenous culture has any significance or value in a white, hegemonic world.

Our struggle is to take control of our own theological education, and transform it so that it builds up the aboriginal and islander leadership so desperately needed in our communities. We desire a theology that draws upon our ancestral narratives, culture, tradition, values and kinship — one that addresses our social, political, racial and economic oppression.

There are those in the Anglican church who have aligned themselves with the fight for the emancipation and recognition of the human dignity of the indigenous people. Archbishop Keith Raynor, for example, recently assisted the indigenous people of northern Queensland and Carpentaria in restructuring their dioceses to facilitate the development of indigenous leadership. Bishop Bruce Wilson has encouraged and supported the ordination of Gloria Shipp, the first ordained aboriginal Anglican woman in Australia.

But the white majority remains critical and full of animosity toward the aboriginal church.

## New Zealand's model

So, what is the way to go? Perhaps we could learn from the Maori model: a national Bishopric structure and a *tikanga* system. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Anglicans have made the church far more inclusive. First, the Maoris have their own national Maori bishop, whose area and authority covers Maori concerns across the whole of the country. Second, they have developed the *tikanga* system — a three-part church structure of shared, equal authority and participation of Maori, Pakaha (white) and Pacific peoples [TW 5/93]. This is how they define church and

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# Tempering realism with hope: ARC-USA

by Ellen K. Wondra

About a year ago, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith proclaimed that the ordination of only men is an infallible doctrine. Since then, many friends and colleagues have asked me how I, a woman and a priest, can serve on the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the USA (ARC-USA).

It's not a new question. I've been asked it — and asked it of myself — ever since I was appointed to ARC-USA almost five years ago. And the dilemma doesn't arise just from the two churches' very different official positions on the ordained ministry of women. Even without this, there are issues concerning freedom of thought and inquiry and expression concerning church doctrine and discipline (remember Charles Curran?), how church teachings are developed (as well as what they say), and, of course, papal infallibility.

These are all questions about the proper understanding and exercise of authority in the church. And, despite 30 years of constant, persistent, and often very wise and creative dialogue, these questions continue to divide us. The much-

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## Indigenous, *continued*

ministry — from their own context, each of the three respecting and learning from one another. Because the power and resources are all shared equally, all are able to be self-determining, self-governing and self-sustaining.

This model and ecclesiology are that for which the National Aboriginal Anglican Council is striving, although in Australia, Anglicans are hostile to this model — they see it as a disempowerment of their hegemonic control. The aboriginal Bishop, Arthur Malcolm, is recognized by indigenous people throughout Australia;

heralded "ecumenical spring" following Vatican II seems to have turned into a long and sometimes dreary "ecumenical winter." And the Vatican's pronouncement on ordination last fall did not seem to herald a thaw.

But while the signs of progress may be small and quiet, they are nevertheless there, and they are important. This month, for example, the Archbishop of Canterbury will make an official visit to the Vatican, as the Pope's guest. This is the first time Archbishop Carey has made such a visit — which makes it also the first official visit since the Church of England began ordaining women, and since last year's Vatican pronouncement. Such official visits give concrete evidence of the two churches' recognition of each other as "sister churches" (who can be united without one being absorbed), rather than "separated brethren" (where the return of the one who has strayed outside the church is necessary). This sort of evidence at the highest level confirms what many of us already know through our daily lives, where Anglicans and Roman Catholics live, minister, and pray with each other all the time: there is already a great degree of communion between our two churches.

It's because we experience this communion in our daily lives that the official diocesan, national, and

yet, in terms of ecclesiastical power and authority, he is limited to only one diocese. The situation is further undermined by the church confining him to the role of assistant bishop. If he is called upon by indigenous people outside of his own diocese, he has to seek authorization from the bishop of that diocese for permission to enter and to deal with the requests of his own people. The non-indigenous bishop has the power to interfere in specifically indigenous matters. This can create cross-cultural nightmares because, often, the diocesan bishops have no understanding of indigenous culture, protocol or politics.

international dialogues are important, and that they are continuing. What the official dialogues can do is draw on our concrete and ordinary experience with each other to show where our unity is already strong, and to discover ways in which it can be made stronger. All of this is substance for theological and ecclesiological reflection, and for the formulation of proposals and policies which, we hope, will bring us closer together, and move us toward full unity.

This is not to say that there aren't real obstacles, and that they won't be difficult to overcome. We have to be realistic. But there is hope.

For me, at the most basic level, it's hope founded in necessity. The most basic reality to me is that we are all in the church together, like it or not. We live on one planet; we profess to worship one God. We live in a time when we're increasingly faced with our interconnections, globally and locally, socio-politically and ecclesially. We can't really get away from each other, although we may use a lot of time and energy pretending we can. But that doesn't change the reality that we're involved with each other, and we need each other.

Now, if that's the case, then the important question is, How are we going to be involved with each other?

The ecumenical movement takes as its charter Jesus' prayer on the night before his passion: "... that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am

Australia's experience highlights the unique difficulties imposed upon indigenous Anglicans. The indigenous people have been dispossessed of land and the resources upon which they could build an economic base. They have to settle for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's [sic] table. And yet, they are expected to develop and sustain their own church and ministries.

In Australia, the future of the church for indigenous Anglicans is dependent upon the ability of the dominant church to transform and renew itself in light of the Christian message.

in you, may they also be in us, ... so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:20-23 NRSV). What I notice here is that the unity that Jesus prays for is a unity that involves cherishing and preserving differences: Jesus and the One he calls Father are not identical, but they are united — or, better, in communion. Their relationship is full, complete, with no division — but also with no loss of distinction or difference, either. Indeed, distinction or difference is what makes the relationship possible at all.

And *that's* the kind of unity that Jesus seeks for us. *That's* the kind of way human beings ought to be involved with each other, and with the whole of creation. At its best, *that's* what the ecumenical movement is working toward among the churches.

The challenge facing ARC-USA and all the folks who serve on it is how to work toward unity when the differences that divide us seem so intractable. It's quite clear now that the Episcopal Church and the rest of the Anglican Communion is not going to decide that the ordination of women was a mistake; instead, we are

increasingly willing to say that the ministry of ordained women is a blessing and a benefit. That hasn't always been the case. For over 25 years, it's been said repeatedly by some Anglicans that it's the ordination of women that has slowed or even blocked the progress of dialogue with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. But it's now increasingly customary to acknow-

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*What the official Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogues can do is draw on our concrete and ordinary experience with each other to show where our unity is already strong.*

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ledge that these churches' ordination of only men is as divisive as the Episcopal Church's ordination of women. "Going home to Rome" on other issues isn't any more likely.

At the same time, the Vatican's pronouncement of a year ago makes it clear that, at the official, policy-making level, the Roman Catholic Church sees the ordination of only men as a matter of doctrine, not discipline. Doctrine doesn't change easily, and there are no signs that this one is going to change soon. Nor, for example, is the claim of papal authority and infallibility likely to be softened or set aside.

Unity requires either that we figure out how to live with these mutually exclusive differences, or that we set them aside — either by one church's relinquishing of a doctrine or discipline it discovers it can live without, or by both churches' changing to a new, common position. Figuring out how to do this is extremely difficult, and it requires a lot of time and energy. And a lot of hope.

It also requires honest and accurate facing of differences of practice and belief and of all that underlies them. For ARC-USA these days, that means looking at

how the two churches understand authority — not just the authority of persons and institutions, but also of texts and traditions. For example, does the fact that a tradition is apparently so constant for two thousand years as to be virtually universal mean that it's an expression of the providence and will of God? Is it then unchangeable? What role do context and experience play in the church's exercise of authority? How do we answer those questions? And who is the "we" who answer them?

Last year's Vatican pronouncement on ordination made it clear that the question of authority is the primary one that faces Anglicans and Roman Catholics in their dialogue with each other. If we are to proceed with that question honestly and accurately, we need before us the whole range of beliefs, practices, and understandings of the two churches. The actual presence of women in the dialogue — in their persons, and not merely as a topic of study — not only makes sure that a particular range of perspectives is represented, it also serves as a witness to the actual nature of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. This is particularly important in this discussion because Anglicans have decided that we can change a virtually universal practice, that we do as a church have the authority to do so. We may need to give an account of that authority that is clearer and more persuasive to our dialogue partners and to some elements of our own church. But our practice shows that we do believe we have that authority. And that is something Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogues need to study and discuss before we can realistically look for much more official progress toward fuller communion.

Sure, right now, I don't see much possibility for significant official progress on the immediate horizon. What I do see is the possibility to help lay the groundwork for some advances to occur eventually. I think my church has something important and valuable to contribute to laying that groundwork and creating those advances; and I am willing to do what I can to make sure that contribution gets made.

### Argentine Indian land rights

Following a peaceful protest by the Wichi and Chorote Indians of the North Argentine Chaco, the provincial government has agreed to sign an agreement giving them the title deeds to their land.

The Indians camped for 23 days on the site of a bridge built on their land without their permission. They feared that the bridge was part of a road project designed to link North Argentina with Paraguay and Brazil. A frontier town would have replaced an existing Indian village and the road would have gone through a site occupied by the Anglican Church.

Anglican Bishop Maurice Sinclair and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Salta took the Indian concerns to the governor.

— *Ang. Com. News Service*



# Penthouse violations

The Episcopal Church needs to walk a fine line in response to the recent *Penthouse* expose of an alleged cross-dressing sex ring of Long Island Episcopal clergy [*Penthouse* 12/96]. A variety of temptations present themselves.

Twenty-seven bishops have already succumbed to the temptation to treat *Penthouse's* expose as "news" and as grounds for a wholesale condemnation of all gay and lesbian Christians. These bishops wasted no time in pronouncing that the story demonstrates "that, even for church people, long-term faithful monogamous relationships among homosexuals are extraordinarily rare" and that the "homosexual lifestyle, especially among young males, is a compulsive, promiscuous addiction that leads almost inevitably to illness and death."

This conclusion is patently ignorant. Bishops of the church should have enough life experience to view *Penthouse's* report with some skepticism. And they must know that aberrant sexual behavior and ritual abuse are not the property of any particular sexual orientation. Sick and manipulative sexual behaviors cross lines of orientation, race and class. They are

even acted out in the privacy of the heterosexual marriage bed.

The other temptation to which church folks may succumb is the flip side of the first — to minimize the events described in order to try to protect the church's reputation. Even though the two priests named in *Penthouse* have resigned their church jobs,

*The Witness* asks that the Diocese of Long Island take the presiding bishop's call for an investigation seriously and conduct a thorough one.

The easiest course of action might appear to be to attack *Penthouse's* journalistic standards (which needs to be done) and then to hint that the priest who is named and pictured in the magazine, William Lloyd Andries, is unjustly maligned. Andries is already insisting (on the Internet) that his sexual escapades were limited to intimacy with one person, that all the other allegations (group sex and cross-dressing) are lies and that his greatest error was in naively imagining that his young lover could really have cherished the union between them as deeply as he did himself. We find his claims self-serving, particularly since

rumors are circulating among people who say they have reason to know that some aspects of the story are true. If Andries engaged in even a fraction of the activity described in such graphic detail, he does a phenomenal disservice to all gay and lesbian couples when he paints himself as like them.

Suppressing the allegations would also buttress the backlash against all survivors speaking publicly about ritual abuse. Those who are so shocked or embarrassed that they prefer to conclude that the allegations can't be true, do additional damage to those whose life stories include these traumas. The Episcopal Church has done some excellent work in the area of clergy sexual exploitation. We hope the openness and honesty demonstrated in many dioceses — Massachusetts comes readily to mind — will prevail in this case as well.

Meanwhile, we find *Penthouse* appallingly disingenuous. Its editors get entirely too much satisfaction out of revealing the "shocking story of a secret cadre of gay and bi-sexual cross-dressing Episcopal priests whose private lives include the most bizarre rituals imaginable". The core spirit of *Penthouse* is one that thrives on sexual subjugation and the exposure of what might otherwise be intimate and sacred. Its editors are hardly ones to throw stones at alleged participants in this sex scandal. It is the spirit of power, money, addiction and distortion that drives *Penthouse*; whenever this spirit manifests elsewhere, *Penthouse* might best acknowledge it as a mirror image of itself.

The sanest responses to date have been from Oasis and Integrity, both of which issued short statements, saying that the sex acts described are "inconsistent with a Christian understanding of love" and recommending a cautious approach which allows for testing the validity of *Penthouse's* claims. Lastly they urge people of faith to pray for all those named in the article, all those implied to be involved in the sexual improprieties and for the church itself.

— The Witness staff

## 'Silent under apartheid'

A section of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) — long dubbed the apartheid regime at prayer — has confessed that it kept silent when many South Africans suffered intimidation, torture and murder under the National Party's racist policies.

The Stellenbosch ring (a ring is a grouping of about 12 congregations) was the first church to make a submission to the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by retired Anglican Archbishop and Nobel peace laureate Desmond Tutu.

Ring chairman Dr. Hannes Koornhof made his submission at commission hearings in Paarl, near Cape Town, in

October, saying:

"We confess that, although we did at times try to protest against the unjust treatment of people, we often did so only with great timidity and circumspection."

The ideology of nationalism had "left a substantial imprint on Christians' way of thought," Koornhof said. This made them insensitive to the injustices and suffering inflicted by the former government's apartheid policies.

After the submission, Tutu, whom observers described as "clearly emotional," praised the DRC ring for its courage in making its confession before the Truth Commission.

— Ecumenical News International

# Ecstatic sensibilities

by Marianne Arbogast

*The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story*, by Brian Swimme (Orbis, 1996).

A cartoon I once saw pictured an ordinary street corner — a sidewalk curb, a sewer grate and a fire hydrant. The caption read: “*The Milky Way*” (detail).

This is Brian Swimme’s outlook. Like the cartoonist, he seeks to widen our perspective to take in something of the cosmic mystery of which we are a part.

The modern divide between science and religion has “broken apart the ancient cosmological enterprise,” Swimme writes. While science shuts out questions of meaning and ultimacy, religion too often focuses on humans in isolation from the whole.

“When we do ponder the deep questions of meaning in the universe, we do so in a context fixed in the time when the classical scriptures achieved their written form,” he writes. “We do not worship or contemplate in the context of the universe as we have come to know it over these last centuries, a context that includes the species diversity of the Appalachian mountains, the million-year development of the enveloping ecosystem, the intricate processes of the human genome, the stellar dynamics that gave birth to Earth five billion years ago, or anything else that is both specific and true concerning the Earth and universe.”

The resulting void has been filled by the deadening, dominant world-faith of consumerism. Swimme decries not our wealth, but our impoverishment.

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Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*.

Consumerism conflicts radically with our innate longing for communion with all of creation. “Any ultimate separation from this larger and enveloping community is impossible,” Swimme writes, “and any ideology that proposes that the universe is nothing but a collection of pre-consumer items is going to be maintained only at a terrible price.”

That price, Swimme believes, is alcohol and drug addiction.

“I think that hoping for a consumer society without drug abuse is as pointless as hoping for a car without axle grease,” he writes. “It is simply not human finally to live a life sealed off from all conscious contact with those powers at work throughout the Earth and universe and within every one of our cells. ...

“The quick and mindless way of transforming this deprived state of being is to ingest mind-altering chemicals that dissolve the thin veneer of consumer culture and bring one swimming into the primary processes at last. Thus, if only for a moment, and sometimes at horrendous cost to self, family, friends and community, one can be at home again in the great flood of beauty.”

The antidote Swimme offers is cosmological education, and the challenge of developing “new cultural forms for initiating ourselves into an ecstatic sense of involvement with the community of beings that is the very universe.”

I’m personally skeptical about a daily morning ritual honoring the Sun — even as I am impressed to learn that “the Sun, each second, transforms four million tons of itself into light,” manifesting a self-giving impulse at the heart of everything.

On the other hand, Swimme’s recommendations that we learn to know our life

place, contemplate the Milky Way, and teach our children to perceive a sunset in a post-Copernican mode — as the earth rotating away from the sun — seem simple, enjoyable and realistic.

Perhaps Swimme’s best contribution is to further the halting contemporary effort to integrate the scientific and spiritual quests.

For a reader with little scientific inclination, even his non-technical explanations of contemporary findings in physics can be a stretch, but it’s worth the effort. I am awed by his discussion of the quantum vacuum, for instance, and the implications of the discovery that elementary particles literally emerge out of emptiness.

“If material stuff is understood to be the very foundation of being, we are quite naturally going to devote our lives and our education to the task of acquiring such stuff, for humans have an innate tropism for being. ... To now suggest that material is not the only foundational reality in the universe throws some doubt upon one of the philosophical justifications of consumerism.”

Swimme’s book raises some big questions which remain outside its scope. His theological framework is unclear, and while he affirms the value of historic faith traditions, he does not elaborate on how they might connect with an earth- and universe-centered spirituality. The same would be true of concrete political commitments. But as “a first step out of the religion of consumerism” (Swimme’s stated intent), *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* offers a solid foothold, based on wonder rather than guilt. **TW**

review

Getting in touch with Wally and Juanita Nelson is complicated by the fact that they don't have a telephone. But that doesn't stop countless visitors from showing up at their door — in fact, it's part of what draws them. For many who seek a simpler, more just and sustainable way of life, the Nelsons offer living testimony that it can be found.

For more than two decades, the Nelsons have lived in a small home on land owned by the Woolman Quaker Conference Center in Western Massachusetts. They cook and heat with wood, draw well-water by hand, use an outhouse and rely on two gas lamps for light. Their entire income — about \$5,000 in a good year — comes from the sale of their garden produce.

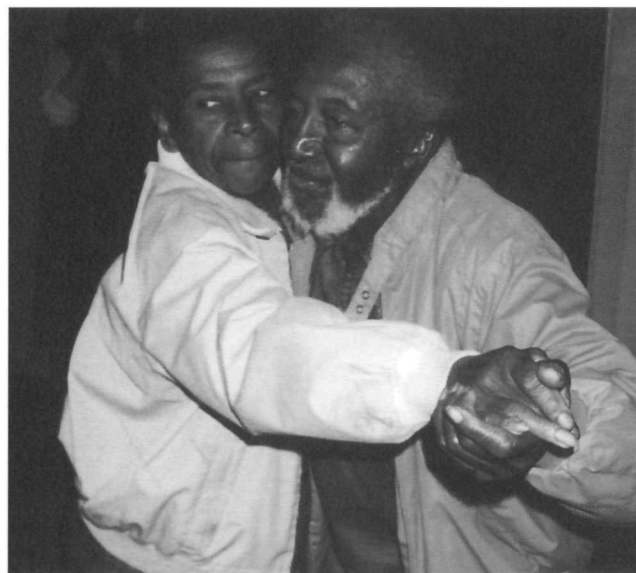
Lifelong activists, the Nelsons share a passion to implement their ideals in their daily lives.

"What I'm striving for is an integrated life, to make of one piece what I believe and what I am doing," Juanita Nelson says. "I think that trying to live more and more simply is at the core. We seem to think that we can just keep getting more and more and more — and then maybe everybody else can get more and more and more. It just doesn't work that way. And the other thing is — more and more *what?*"

"I can't think of any good, sensible reason why so many people in this country are without food, without housing,

*"Every once in a while, we think, suppose we can't work, what are we going to do? We can't figure it out, so we just stop worrying about it."*

— Juanita Nelson



Juanita and Wally Nelson dancing at a wedding reception

## 'Doing the things our hearts tell us'

by Marianne Arbogast

without clothing," Wally Nelson says. "In this society, we're encouraged not to think seriously about other people. I want to think more about them, and participate less in the reasons why they are suffering."

The Nelsons met during World War II, when Juanita Nelson, then working as a newspaper journalist, visited the prison where Wally Nelson was serving a three-and-a-half-year term for draft refusal. Both were veterans of civil rights campaigns: Juanita Nelson had been part of a campus struggle to desegregate a restaurant near Howard University, and Wally Nelson had joined in hunger and work strikes which ended the prison policy of racial segregation.

After they were married, the Nelsons became involved with Peacemakers, a group founded in 1948 which advocated non-registration for the draft and non-payment of military taxes. Their commit-

ment to tax resistance and social change shaped the pattern of their lives. Unable to work for employers who withheld taxes and unwilling to sacrifice political work for career goals, they worked at a variety of jobs which paid enough to support their activism.

"When I was about 23, I made a very conscious decision that I didn't want to be a professional, I didn't want to be tied to a job, and I've been a ne'er-do-well ever since," Juanita Nelson laughs. At one point she earned a masters degree in speech therapy, but worked only briefly in that field when she found that only full-time jobs were available.

In 1970 — when Wally Nelson was nearing the age at which most people retire — the Nelsons' convictions impelled them to leave their home in Philadelphia for a simpler, rural life in New Mexico.

During a three-week fast in support of

*Witnesses,  
the quick and the dead*

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*.



the United Farmworkers' grape boycott, Wally Nelson had developed a sharp awareness of the web of unjust social relationships.

"It hit me very hard that every time we went to the food store and bought some produce, we were exploiting the people who were working in the fields," he explains. "I thought, if we couldn't do anything else, at least we could crawl off the backs of those farmworkers. We could learn how to grow food ourselves and bend our own backs."

"I wanted to break away from the corporations, getting things from way off somewhere, dealing with huge conglomerates," Juanita Nelson says. "In the city you are completely dependent, but in a rural setting we could get more control of our own lives. I prefer not to be connected with the utility companies, for instance. If I'm heating with wood, I can cut my own or get it locally."

After a short time in New Mexico, the Nelsons moved to Massachusetts, building their own home with scrap material from a demolished house and the help of like-minded friends.

The process of crafting a lifestyle they can believe in has been liberating and exhilarating, the Nelsons report.

"The improvisation of making do with what you have has its great satisfaction — and not just ideologically," Juanita Nelson says. "It's just fun to try to be imaginative. The sense of adventure is one thing that really keeps me going."

They do not miss things that many would consider necessities.

"We haven't had a phone in the house since 1970, and I don't know if I could even stand one!" Juanita Nelson says. "I have stopped my participation in communications technology with a manual typewriter, and I don't feel any lack because I don't use a computer and faxes. I feel I'm living a very full life."

A solar-battery-powered radio pro-

vides them with news and music.

"We might be sitting at the table eating, and if some music comes on, we get up and start dancing," Juanita Nelson says.

"We believe in having a pretty good time," Wally Nelson agrees. "If we go to

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*"There is a wonderful community around us, so we would not go hungry in any case. I think our security lies in each other and in people."*

— Juanita Nelson

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a party, they often wait for me to get started dancing, because they know I will. We associate for the most part with younger people, and oftentimes we forget that we are older. They're quite lively, and they make me think that I'm lively, too."

Juanita Nelson, now 74, confesses that there are days when she is tired, and would rather not face the demands of gardening. "But if I were working in an office, think how much worse it would be!"

In the past few years, she has faced some serious health problems without insurance. Once, she paid a surgeon two strings of garlic and a small book she had written.

"Every once in a while, we think, suppose we can't work, what are we going to do?" she says. "We can't figure it out, so we just stop worrying about it."

She quickly adds that "there is a wonderful community around us, so we would not go hungry in any case. I think our security lies in each other and in people."

The Nelsons profess no religious faith.

"I'm around people who always talk about spirituality, but I simply don't know what they're talking about," Wally Nelson says.

The Nelsons speak instead of nonvio-

lence, justice, equality and community. They do not vote and harbor a deep mistrust of big government.

Juanita Nelson laughs about finding some commonality with the radical right.

"This is almost like the very conservative viewpoint that we know better how to use our money than to send it up some blind alley to support big bureaucracies and high salaries. I believe in a more personalist approach.

"I don't really have a blueprint for society," she explains. "I don't know what form of government I would support — it certainly would have to be much more decentralist than what we have. I think we need to learn to say no to what there is, and maybe we'll find something better to replace it. It's how we get there that's the most important thing."

At 87, Wally Nelson admits that he would not have anticipated his current lifestyle.

"I really had thought that at my age I'd be like the average person with a retirement income. My life just developed differently."

Though they love company, the Nelsons worry that people may think they are unique.

"We're not doing any more than anyone could do," Juanita Nelson says. "I wish people knew that we could find happiness in just being together and making our own entertainment, and not be so afraid! If we do the things that our hearts tell us to do, that's satisfaction." **TW**

*"The Witness is especially helpful to me as a Christian educator."*

— Anna K. Comer, Pittsburgh, PA

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