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*The Witness*

Volume 80 • Number 6 • June, 1997



*Defying presumptions:  
gay and lesbian Christians celebrate Jesus' call*

ological Seminary of the South  
Austin, Texas

## Raising kids with conscience

THE APRIL ISSUE ON RAISING children is wonderful. As a parent, grandparent and teacher, I view the many complexities in raising children today as a challenge to remain centered, watchful and creative in our parenting. I was particularly interested in Jerry Berrigan's firsthand account of growing up in an activist family. Thanks for your multifaceted approach to every topic your publication addresses.

**Donna Searle**  
Reading, PA

SPLENDID AND COURAGEOUS article on the 'Summit'! A good issue in fact. Jeanie, your piece on 'icons of white supremacy' is full of insight, irony, heartbreak — and finally hope. Amazing in two pages.

**Charles Long**  
Cincinnati, OH

"RAISING KIDS WITH CONSCIENCE" is a moving issue. The truth-telling more than balanced the by-now wearying voices of anger and blame. I was especially moved by Erika Meyer's article. Really, it's a miracle she didn't set her face against the life of the church altogether. Many other PKs have done so with less provocation.

The juxtaposition of these articles with Gay Jennings' excellent letter again raises a couple of questions. Am I the only one who has come to despise our internally focused obsessions in the form of opposition to women priests, lesbians and gays, etc.? Am I the only one to suspect that the continued wranglings are excuses not to look outside of our cozy denominational burrows to become fully engaged with the suffering world?

I have begun to think we Episcopalians need our own version of We Are Church. But that, perhaps, is a future issue.

**Terence Hughes**  
Akron, OH



## Grieving rituals

YOU DID A SUPERB JOB with my photos — layout, context, reproduction quality — & on the issue totally. I have passed copies to friends.

**Skip Schiel-Teeksa**  
Cambridge, MA

## Responding to the Right

OCT. 96 was the BEST!!

**Joseph A. Lane**  
San Francisco, CA

## Witness praise

THANK YOU! HOW WONDERFUL to have my very own double fix of "indulgent lefty babble" ("she's just gotta have it"). Although none of the content surprised me, I confess the very handsome — correction, *splendid* layout astounded me.

**Mary Louise McIntyre**  
Evanston, IL

A FRIEND SHARED HER COPY of the latest issue. I LOVE what I have seen of *Witness*.

**Victoria W. Garner**  
Silver Spring, MD

I'M A SUBSCRIBER — love *Witness* — This is for my sister.

**Joel G. Hill**  
Hagerstown, MD

I JUST WANTED TO WRITE to say how much I appreciate receiving *The Witness*. Keep up the good work! It is uncanny how you so frequently choose a topic that is of great interest to me.

**Tray Davis**  
Montclair, NJ

I AM AMAZED THAT I HAVE reconciled with Western Christianity through the Episcopal Church. I truly was unaware that a Gospel of love, tolerance, and diversity was coming from the pulpit.

**Richard K. Hamet**  
Dearborn, MI

I RECALL A COMMENT IN one of the renewal notices about folks not having time to read all the publications they get. I'm stacked up — still going through some material I picked up in Ohio, yet hope to be caught up soon, especially with *The Witness*, which is such a good journal. (Tho' I smiled when one letter writer recently commented about the "left" editorial slant being forced or overdone or whatever). We were able (well me anyway) to keep the spirit of the Cincinnati justice summit alive locally with Ed Rodman's presentation of "The Color of Fear" at our parish. Got some people thinking.

**James Michael Moher**  
Nashua, NH

## Gloria Brown

OVER THE YEARS I HAVE revisited Lionel Trilling's impressive introduction to George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* — a vivid account of the Spanish Civil War. At one place Trilling mentions Orwell's criticism of

## New Detroit office!

*The Witness* has moved! Check the masthead for the new street/e-mail addresses and phone/fax numbers. Within walking distance for some of us, the new location saves us money and gets us out of downtown just as construction begins on two new stadiums and three casinos. Sweeping the walk and putting flowers in the windows is the beginning of our effort to reclaim this corner from decline and prostitution.

*Letters*

the English intelligentsia of his day, which he says "was as simple as this: that intellectuals did not think and that they did not really love the truth."

Surely, intending ourselves as ministers, lay or ordained, especially as faithful witnesses to the truths of the prophets, means sincerely being open to these, and means being willing thoughtfully — painfully, if necessary — to appropriate them and their implications and to accommodate the personal changes such truths require.

I know what it feels like to defend my ego, and my personal comfort, against the threatening prophetic truth. For example, I once heard a black woman remark broadly upon white privilege and the history of white oppression. I felt defensive, wanting to be excused from responsibility, from the inconvenience of having to find *me* within the problem, so I said to her, "I feel that you are making me into the focus of evil (as a white man) in the modern world."

She could have discussed the degrees of truth or falsity, and various shades of meaning in between; instead, Gloria Brown looked at me kindly and said what I needed to hear: "Maybe you are," she said. "Maybe you are."

I tend to become angry only at the truth. Though it pained me, I saw, and see, what she was saying. I am indeed privileged as a white, heterosexual male in this world; my obliviousness to how my getting along is — in the context of structured racism — tied to the fate of others has certainly been no help to them. This recognition does not make me feel guilty, but its truth greatly influences my understanding of lots of things, lots of very important things.

Greater than my neurotic need for personal innocence or the comfort I might indulge through denial is Gloria's truth, what we white folks *must* see for there to be a chance for genuine peace and justice, which is after all more important than one's personal serenity.

To be a white person in our time offers the tremendous opportunity to be open to the important truths, to undertake an adventure in faithfulness, solidarity, and decency, to love and trust God and God's truth, but it *is* hard because being white we have the privilege of (so far) not having to face all this if we don't

want to. But Orwell knew that the true intelligentsia humble themselves respectfully before truths — especially the inconvenient ones — and I believe Jesus did, too. Doing this is what we who are white must do if we are to be, well, saved.

**William Rankin, Dean  
Episcopal Divinity School  
Cambridge, MA**

JEANIE WYLIE-KELLERMANN has done an outstanding job of editing and managing *The Witness* for several years. Her artistic taste and ability show in every issue. They stand out!

I think congratulations are in order upon her announcing co-editorship with Julie Wortman. That should lighten her burden, if it is that. (My own job has been single-handed; I would welcome a co-editor.)

**Edna Ruth Johnson, Editor  
*The Human Quest*  
St. Petersburg, FL**

## Call to action

IF *WITNESS* READERS BELIEVE, as I do, that gay and lesbian concerns should be addressed by next summer's Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops, they should contact both the Archbishop of Canterbury and the General Secretary of the Anglican communion now:

The Most Reverend George Carey  
Lambeth Palace  
fax: 011-44-71-620-1070

The Rev. Canon John Peterson  
Sec. Gen. of Anglican Communion  
acc@ecunet.org  
fax: 011-44-1-71-620-1070

The Archbishop of Canterbury does not believe there is any place for same-sex love *within the community of the Church* [see page 27]. He appears determined to keep issues impacting the life of gay and lesbian people from being considered by the Lambeth Conference, although the conference will be addressing sexuality.

**Otis Charles, Executive Director  
Oasis/California  
San Francisco, CA**

## Classifieds

### 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, Dept. W, Saint Bartholomew's Church, 82 Prospect Street, White Plains, NY 10606-3499.

### Bishop candidates wanted

The Nominating Committee to Elect a Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark will be accepting candidates' names for the position of Bishop Coadjutor between June 1 and September 12, 1997. Nominations must be submitted on a prescribed form, which may be obtained by calling the Committee's secretary, Louie Crew, at 201-485-4503. Names may be submitted by the candidates themselves or by others. Persons submitting the names of others must confirm their willingness to be candidates. All candidates who enter the process will be asked at a later date to submit resumes and CDO profiles and to complete a questionnaire.

The Diocese of Newark is proud of its diversity. Women and men of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, of all sexual orientations, and of all four orders of ministry are encouraged to apply. We seek someone with grace, maturity, a sense of humor, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, compassion, leadership, empathy with the poor and the dispossessed, liturgical perspicacity, and a good mind.

Copies of the Diocesan Profile are available from the Nominating Committee. To request a copy, call, write or fax. All correspondence should be addressed to: Nominating Committee to Elect a Bishop Coadjutor, P.O. Box 30, Newark, NJ 07101. 201-485-4503/FAX 201-485-1095. <http://newark.rutgers.edu/~lcrow/coadj.html>

### Classifieds

*Witness* classifieds cost 75 cents a word or \$30 an inch. Call 313-841-1967.



# The Witness

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*Gay and lesbian Christians are offering the church a fresh understanding of the biblical call to 'come out' and to spiritual integrity.*

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*The church can no longer sustain a condemnation of homosexuality based on its traditional sexual ethic, Jung argues. Heterocentrist presumptions are the problem.*

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*Before its demise in 1993, C&C was a progressive voice on sexuality issues, but the magazine didn't always support gay/lesbian rights.*



Cover: III<sup>e</sup> Jésus tombe sous le Poids de la Croix by Marek Czarnecki, an artist in Bristol, Conn.

*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.

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# Celebrating the call to integrity

by Julie A. Wortman

Years ago a gay friend told of the time he finally came out to his family. He and his partner lived in a two-bedroom apartment in New York, a city some considerable distance from where each of their families lived. They usually used one of the bedrooms as an office, but whenever a family member announced a visit, they would move the furniture to make it appear they slept separately.

They followed this practice for years, believing, as many of us gay folks do, that if family members knew they were gay, they would be very upset and either renounce them or become consumed with the need to make them heterosexual.

One summer my friend's sister called to say she'd be in town and would like to come to stay. So once again he began the frustrating chore of shifting bureaus and desks — this time in 90-degree heat. Slowed down by the fact that this was a two-man job and his partner was away on business, he was caught trying to haul one particularly heavy filing cabinet between rooms when his sister arrived.

Sweat-soaked and exhausted, he opened the door with resignation.

"Maria, I'm gay," he said bluntly. "I just can't move the furniture anymore."

More and more gay men and lesbians are realizing the futility and spiritual cost of moving the furniture every time the straight world comes to call. We're in the mood to celebrate, not hide, the lives

we've furnished with loving care. Love, we've discovered, has a stronger pull than fear. We may lose our families, we may be refused ordination, housing, jobs or the most fundamental of human rights, that of marriage, but we know that none of these things is more worth having than love — because through loving, we come to know God.

What is proving disconcerting for the dominant, heterosexist, largely Christian culture in which we live is that the more gay folks follow the truth of our own beings, the more we are defying this culture's presumptions.

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*"Maria, I'm gay," my friend said bluntly. "I just can't move the furniture anymore."*

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By "defying presumptions," I don't merely mean shooting holes in the stereotypes used to mock or diminish us or proving wrong the conviction that Americans are not ready for a lesbian starring in her own show as a lesbian character on prime-time television. Instead, I mean exposing the false presumptions that the dominant culture brings about its own reality to the is-it-okay-to-discriminate-against-gays debate.

As theologian and ethicist Patricia Beattie Jung demonstrates in this issue (p. 15), for example, the sexual ethic which is invoked to prove homosexual sex is "bad" because only heterosexual sex is "good" is proving instead to lack credibility, even for heterosexuals. Like-

wise, as biblical scholar William Countryman (p. 10) shows, the fundamentalist appeals to Scripture that at first persuaded even liberal Christians that homosexual relationships are sinful no longer have the ring of authenticity — not only because the Bible doesn't say what fundamentalists claim it says, but also because we are coming to realize what the early Christians evidently clearly knew, that Scripture was never intended to be read as a lawbook. As gay and lesbian Christians find the courage to come out and to stand up to the powers and principalities which would deny them life, Countryman points out, they are experiencing the Spirit at work in their lives, an experience that finds confirmation, not condemnation in Holy Writ.

The call to integrity that the gay and lesbian community is hearing these days with such clarity, I believe, is a gift of the Spirit in this age of AIDS. As my partner, Anne (straight people always accuse us gay folks of talking about sex — is referring to my "partner" what they mean?), often says, there is nothing like a funeral for helping people "get real." Tragically, funerals have become all too much a part of everyday life for many gay and lesbian people, but as we face up to untimely deaths — deaths that a significant portion of the straight community regard with some self-righteousness as what we deserve for being homosexual — we are learning life's best lesson: to be ourselves.

This, in the end, is all that matters, and it is a gift we offer the straight world with joy.

TV

*editor's note*

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Julie A. Wortman is co-editor/publisher of *The Witness*.

# If we unlock church doors, will anyone come?

by Malcolm Boyd

**I**n my slum parish in the inner city of Indianapolis in 1957, no one black could enter the church. There was total segregation. Once I saw a white boy jabbing a penknife in a wooden pole outside the church, repeating over and over again the mantra, "I wish it was a nigger." And in 1962, when black and white protesters engaged in a sit-in at a segregated church-owned restaurant in Sewanee, Tenn., a cross was burned on the lawn outside, and an angry mob surrounded the place. A white, churchgoing supporter of apartheid walked up to us, looked into the face of my colleague, Quinland Gordon, who was black, and said, "I can see the clerical collar, it's white. But the face is so dark I can't tell if it's a man."

There are many stories that document the church's long refusal to be inclusive. One lovely one is about an Episcopal church in Michigan. It had always been segregated. No one African-American could enter, pray or receive holy communion. Finally, in the late 1960s, the parish leadership decided the time had come when it *had* to open its doors simply to appear relevant, to be politically correct.

There were anguished vestry meet-

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**Malcolm Boyd**, poet-in-residence at the Los Angeles Cathedral Center of St. Paul, is author of *Are You Running with Me*, *Jesus?* and *Take off the Masks*, a memoir of his coming out as a gay man and priest in the 1970s. These reflections are adapted from his sermon at the Beyond Inclusion conference held at All Saints' Episcopal Church, Pasadena, Calif., last April.

ings, tears, imprecations. The fatal Sunday arrived. African Americans were now welcome in the holy of holies. The rector, vestry and congregation waited for a black horde to storm the doors. But no one came. No one black *wanted* to be there. Why should they?

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*The church wishes to evangelize Africa and Asia, but not invite into its communities one of the largest, most visible minorities on home ground in urban America.*

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The question the church faces today in regard to gay men and lesbians is this: Does it love unconditionally? How *much* does it love? Does it love *enough* to heal the wounds of centuries of persecution, torture and debasement? Does it love *enough* to ask for *forgiveness* for things done and left undone?

Looking out at today's thriving, eclectic, creative, exciting gay culture in all our major U.S. metropolitan areas, do you see gay people knocking down the doors of mainline churches, begging to be let inside? Are gay people saying to the churches, "You possess spirituality and sanctity—please let us be a part of you—we bring you our bodies, our gifts, our money as a sacrifice"?

No. A great many gay people are say-

ing, "You don't have a spirituality we can identify with because it has never included our humanity. Yet Jesus clearly states quite the opposite! Clearly, you don't know us — our needs, our spirituality, our peoplehood. We have long ago gone elsewhere, way outside your entombment in hypocrisy and self-righteousness. And, frankly my dear, we don't give a damn for your pretensions, your empty rituals, your betrayal of your own Savior."

This brings up the subject of evangelism, one of the church's favorite topics. The church wishes to evangelize Africa and Asia, but not invite into its communities one of the largest, most visible minorities on home ground in urban America.

I think the church's focus is all wrong. It isn't a thriving gay population in America's urban centers that is obsessed by the idea of getting *into* the church. It is a church that has been obsessed by racism and sexism that, even at this late date, as we approach the millennium, remains too often obsessed by the idea of keeping gays *out*. No ordinations. No blessing of unions. No inclusivity. No full membership in the body of Christ, not even on the basis of baptism. This, from a church that is increasingly losing the battle of relevancy, of proclaiming the gospel of Christ in a culture increasingly listening to other voices, other songs.

For the Episcopal Church—and, indeed, Christianity in the United States—the focus can no longer be on *whether* the church wishes to be inclusive. The focus needs to be *on the mission field*, attempting to interpret the gospel of Christ so that people will come *in*!

**TW**

## ***Help spread the word!***

Please give us the names and addresses of people who might like *The Witness*. We'll send them a sample copy.

## Founded on the Ruins of Christs

by S.A. Schopfenheimer

Founded on the Ruins of Christs

He has come back to me — here, now, on a day sprung  
from my childhood to my virago — defeating all counterfeits  
and clamors of hype-men, and he's moving in sweetly, gently,  
as in old times, those days warmed by a young sun,  
green with freshness, then when nothing stood in our way.

He has wrapped arms around me, spoken of our sacristy,  
told me of how it'd be all right, I could sleep through the night,  
whispered that it doesn't count what they say or think  
or try to push my way, I'm family and he'd stick by me.

I'm keeping him here with me because he tells me the truth,  
no fantasy or masquerade in smocks of white or eyes of blue.  
No, just uncouth reality, the thin, rugged little Jew who  
narrowed Laws down to two, promised me he'd keep  
his part though he knew I could hardly even start to keep mine.

*S.A. Schopfenheimer lives in Morganton, Ga.*





# Glimpsing Canaan

by Elizabeth Kaeton

The applause was warm and sustained. The laughter was deep and real. The *Beyond Inclusion Conference*, held at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Pasadena April 10-14, began with a celebration of the eucharist during which Walter Righter preached about the "sea change" which is happening in the church.

"I thought the last 20 years were the most exciting time to be in the church, but I think the next 20 years are going to be even more exciting," Righter said.

This was the family of God finally, *at long last*, having serious conversation about a subject we had too long avoided. We were talking about blessing same-gender relationships, but without the presence of dissension, without the fear of reprisal, without the tension of high emotionalism which clouds intelligent thought and stifles inspiration and insight. We had a *good time*.

It was clear that many of us had already moved *beyond inclusion*. We were there, in a sense, to talk about the journey as faithful pilgrims who had ventured out into the wilderness and had returned only long enough to bring more souls on the pathway of justice.

The five presenters who followed Righter were voices from academia, who raised thoughtful and intelligent insights and questions. The responders, primarily voices from the church's ordained leadership, nuanced the issues raised by the presenters and provoked lively discussion from those in attendance. Ed Bacon,

rector at All Saints', led his staff and church members in the design and implementation of the conference.

Marilyn McCord Adams took us through early church history and the formulation of the Trinity as a model for the mystery of relationships in the community of faith. Pattie Beattie Jung [see p. 15] questioned the absence of the perspective of women's sexuality in the development of moral codes and norms as well as in the formation of heterocentrism. The day ended with the voice of Michael Jesse Battle, former chaplain to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who gave us a language and a construct straight from the heart of Africa in his discussion of *ubuntu* or "whole person" theology.

The next day began with Bill Countryman's insight that early Christians read scripture through the eyes of conversion [see p. 10], and he called us to the same task, reminding us that "family values" in the present modern suburban model look very different from "the household" of Christian antiquity, which included wives, many and various children, widows and slaves. Finally, Juan Oliver spoke of the importance and necessity of liturgical rites of blessing same-gender unions, but not before challenging the entire notion of "inclusion" in the household of God. Thundering with a voice heavy with passion and spiced with a Latino accent, Oliver demanded, "How dare you 'include' me in my own house!"

His was not the only voice to betray an impatience with the progress toward the realization of the goal articulated 11 years ago by Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning when he said, "In this church of course there will be no outcasts." In the midst of the pervasive

atmosphere of "feel good," murmurs of disquiet and an eagerness to get on with the task rumbled just below the surface.

In response to Pattie Jung's presentation, one woman from Ft. Worth noted with sadness and anger that, in her diocese, the most ardent leaders of the opposition to the ordination of women are gay men. That quickly gave rise to the awareness that despite all the careful, politically corrected balance of presenters and responders, there was no visible lesbian presence.

Taking up another issue, several people questioned, both in large and small discussion as well as in the political action groups, the wisdom of founding an argument for "full inclusion" for gay and lesbian people on the basis of "faithful, long-term, monogamous relationship."

"I'm bisexual," said one man. "Are you telling me that I'm 'beyond inclusion,' that I'm inferior or unacceptable because I have not made a choice for monogamy?"

"I'm a single, heterosexual woman," said another, "and I do not feel called to celibacy. Yet, I am not ready to make a lifelong commitment. Where do I stand in the household of God?"

"Do we need a bishop's permission to bless?" asked one of the responders. "This is an issue of vocational discernment, which needs to be done in the midst of the community of faith, as should all committed relationships." That gave rise to the question, "Why are we taking this to General Convention? Being in relationship, like being celibate, is an issue of vocational discernment, and we already have authorization to bless as the priesthood of all believers. Why are we wasting our time in Philadelphia seeking authority for something which we already have?"

Some participants also asked, "Where are the people of color? Where are our African-American sisters and brothers?"

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**Elizabeth Kaeton** is diocesan missionary to The Oasis, a mission and ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark with gay and lesbian people, their families and friends.

noting that the current of homophobia runs strong and deep in that community, beleaguered by its own struggle for liberation and inclusion. "How many issues do you want us to fight at the same time?" asked one black gay man with a weary sigh.

Issues of class were also raised. In conversations held in stairwells and lines for coffee and over outdoor lunch tables, voices carried observations of the notable availability of resource and wealth, and what the conference might have looked like somewhere else.

"Where?" I asked, intrigued. "Where is 'our side' of paradise?"

"I don't know," came the response, "but all this obvious wealth makes me nervous."

Make no mistake: this was not a gripe session by the hoi polloi. My clear sense was that, as lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual Christians who had gotten a glimpse of the promised land "beyond inclusion," we were anxious to get on with the rest of the journey. There is no turning back now. Indeed, there is even new frontier to discover, and new, related issues to explore. There are new ways of learning how to live together in community with all of our diversity, new languages to learn and new songs to sing.

One only needed to hear the voice of one of the elders of "our tribe," Malcolm Boyd [see p. 6], at the eucharist on the last

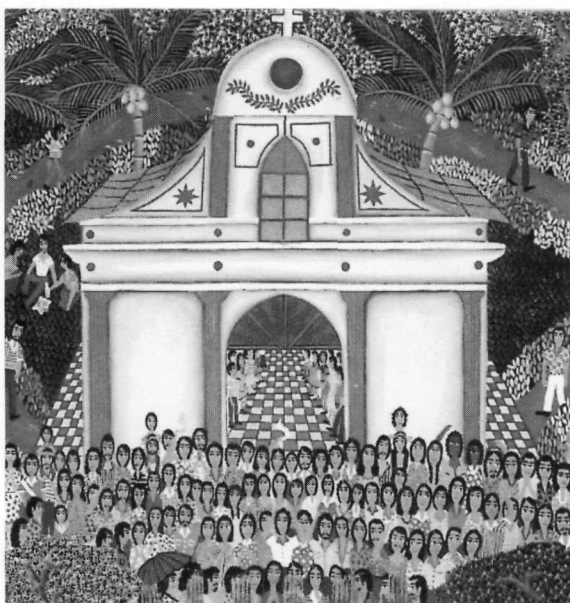
day of the conference to know that the movement to claim the biblical promise of liberation and inclusion for all God's children will not be denied or delayed. At age 73, his strong voice cracking open with wonder and joy, he seemed to startle himself with the power of his own emotion, practically shouting the benediction of affirmation and acceptance on his sisters and brothers: "Thank God I'm gay!"

As Andrew Sullivan, the keynote speaker said, it's not that gays and lesbians don't have civil rights. We do. Anyone can get married in this country, including people who are emotionally disabled, intellectually challenged, or even criminally deranged. We have the civil right, as

citizens of the U.S., to marriage. The problem is that we have been *denied* our rights.

And so, too with full inclusion in the household of God. There is no "second class" status for "the children of a lesser God." Not any more. The full inclusion of gay and lesbian Christians may well be the last great liberation movement for the church and society which we will carry from the 20th century into the new millennium.

We're on the road to the Realm of God, where, indeed, there are no outcasts. In the words of Louie Crew, another of our tribe's "elders": "The meek are getting ready."



Nicaraguan Cultural Alliance

*El Tope en Dolores* by Edmundo Arburola

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# Bringing biblical truths alive

by William Countryman

We, the Christian community of faith, have been engaged for several centuries in the process of *moving toward inclusion* — and now beyond it to the celebration of the whole diverse company of those called by Christ. In this long journey, the Bible may sometimes have seemed part of the problem rather than a resource for resolving it faithfully. Again and again, the enemies of openness and of gospel welcome have claimed the scriptures as their chief bulwark against change. The scriptures, we are told, mandate a world just like the one we grew up in; and the Spirit certainly wouldn't try anything new. This happened in the conflicts over American independence and democracy, over slavery, over segregation, over the exclusion of women from authority in the church. And it is happening in the conflict over sexual minorities in the church.

Only powerful cultural presumptions could enable any one to read the Bible as if it mandated modern American suburban family structures. Its dominant picture is that of an ancient slave-holding household, probably polygamous. It used to surprise me that the legalist side of this debate claimed the Bible while actually ignoring it so cavalierly. As I have become more aware of how Christians argued on behalf of slavery in the 19th

century, I have become less astonished. The power of our preconceptions to channel and limit our reading of scripture is truly impressive. More and more, I believe that, when we *do* manage to read the Bible with an open mind and heart, it is a gift of grace and not simply an achievement of human attentiveness. Without that grace, we may read the words on the page, but the eye of the mind sees only what it expected to see all along.

## Necessity of conversion

No wonder Jesus kept emphasizing the necessity of conversion. Conversion means taking the risk that our presumptions may be wrong, that God may see things differently from us. Conversion means taking the risk that, if I trust God, I might find the world beginning to look different. Conversion means letting go and allowing God to say to us whatever God wants to say, even if it contradicts the preconceptions we have absorbed from our early upbringing. If we approach the Bible in a state open to conversion, we are sometimes astounded to find that what it is actually saying is quite different from what we were taught to expect.

It is time for us to reclaim the Bible for what it is *meant* to be — not a lawbook to reinforce whatever the *status quo* happens to hold dear, but a vehicle

of the good news. In doing so, we follow in the footsteps of our earliest Christian forebears, who were anything but fundamentalists in their approach to scripture. There is a widespread American myth about the history of Christianity. It says that fundamentalism represents the original Christianity, that the old rigorism has been gradually collapsing ever since, and that more welcoming, less legalistic expressions of Christian faith are just a compromise with the weakness and unsteadiness of decadent modern people. In actual fact, fundamentalism is basically a product of the modern era, a creature of the age of Hitler, Stalin and Mao, a violent reaction to the uncertainties of a world flooded with change.

Fundamentalists actually have little in common with our earliest Christian forebears, particularly in their use of the Bible. For the fundamentalist, the Bible is a lawbook — a peculiarly organized lawbook, to be sure, but, never fear, the fundamentalist will interpret for you and tell you in detail what it demands of you.

That is not what the Bible was for the

earliest Christians. Indeed, their attitude toward scripture was so different from this as to seem quite cavalier. Their interpretations of scripture were so creative and imaginative that I have to tell my students that, for class purposes, at least, they are not to follow their example. (I'm not a legalist, but I do want interpretations to stay pretty closely connected with the text!)

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The only scriptures the earliest Christians had were the scriptures of Israel — more or less what we now call the “Old Testament” and the “Apocrypha,” but in the form of many separate documents. These said nothing directly about Jesus. Even as the New Testament documents came into being, most early Christians learned of them primarily through public reading. Most people did not have the chance to study them in detail, if only because copies were scarce and expensive and not everyone could read well enough.

### Jesus, not scripture, the center

For these people, scripture was not the center of their encounter with God. That center was Jesus. Jesus had come, freeing people from demons and disease, proclaiming the good news of God’s love and forgiveness, *sharing food with all sorts of people*, the “good” and the “bad” alike, demanding *conversion* from everybody, even the religious. Jesus challenged the religious authorities themselves for their legalism and hypocrisy. And he was willing to endure suffering and death rather than back away from his message of release and joy. And God, in turn, raised Jesus from the dead to show that this message of good news was true and reliable. That’s where the earliest Christians placed their reliance.

When they encountered Jesus and his message, they found that it turned their worlds around. They experienced *conversion*. From that point onward, nothing could ever seem quite the same to them: God, the world, the meaning of life, themselves. Not even the scriptures! They thought they already knew something about them. They thought they knew at least roughly what they said. But they went back to them with new eyes, eyes opened by the teaching and life of Jesus. And they discovered that the scriptures didn’t read quite the same any more.

It wasn’t that they were bringing new

ideas in and forcing them on scripture. They were simply rediscovering things that they hadn’t really paid attention to before. Things that had been in the background moved into the foreground. Things that had seemed enormously important receded almost out of view. These were the same scriptures that they had been

of the moment; it was a description of present experience, charged with the Spirit. From being a background item, it moved into the foreground.

Or think of Paul struggling with his mission to the Gentiles. Jesus didn’t just convert Paul in that vision on the road to Damascus. (That would have been em-



Group from Topeka, Kan., demonstrates at the Episcopal Church’s General Convention in 1994.

Jim Solheim/ENS

reading before, but now their encounter with God in Jesus made them seem very different.

Think of the experience that Luke describes at the first Pentecost: the giving of the Spirit, the speaking in tongues, the prophesying. When Peter is called on to explain this to the gathering crowd, he goes back to scripture, to *Joel’s* prophecy of a time when all God’s people would become prophets. It was a familiar enough passage of scripture. But how different it became now that it was perceived as a description of the Christians’ actual experience! It was no longer a prophecy of some remote future, irrelevant to the life

barrassing enough for the enthusiastic persecutor!) Jesus went on to commission him as his emissary to the Gentiles, precisely the people that a faithful Pharisee of that particular era, intent on maintaining purity, would have preferred to avoid. Yet, a few years later, Paul, writing to the Romans, says that the scriptures themselves mandated the bringing in of the Gentiles. Was it from the scriptures that Paul first learned this? No. He learned it from his lived experience of the Spirit at work. *Then* he went back to scripture and discovered that it had been there all along.

I am not trying to set scripture and

experience at odds with each other. Neither one is transparent by itself. Both are rich and many-faceted. Neither is clear on first reading. What I am saying is that the early Christians, while they knew and valued the scriptures all along, found that the critical element that produced conversion in them was not scripture but their encounter with the good news of Jesus — directly in the person of Jesus or indirectly through Jesus' followers. Once they had come to conversion, they were able to go back to scripture and read it with new eyes, eyes that were now opened by what God was doing in their own time and place.

This is not some new-fangled way of dealing with our tradition as Christians. It is the oldest way possible. And it is where we find ourselves again today, by the grace of God. We have been meeting the good news of Jesus in our common experience as people of faith. We have been meeting the good news as we learn that God loves all people regardless of color or ethnicity, women and men alike. We have been meeting the good news as we discover that God speaks to gay men and lesbians just as powerfully and articulately as to heterosexual people. *It is time now to take our experience of the Spirit at work here and now proclaiming good news, bringing joy out of defeat, hope out of despair, life out of death—and go back to the Bible with it, where we will find that God who is at work among us now has left manifold traces of the same work on the sacred page.*

### Calling out and coming out

What do we find if we do that? There are some things in scripture that stand out with particular clarity for lesbians and gay men, because they meet with our experience in such a clear way. And there are things in scripture that “come alive” for all of us now, whatever our sexuality, in relation to the conversion that has brought us to this point, together, today.

For lesbians and gay men, one striking thing about scripture is the importance of the themes of *calling out* and *coming out*. Religion may have a tendency to go to bed with the *status quo* and stay there. But the Bible keeps showing us how God calls people to leave their familiar environment and strike out for some other place or some other way of life. Terah, the father of Abram, was at home in Ur of the Chaldees till he came out to go to Haran. Abram was at home in Haran till God

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called him to go to Canaan. Moses was at home in the desert until God met him in the burning bush and called him to go back to Egypt and bring the people out of slavery. The list goes on and on — right through Jesus leaving his family and calling on his disciples to leave theirs. Again and again, God says to us, “Come along. You can’t stay here. I have other things for you to do.”

This cannot have been an easy move for any of our forebears in faith. Terah and Abram became terribly vulnerable when they gave up the familiar terrain and alliances where they had lived so long and moved into strange territory. Moses took great risks in returning to Egypt with major social change on his

mind. Jesus and many of his disciples found that their daring led eventually to their deaths. And yet, putting their faith in the God who called, they risked everything. And the risk ultimately proved life-giving, even if it brought them to the resurrection by way of a cross.

As M. R. Ritley has pointed out in *God’s Gay Tribe*, this is very closely related to the life experience of gay men and lesbians. We experience God’s call to us in a most improbable form — the form of a deeply rooted disposition to love members of our own sex. We experience that disposition, as it matures in our lives, not as sickness or as sin, but as a part of our created and creative humanness. It is deeply involved in all that we are. Some of us have endeavored to root it out — and found it was not only ungrateful but impossible. It meant trying to uproot our *selves*. The effort failed because it turned out to be a betrayal of the God who made us.

Why have people even tried such a thing? Because the world around us (including the churches) told us we should, told us there was something profoundly wrong with same-sex erotic attraction. But once *we took the risk of conversion* and quit listening to the voice of the world in this matter, we found that God was calling us to embrace what God had given us. And we found that our sexual orientation was not in fact wrong or harmful or sinful. Like heterosexual attraction, it *could* be perverted to harmful or sinful ends. But, in itself, it was not wrong. It was even life-giving.

To love another person and be loved in return gives life and joy. Whether the love is heterosexual or homosexual makes no discernible difference. Both reveal the goodness of God’s own love for us — the love that created us in the first place and that calls us into communion with God throughout our lives. In other words, love among human beings, beautiful as it is in

itself, turns out to be a vocation from God, too. We have heard God calling us through our God-given loves.

God is calling each and every one of us. In the experience of gay men and lesbians, this reality becomes particularly vivid and inescapable in our time. God's penchant for calling people out of the familiar and into the adventure of pilgrimage and the risk of living by God's promise is central to the Bible. I believe that the way this scriptural truth has come alive in our lives will prove to be illuminative for other people, too.

### Spiritual danger

For gay and lesbian people, of course, "coming out" means more than just taking the risk of leaving one world for another. *It also means getting honest with yourself and the people who are important to you.* It means cultivating the kind of integrity that would enable us to lead a more or less unified existence. The life of the "closet" may be unavoidable in some hostile environments; but we know all too well how dangerous it is to the spirit.

Being in the closet means treating one aspect of your life as so radically unacceptable that it must not be allowed to touch another, more public aspect of it. One danger of this is that it may leave us not knowing who we really are — just playing out a series of roles. And how am I to have a love affair with God, as the mystics urge me to, if I am just a collection of roles? How can I be engaged, involved, in love?

Another danger is that *we will become less than God made us.* For gay and lesbian people, being in the closet always means to some degree accepting the culture's negative judgment on us. Sometimes, as I say, the closet is necessary to a person's survival, but it still has a price. And the price is that it makes it difficult to accept what we really are: God's good gift of creation.

A third danger in the closet, a danger

that Jesus emphasized repeatedly in his teaching, is a danger that the habit of concealment may turn into a *habit of hypocrisy.* And, according to Jesus, hypocrisy is the one sin that can place a person beyond hope of salvation. When some of the religious authorities dismissed his exorcisms as works of the devil, he warned them about the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Spirit. What, precisely, were they doing that he felt he must warn them against? They had given

Coming out of the closet, for lesbians and gay men, has an element of exactly that about it. It means letting go of the dream of being like everybody else. It means letting go of the hope of keeping life safely compartmentalized so that our inner truth need never escape into the public eye. It means letting go of control.

The scriptures' repeated insistence on integrity and righteousness and truth is not just abstract moralizing. It is a fundamental spiritual teaching. You cannot be



*The First Supper* by Jane Evershed

up all effort to take seriously what God was doing before their very eyes. They looked at the people being freed from the bonds of the devil by Jesus' ministry, and they said, "This is bad because *he's* doing it — and he isn't one of us." As Jesus pointed out to them, they would have made a very different assessment if the exorcisms had been done by members of their own party.

When hypocrisy becomes a way of life, it becomes the way of death. We would rather maintain our own righteousness than accept God's love. Truth ceases to have any value for us. Only the maintenance of a good facade remains. The only hope for us, when we become sunk in such hypocrisy, is to have our lives shattered so that they can be remade.

in touch with God without getting in touch with yourself. You cannot be in touch with either without cultivating a certain reverence for truth as something far larger and more unpredictable than we had ever thought possible before. The choice for integrity and truth over against hypocrisy proves to be the most life-giving one we could possibly make.

The value of recognizing that gay and lesbian people are fully children of God and fully members of the church is that the whole Christian community gains the advantage of our experience. It is, after all, simply the experience of humanity, wrestling with God's gifts and with our own tendencies to reject them and to try to make a world of our own that is safe from God — it is this universal human



experience underlined, writ large, made the more inescapable through the particular circumstances under which we live it out.

That's why we are moving "beyond inclusion." This is not about a group of "real Christians" deciding to include some more dubious folk on the margins. This is about recognizing the beautiful diversity of those whom God has called together and how much we need one another.

### Intending community

God, it turns out, has a very strong penchant for bringing apparently unrelated people together and forming them into a *community*. We may want to draw lines of race and culture and sexuality and gender and defend them, but God keeps wanting to mix us all up together. We often find the experience painful at first, and we go along reluctantly. But God, in the long run, is not to be denied. And God knows how to give life.

*From the beginning, God created hu-*

*manity to divide and to reunite.* Remember the story. When God saw that the first human was alone and doomed to loneliness, God created the second human out of the first. God separated us from one another so that we might be friends and have communion with one another. Separating us, by itself, was not enough. In itself, separation produces all the distress and sorrow that sets one human being against another and one human group against another. God knew that there must also be something to bring us back together. And so *God instituted love*. "Therefore," says the biblical author, "shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24AV).

It is a mistake to hear this verse from Genesis merely as the foundation of heterosexual marriage. It actually describes a kind of family life (a matrilineal system in which the husband leaves his parents in

order to live in his wife's household) that is scarcely found elsewhere in the Bible or in Christian practice today. The point rather is that God takes us out of our familiar, natal environment, our families and tribes and nations, and puts us together in surprising ways to make something new: an Israel, a church — new communities that overcome the separations of the old. Sexual love is the first and most deeply rooted example of God's penchant for taking the unrelated and making of them a new family, a new nation, a new community of faith. God draws together the improbable, the unexpected, even the oppressed and inimical, and says, "You shall be one family now. You have the opportunity to create something new along with me."

God does not stand still. Jesus does not stand still. The Holy Spirit does not stand still. And their work proceeds still along the lines the Holy and Blessed One laid out from the beginning of creation: Leave the familiarities of father and mother, the Creator says, and cleave to the new family of which I will make you a part. "Who is my mother and brother and sister," says Jesus, "but the one who does the will of God"? What is Israel without its mixed multitude? What is the family of David without its Canaanite and Moabite mothers? What is the church without its unthinkable mix of people who were not supposed to belong together at all?

We are witnessing a triumph of the good news in our very association together. Our ongoing task is the same one given to those people who witnessed this same good news incarnate in Jesus: to live by it and to proclaim it, in season and out of season, as a message of hope for the future. *When we do so, we are fulfilling the deepest bidding of the Spirit.* And if we have seen the flight of the Spirit in our own midst, we need not be surprised to turn back to the Bible and find the traces of those wings on page after page. **TW**

## Canadian bishops on gays

Two-thirds of Canadian Anglican bishops surveyed recently favor some change to their 1979 guidelines on the ordination of homosexual persons, but they have continued to uphold the guidelines "in principle."

The guidelines say all people are equal before God, but "our acceptance of persons with homosexual orientation is not an acceptance of homosexual activity." The guidelines also say the bishops "do not accept the blessing of homosexual unions." They say a gay or lesbian person may be ordained if there has been a commitment to abstain from sex with persons of the same sex.

The survey showed that of 34 bishops surveyed, 19 favor an apology to the gay and lesbian community for insensitivity and hostility originating in the

church; 12 oppose the move. Twenty-one say the church should "intentionally welcome and celebrate the presence of its gay and lesbian members"; 10 oppose this.

Sixteen bishops oppose considering recognition of same-sex relationships, while 14 are in favor. But 19 want to "keep open the discussion concerning possible ways to affirm relationships formed by same-sex partners," while 10 oppose.

If the 1979 guidelines were to be replaced, 28 bishops, the largest majority on any of the questions, favor retaining its assertion that "all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are equal before God"; three oppose retaining the statement.

—*Anglican Communion News Service*

# Heterosexism, justice and the church

by Patricia Beattie Jung

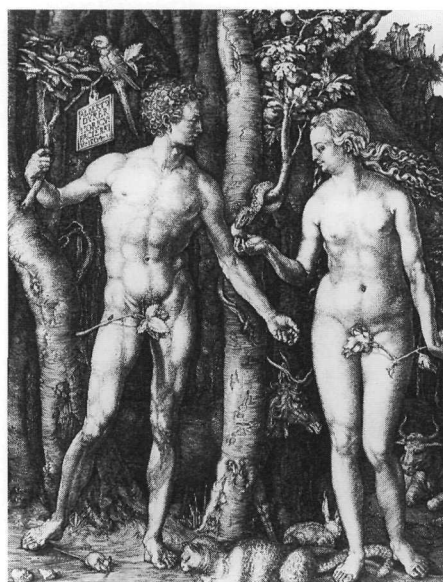
**H**eterosexism is a cognitive system of differential behaviors and practices developed in response to sexual orientation. It results in the preferential treatment of heterosexual people and in the prejudicial treatment of all others. Heterosexism is accompanied by hidden costs for gay and straight communities alike, and though it can take a variety of forms, in all cases it hinges on a heterocentric sexual ethic.

By “cognitive,” I simply mean that heterosexism is a reasoned, intelligible way of thinking and acting. I do not mean that it is rationally defensible. My point is to distinguish heterosexism from affective or visceral responses to homosexuality and bisexuality. Though it is often accompanied by, and certainly reinforced by, homophobia, it is neither logically nor existentially linked to it. Homophobia is to heterosexism as misogyny is to sexism and as racial bigotry is to racism.

## Shaping public policy

By defining heterosexism as a system of behaviors and practices, I want to emphasize that this pattern of differential treatment pervades our culture and shapes our attitudes toward a wide range of public policies. For example, gay people do not have equal access to public accommodations, to housing or to employment opportunities. Unlike their heterosexual

counterparts, gay people are not routinely granted access to the joys and responsibilities of parenting, whether as foster, adoptive or biological parents. They are not afforded the opportunity to celebrate



The Detroit Institute of Arts

*Adam and Eve by Albrecht Dürer, 1504*

*Heterocentrism is the claim that heterosexuality is more than simply part of God's good creative design, that it is the moral ideal or the only normative form of human sexuality, the only orientation which can be proclaimed good.*

their authentic sexual identity or their loves. Society's refusal to license homosexual marriages denies those gay couples who desire it the institutional support which would accompany the civil recognition of their relationships. These include spousal immigration rights, a variety of benefits from social security, veterans, life and health insurance policies and the protection afforded couples by divorce, estate and inheritance laws. Heterosexism in its most extreme expressions denies gay people the right to a “safe haven” other than their closets. Central to the notion of anyone's safe haven is physical safety, yet according to the Department of Justice, gay people are the most common victims of hate crimes in the U.S. The department's own studies show that lesbians experience three times, and gay men experience four times, as much criminal violence as their straight counterparts, all other factors being equal.

## Hidden costs

Those treated prejudicially because of their sexual orientation as a matter of public policy also suffer in hidden or less public ways. For example, fear of being gay exacerbates the confusion gay adolescents experience about their sexuality. And when internalized, heterosexism fosters self-loathing and self-destructive behaviors. Also hidden among these costs is for some a kind of moral despair. Though heterosexism does not technically endorse such behavior, its prohibition of even just, faithful and loving sexual lifestyles does little to discourage promiscuity among those who find they cannot or will not embody its call to sexual abstinence.

Heterosexism proves costly for people outside the gay community as well. When gay persons come out to their families and friends, responses forged by heterosexism stretch our bonds to the breaking point. Fear of being misperceived as gay inhibits expressions of intimacy between hetero-

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sexual friends of the same sex, especially among men. When supported by the theory of gender complementary, heterosexism reinforces sexist stereotypes among us. And perhaps most distressing, it leaves all of our children more vulnerable to sexual predators because it mistargets our efforts to protect them.

### Heterocentrism

Central to this system of discrimination are heterocentric convictions about what makes for good sex. Heterocentrism is the claim that heterosexuality is more than simply part of God's good creative design, that it is the moral ideal or the only normative form of human sexuality, the only orientation which can be proclaimed good. Put negatively, heterocentrism is the view that there is something wrong with, something diseased or evil about, being gay.

Most, though not all, Christians condemn the verbal abuse of and violent attacks against members of the gay community. But because we are divided in our basic moral evaluation of heterosexism, the church is divided about how to respond to the rest of this system of discrimination.

Some of us see the dismantling of heterosexism as an important dimension of the church's work for justice and peace because it is a crucial dimension of the Christian mission to protect the basic human and civil rights of all people, rights which Christians believe are based on our common creation in the image of God.

But I need not tell you that others see these efforts to dismantle this system at best as misguided and at worse as a moral outrage. Some of our brother and sisters in Christ, in fact, explicitly endorse several expressions of heterosexism. It is good, they argue, to discriminate against gay people in regard to any work connected with children, whether teaching, coaching or parenting. It is also just, they argue, to discriminate regarding military

service and to prevent the civil licensing of gay marriage. Even the denial of housing may sometimes be justified. Why? Because gay people are perceived to be a threat to the commonwealth in general, to heterosexual marriage and family life, and to children in particular.

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One could respond to these brothers and sisters in Christ by arguing, as has the Dominican Richard Peddicord, that there is no evidence whatsoever to support the claim that gay people pose any such threat. Therefore, on the basis of our obligation to respect human rights to religious liberty and to the freedom of conscience, the church should work against any and all forms of discrimination against gay people in the civil arena.

This line of argument is tremendously important. First, it is crucial that we correct wherever possible the misinformation that is out there about the gay community that is still so prevalent. And

second, despite the deep divisions within the church about sexual ethics, a politically powerful coalition for the promotion of these basic human rights might be forged around the values of religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

### Challenging heterosexism's sexual ethic

But in my opinion, this strategy will never prove wholly adequate because many people in the church united in such a coalition could and most likely would continue only to bless heterosexual marriages and would continue to commend as morally normative only total lifelong sexual abstinence for gay people. The sexual ethic at the base of heterosexism needs to be directly challenged. Only when this ethic is proven untenable will both the civil and ecclesial expressions of heterosexism collapse.

Because all people are made in the image of God, all of us share the same dignity and worth as children of God. Now, of course, respect for this fundamental equality among us does not require that we always and everywhere treat people identically. But it does mean that any preferential treatment bears the burden of proof. So it is perfectly legitimate for us to ask whether discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation can be justified. Since the traditional answer to that question has been "yes," it is also important for us to be clear about what fidelity to the tradition requires of us as Christians. Normally, Christians are biased in favor of the tradition as received and are inclined against its reformation. But the presumption of truth that we ascribe to the tradition remains simply that, a presumption. Therefore Christians can in good faith question the traditional Christian sexual ethic.

Heterocentrism rests on the conviction that sex is only really good under two conditions — when it is open to the possibility of procreation and when it is



expressive of a communion of persons whose genders are complementary. But these norms of procreativity and gender complementarity are not consistently embodied by those who commend them to the gay community.

Few Christians, including many Catholics, believe any more that heterosexual activity must be open to the possibility of procreation in order to be good. Few judge that oral sex or masturbation is unnatural when practiced by heterosexual people. The conjugal activity of heterosexual couples when the wife is pregnant or postmenopausal is not usually judged immoral, either. On the level of practice, few heterosexual Christians believe that use of artificial contraception, the decision to be sterilized, or the choice to remain child-free are in themselves morally problematic.

Similarly, gender complementarity is highly contested among heterosexual Christians. And even among its proponents, not many argue that heterosexuals are immoral if they do not adopt lifestyles which foster human completion through gender complementarity. For example, not many would judge the lifestyles of heterosexual singles, widows or the men and women who live in religious communities to be unnatural.

### Uncompelling norms

Now, of course, these inconsistencies on the level of practice could be interpreted simply as a sign that sin abounds, but I believe that they signal the abysmal failure of the church's traditional sexual ethic to prove compelling. These norms simply don't make sense to people any more, and for good reason.

These teachings about what makes for good sex are not comprehensive of modern understandings of reproduction, sexuality or relationship.

Specifically, the conviction that the possibility of procreation is essential to good sex does not take adequate account of female sexual physiology as well as all the other non-physiological aspects of relationships. Similarly, assertions that

gender complementarity is essential to good sex simply beg the question posed by the experience of authentic two-in-one-flesh unions enjoyed by many faithful gay and lesbian Christians.

### Womens' sexual experience

Traditional teachings about the sexual significance of procreativity rest on the equation of male sexual experience with human sexual experience. Most of the time, when men have an orgasm, it is accompanied by ejaculation. But there are relatively few points of continuity between reproductive processes and erotic responses in women. When female sexual experience is taken seriously in our effort to think about what is human sexual experience, then the natural relationship between sexuality and procreativity is recognized to be variable and irresolute. The connection between sexual pleasure and reproduction is more accurately seen as periodic and seasonal — if not downright capricious! — rather than essential.

Like their practice of mutual masturbation, the oral and anal sex enjoyed by many gay couples are usually presumed by heterosexists to be sorry substitutes for penile-vaginal intercourse. It alone is the real thing. Not only because it alone is potentially reproductive, but also because it alone engages an "other" sufficiently different that the love signed in the union can be truly seen as "other regarding." This, of course, begs the question, the question that is posed by taking the gay experience seriously. As gay people have interpreted their sexual encounters to me, they can and do authentically sign the communion for which sexuality was designed by the Creator.

For these reasons it is legitimate to conclude that the church's teach-



*Expulsion by Masaccio, 1427*

ing on sexual ethics is not credible.

### **Biblical wisdom**

For many Christians, just such a rationale is thought to reside in the Bible and what it has to say about human sexuality. But careful study reveals that biblical wisdom does not justify this ethic for three main reasons. First, even though tradition normally illumines biblical interpretation, this particular element of tradition — the traditional teaching on sexual ethics — actually shrouds the scripture in misinterpretation.

Consider if you will the heterocentric interpretations of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. They have obscured the true witness of this text against sexual violence in general and against same-sex gang rape in particular. This word does not speak against homosexual relationships per se, just as the word found in Judges 19, which reveals the story of an

other-sex gang rape which is nearly a perfect parallel to the Genesis account, does not reveal God's judgment against heterosexual relationships per se.

Second, texts traditionally cited as for heterocentrism do not, in fact, support that conviction. For example, the Yahwist creation account found in Genesis 2 does not reveal the design of creation to be exclusively heterosexual. Were that the case, then the text would need to reveal sexual differentiation to be both the cause and the solution for Adam's loneliness. But Adam was lonely long before Eve was created. The passage as a whole, particularly Adam's exclamation that Eve is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, emphasizes the partners' similarities, not their differences. In fact, the passage is silent about the purpose of sexual differentiation. It is also silent about whether homosexual persons can experience the

companionship for which sexuality was created. Placards which read Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve, simply jump to a conclusion which cannot be established on the basis of that text.

### **A special category of sinners?**

Finally, the key to most biblical arguments for the retention of heterosexism is a theologically problematic and morally suspect interpretation of Romans 1. In our process of interpreting this passage two important insights about human sexuality surface. Christians today understand that sexual orientation pervades and is central to our sexual experience and that our sexual identity is at the core of our personhood. When these two contemporary insights are combined with the possibility that Paul's remarks could entail of all same-sex desires, they inescapably generate two conclusions which even Paul recognizes to be problematic. Together they suggest that gay people are sinners in a way that differs fundamentally from everybody else and that gay people, worst of all, have been abandoned by God at the very core of their being.

Such conclusions must be named as morally irresponsible and profoundly problematic for deeply theological reasons. They need to be treated like those interpretations of New Testament texts which reinforced slavery and which continue to reinforce the oppression of women. They clearly contradict the overall message of Paul's letter to the Romans, the Pauline corpus as whole and the rest of the biblical witness, both about the depth of sin among us and about the abundance of God's love. The Bible provides no compelling argument either for the retention or against the abolition of heterocentrism.

The conclusion of this analysis is short and sweet. Heterosexism lacks the proof which any form of just discrimination requires. In both its civil and ecclesial expressions, it ought to be dismantled. **TW**

## **Homosexuality and the Bible**

**Walter Wink, *Homosexuality and the Bible* (Fellowship of Reconciliation, Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960), 16pp. \$1.50; bulk rates vary — 1000 @ \$.30 each.**

With this little tract, Walter Wink (aided and abetted by the FOR) is attempting to alter the bitter debate raging in our congregations and denominations over homosexuality. Revising material he has published previously in various venues (see, for example, *TW* 12/95), he acknowledges frankly where scripture condemns homosexual behavior, but demonstrates in plain fashion how Christians, whether liberal or fundamentalist, actually affirm and practice today few of the sexual mores exhibited in scripture (for example, allowing polygamy, mandating leverite marriage, or condemning intercourse during menstruation). The biblical ma-

terial reflects various sexual mores, he says, but does not assert a sexual ethic. Instead, the bible knows only a love ethic, which must be brought to bear on the mores of any given era. In that task he claims Jesus' freedom in the Spirit to "judge for yourselves what is right."

None of this is to question biblical authority, but to bring the nature and character of that authority down to discussion in the pews. In fact, Wink treats the great debate as an opportunity to clarify the meaning of biblical ethics. This pamphlet is so useful because it is written in plain speech, free of jargon. Moreover, it is priced to move and designed for mass mailing. Blanket permission to copy is granted, but at their bulk rates, one could readily flood a congregation or even a denomination with a needful resource. —*B.W-K.*



## Stalkers Home Page

Personal information has become a hot commodity for Internet entrepreneurs, Curt Guyette writes in *The Metro Times* (1/8-14/97).

"Someone can find out your address for \$6," Guyette reports. "Unlisted phone numbers go for \$9. A list of the neighbors living next to you is \$11. Real estate filings can be found within two days, criminal histories in a week. Worker comp searches, bankruptcy filings, driving histories — all are available in a matter of days. And it is all legal."

Computer technology has made such information cheap and accessible, Guyette explains. "Searches that a decade ago could take days, weeks or even months of legwork by an experienced investigator can now be done instantly, for almost nothing."

Among those raising warning voices is Glen Roberts, who runs the "Stalker's Home Page" on the Internet (Web site: <http://pages.ripco.com:8080/~glr/stalk.html>).

## Bugged bugs

If that isn't enough cause for concern, a recent news story revealed that the Japanese government is paying scientists \$5 million to remove the wings and antennae from roaches and implant electrodes which cause the insects to respond to remote-control commands (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1/10/97).

"The potential applications of this work for mankind could be immense," said assistant professor Isao Shimoyama, head of the research team at Tokyo University. Roaches carrying mini-cameras could be used on surveillance missions, Shimoyama explained.

## Anti-union training

A recent brochure in our mailbox invited "management representatives only" to a Union Avoidance Seminar, to be held in three Michigan locations this year. Sponsored by Miller, Johnson, Snell & Cumiskey — a Grand Rapids law firm

"specializing in union avoidance and employment law matters," the seminar promises a "full-day, interactive training session" covering topics such as "Recognizing Union Activity," "Staying Union Free," and "When Your Customer Supports the Union."

## Reforming corporate welfare

John Kasich, a Republican Representative from Ohio, has launched a coalition to oppose federal handouts to huge corporations, *The Progressive* reported in March.

"This is an issue of fairness," Kasich says. "Since we reformed welfare last year for people who don't have power and don't have lobbyists, I think it enhances our case to be able to reform welfare for people who do."

The group, which includes Ralph Nader, "has identified a 'dirty dozen' — 12 programs that sop up billions of federal dollars. These include the Market Access Program (\$347 million), which helps U.S. multinationals like McDonald's peddle their goods to the Third World; the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (\$281 million), which underwrites the export of U.S. nuclear reactors; and the International Monetary Fund (\$3.6 billion), which strangles Third World economies until they open up to foreign capital."

## More family values

"Perhaps the most insidious example of the perils of cross-media corporate domination is provided by Disney/Capital Cities/ABC.

"Disney's activities have occurred with special dispensations from the FCC. The merger required seven waivers. Commissioner Rochelle Chong was quoted as saying, 'I think it's great that a major network like ABC would be thinking of combining resources with a family-oriented company like Disney.'

"Values do play a role in the decision to approve media mergers, but they are not the 'family values' alluded to by Chong. Rather, they are the calculating values of profit and multinational domination.

Disney, this 'family-oriented company,' was listed among the 10 Worst Corporations of 1996 by the *Multinational Monitor* for its exploitive labor practices in developing countries. Some of the clothing sold in promotional blitzes was found to be manufactured in Haiti and Thailand by people paid less than the legal minimum wages there, essentially pennies an hour. Child labor was involved. Disney was also criticized for its use of factories in Myanmar that result in support for the dictatorship there."

— John Rodwan

## Death penalty activist dies

Patsy Morris, one of the first people to document the connection between race and capital punishment, died in March. Dubbed "the Queen of Death Row" by *Time* magazine in 1979, Morris worked for 20 years to obtain and monitor legal representation for inmates on Georgia's Death Row. She wrote extensively on death penalty issues and befriended many death row inmates. A fellowship for recent law graduates to continue Morris' work has been established at the Georgia Appellate Practice and Educational Resource Center, where she worked.

## Simple lifestyle

A *Simpler Living Alternative Calendar* offering 366 days' worth of thoughts and tips for simplifying our lifestyles is available from Alternatives for Simple Living, a non-profit organization which provides resources to help people of faith resist consumerism. To order a calendar (usable in any year) or resources for simplifying holiday and wedding celebrations, contact them at 3617 Old Lakeport Road, P.O. Box 2857, Sioux City, Ia. 51106; 712-274-8875, fax 712-274-1402.

*Short takes*



# Blessing same-sex unions

The desire to celebrate the commitment to a life together arises from within the baptismal community as it seeks to support all its members, including those who are lesbian women and gay men, as they endeavor to form and deepen their Christian identity by making mature commitments, sharing their gifts with the community, and receiving the support of the community. And having followed carefully the discussion about heterosexism in the church, and with consciences formed by Scripture, tradition, reason, and the experience of and belief in the equality of people, we came to believe that there is no justification for the exclusion of gay/lesbian people from full participation in the liturgical and sacramen-

tal life of the community. While few of us would agree with every sentence of the Consultation's report, all of us feel that our collaborative work should be shared with the bishops and deputies attending the 72nd General Convention as part of the ongoing discussion in the church.

We present the Rite contained in the report as "a work in progress," and not many of us would be comfortable using it as it now stands. Can clergy canonically preside at the celebration of such commitments? Although the General Convention in 1979 passed a resolution against the ordination of homosexual persons, the church has not written into its canon law or rubrics any prohibition of such ordinations. Resolution A-104sa, passed

by the 1991 General Convention, moreover, was offered as a compromise because the convention was unable to reach an agreed-upon policy regarding such ordination. The resolution, even though arising out of the Ministry Committee of the House of Bishops, seems to acknowledge, first, that the prior issue to be resolved is not ordination, but the church's sanction of the faithful commitments of homosexual persons, and second, that there is a discontinuity between the church's traditional teaching regarding marriage and many of its members' experiences.

... It is from [a] perspective on the value of commitment that we have produced this Rite.

— excerpted from *The Report of the Second Consultation of Episcopalians on Same-Sex Unions* (July 1996)

## Liturgy in progress

An excerpt from "A Rite For the Celebration of Commitment to a Life Together" produced by the Second Consultation of Episcopalians on Same-Sex Unions (July 1996):

*The couple stand. The Presider and the sponsors (and, if desired, the congregation) may lay hands on the couple. The couple may stand at the table with right hands joined upon the Gospel book or Bible. The Presider may bind their hands together.*

*Presider:*

Praise and thanks to you, O God,  
Creator and Sustainer of the world.  
You spoke and the heavens came into being, the earth and everything that lives.  
You looked and found it good.  
The world was charged with your glory and mercy.

Praise and thanks to you, O God,  
Liberator and Healer of the world.  
You have broken down the wall of division, calling together by the law of love those who were apart.  
For this, Christ died, giving birth to a new creation.

Praise and thanks to you, O Lord our God.  
You renew the face of the earth.  
Pour your Holy Spirit upon N. and N.  
Let them love each other openly without fear, a joyful sign of your new creation in justice, love and peace.

*Deacon:* People of God, give praise to God.

*People:* Blessed by God who appears to us in their love.

*Presider:*

The living God bless you.  
May you flourish together  
and rejoice in your friends.  
[May God bless your children.]

May God grant you the goods that endure and bring you everlasting joy.

And the blessing of the Living God,  
The Source, the Word and the Spirit,  
be upon you now and forever. *AMEN.*

*The Liturgy continues immediately with the Peace. The couple kiss and the congregation welcomes them by greeting them and each other. During or after the exchange of the Peace, the following anthem (Ps. 85:10,22) may be sung.*

Mercy and truth have met together,  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth shall spring up from the earth,  
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

*The service continues with the Eucharist. The couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.*

# Shifting views on gays/lesbians in *Christianity & Crisis*

by Mark Hulsether

On the same day last summer that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted to exclude all non-celibate and “unrepentant” gays and lesbians from its leadership—a constitutional amendment that was officially approved by in March by Presbyteries throughout the nation—I happened to be working on the chapter about gay and lesbian issues in a book that I am writing on the history of *Christianity and Crisis* magazine. This started me thinking that if *C&C* were still in existence, it would certainly be preparing to weigh in on the Presbyterian vote. Until its demise in 1993, the magazine was one of the central forums for main-line Protestant debates about a wide range of social issues, and its legacy deeply informed on going Protestant controversies about sexuality.

But *C&C* did not always support gays and lesbians. In fact, for *C&C*’s first 30 years after its founding in 1941, it hardly addressed gay/lesbian issues at all. Even during the 1960s, when *C&C* began to turn from its original preoccupations with the Cold War toward more radical stances on civil rights and foreign policy, writing about sexuality (either straight or gay) was a low priority for *C&C*’s overwhelm-

ingly white male leaders. When homosexuality did come up overtly, *C&C* took a fence-sitting stance and homophobia often lurked just below the surface. Gay/lesbian sexuality made even *C&C*’s most libertine writers uncomfortable. In 1963, these writers, led by Harvey Cox and Tom Driver, convinced *C&C*’s editorial board to lift its anathema against premarital sex, at least for “responsible” straight couples. Part of their discussion centered on a document by British Quakers who proposed that sex should be judged not by the presence or lack of wedding vows, but by whether the sexual acts would “express and encourage the responsible behavior of the whole person” or, on the negative side, “whether they involve exploitation.” It defended responsible gay/lesbian relationships in the same terms as heterosexual ones, and Driver’s review generally supported its approach. However, Driver qualified his endorsement and called for humor to “put sex in its place,” and he was largely thinking about gays. Although he was untroubled by unmarried straight couples having sex, he spoke as follows:

“[Gay partnership] can be a serious and responsible relation. But the matter cannot be left there. ... Homosexuality is odd. All sex is odd, but homo-sex is odder than most. And funnier. The homosexual doesn’t know what he’s missing. Bigger joke: for emotional reasons, he can’t

know. The guy is trapped. ... Are we to take this trap as fate (bad), or destiny (potentially good), or as a devil of a predicament from which there might be a way out? The minute we opt for fate and/or destiny we play acolyte to the bogus rituals that surround homosexuality. There is a whole literature and psychology built on this, and it’s just plain cockeyed.”

Because Driver did not reject gay/lesbian relationships categorically, this position was *C&C*’s most positive (or least negative) stance on the issue before the 1970s, rivaled only by statements criticizing the harassment and criminalization of gay men, as when a pastor lamented that police harassment had hounded one of his gay parishioners to commit suicide. These critiques gave similarly mixed messages; in this case the pastor implied that homosexuality was like a disease, since he asked whether those who harassed gays would also harass the mentally ill. Given that *C&C*’s board almost never agreed with Ronald Reagan on anything, it is fascinating to note that they backed him on one gay

rights issue during the 1960s when an editorial cautioned liberals not to attack Reagan for appointing gays to high posts in the

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*Homosexuality is odd. All sex is odd, but homo-sex is odder than most. And funnier.*

—Tom Driver in *C&C*, 1963

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California state government, although his “traditional values” made this tempting. But beyond such articles, *C&C*’s only explicit writing on homosexuality came when its conservative minority attacked liberal “permissiveness.” Richard John Neuhaus mentioned a book which defended gay rights entitled *The Lord Won’t Mind*; he stated that this “might serve as the theme of much recent writing on Christian ethics.” For Neuhaus, to defend gay/lesbian rights was to extend contextual ethics to the point of absurdity.

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**Mark Hulsether** is a professor of religious and American studies at the University of Tennessee. A longer version of this article will appear in his new book, *From Liberal Preaching to Radical Teaching: Culture, Politics, and Religion in Christianity & Crisis, 1941-1993* (U. of Tenn. Press). Artist **Robert Lentz**’s icons are distributed by Bridge Building Images, P.O. Box 1048, Burlington, Vt. 05402; 802-864-8346.

### Moving towards pride

In the early 1970s, *C&C* began to write about gay/lesbian movements in roughly the same terms as black power and feminism, which were the two major issues (along with anti-imperialism) being embraced by *C&C*'s radical wing at this time. An early article by *C&C* contributing editor James McGraw took a standpoint within the gay pride movement. He denounced the *New York Times* for suggesting that gays would prefer to be straight, adopted the word "faggot" as a defiant point of pride somewhat like black nationalists used "nigger," and generally insisted that the problem was not the "sickness" of gays, but homophobia and oppression by straights. McGraw's boldest argument was implicit in his title, "The Scandal of Peculiarity." Readers with a minimal knowledge of academic theology could immediately recognize his pun on "the scandal of *particularity*"—a shorthand term for the problem of conceptualizing how Jesus could have a special relationship with God (in orthodox Christian doctrine, equal status in the Trinity) given his human incarnation in general, and his execution as a criminal in particular. In other words, McGraw implied that theologians who could see God revealed through Jesus' embodied human life should also be able to see God's will and blessing expressed through (responsible) gay lifestyles—and implicitly McGraw compared the oppression of gays and lesbians to the suffering of Christ.

Although McGraw did not develop this last point explicitly, his general drift was unmistakable. He compared Troy Perry's founding of the Metropolitan Community Church, a predominantly gay and lesbian denomination, to James Varick's founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion. In both cases, people left established denominations because of discrimination, and they "took Jesus with them, as he always feels

more at home with the rejected."

After McGraw broke *C&C*'s silence, articles in a more scholarly voice defended gay/lesbian rights. A widely reprinted article by James Nelson provided a broad compendium of biblical and theological defenses. Nelson argued, for example, that the actual sin in the leading biblical proof-text used to condemn homosexuality, the story of Sodom and

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### *In an early article*

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(responsible) gay lifestyles.*

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Gomorrah, was inhospitality to strangers and homosexual *rape*. (If it were about heterosexual rape, how many people would conclude that all straight people should be condemned?)

There should be no obstacle to adopting these understandings, Nelson continued, because the "Protestant principle" of reforming received traditions in light of "God's invitation to human wholeness" had led Christians to revise other aspects of biblical teaching in light of changing thought: For example, they had not maintained biblical understandings of astronomy such as the theory that the sun moved around the earth, nor biblical teachings justifying slavery and polygamy, nor biblical prohibitions against eating shellfish. (Virginia Ramey Mollenkott later added that the first church council to explicitly ban homosexuality, in 1179,

also imposed sanctions against moneylenders, heretics, and Jews.) Similar changes were needed now in relation to sexuality. This was a matter of justice for gays and lesbians, but also of self-interest for the society at large, since homophobia (and its connection to male sexism) caused unhealthy repressions in straight people.

### Deconstructing 'heterosexual'

There was a submerged tension in Nelson's article between the changeable social and cultural constructedness of sexuality—always being reformed by the "Protestant principle"—and the appeal to fixed gay/lesbian orientations which must be accepted as natural and unchangeable. A key early article by Carter Heyward addressed this tension explicitly. Heyward highlighted the constructedness of the "boxes" in which people play out sex and gender roles, including the categories "gay" and "straight." Yet she insisted, "These categories—boxes—are real. We live in them." And she argued that it was appropriate for her at this time and place to identify as a lesbian feminist.

The most important "box" to deconstruct was "the single box labeled 'heterosexual'" that defined male and female roles in sexist ways and presupposed hierarchies of exploitation. A key problem with the straight box was that it often short-circuited the creative power of passion and its associated drive for mutuality, which refused to flow in the channels it proposed. Feminism in general, and lesbian feminism in particular, was for Heyward the most creative current box in which to situate herself because of the way it criticized such dominant social patterns and highlighted the positive role of mutuality and passion.

Of course, in the churches at large such positions were extremely embattled, and for the rest of its existence, *C&C* often reported on the progress of gay and lesbian ordination rights, as well as conservative counterattacks such as the case



of a United Methodist minister named Rose Mary Denman who was hounded out of the church when she came out as a lesbian. One of *C&C*'s most influential articles on this subject was by the prominent theologian John Cobb, Jr., who deflated conservative pretensions to be upholding "biblical values" with their rule (mainly designed to exclude homosexuals) that all clergy must embrace "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness." Cobb pointed out: "The Bible reflects and sanctions several ways of dealing with sexuality, ranging from the multiple wives and concubines of the patriarchs and kings of Israel to the lifelong chastity that seems to have been favored by Jesus and Paul. But I do not know where the exact pattern now being proposed [including tolerance of divorce, which was explicitly condemned by Jesus] is reflected or supported."

#### Voices of backlash

Occasionally voices of backlash appeared in *C&C*'s pages. A Methodist bureaucrat received space to answer Cobb by restating the party line, and Yale Divinity student John Espy attacked Nelson's article, arguing that the biblical idea of purity "clearly excludes homosexuality" and that "only heterosexual relationships are natural."

In addition, letters to the editor characterized homosexuality as "lust" and suggested that *C&C* should "hate the sin but love the sinner." A southern ecumenical leader described gay/lesbian sexuality as a "perversion of the flow of nature." If so, Nelson's reasoning was backwards: to affirm homosexuality was actually a *refusal* to "accept and affirm one's own sexuality." During 30 years of pastoral counseling he had "experienced most homosexuality as a conflict in identity, such as a male not being willing to affirm or accept maleness. If one fails to accept one's sex given by nature, then all

the other identities are up for grabs such as ethnic group, race, regionality [sic], etc. ... As for ordaining homosexuals (or lesbians) we are (in primitive terms) making a person potent. To put the blessing of the church on an impotent person does not bestow potency."

*C&C* did not present these hostile responses as an equally legitimate pole of a balanced debate. In 1977, a special issue



*Holy Wisdom* by Robert Lentz

on Homosexuality and the Church opened by answering a new subscriber who, having read Nelson, had written to ask whether *C&C* had published articles on the other side of the issue. One might debate the proportions of honesty and evasion in the editor's reply: "No, there is no previous issue of *C&C* arguing the other side of the question."

Their rationale was forthright: while realizing that "many readers will disagree ... and some will object strongly," they still planned to be advocates for gay-

lesbian concerns. The real theological problem, they said, "[is not] reconciling acceptance of homosexuality with the scriptural passages that appear to condemn it, but rather how to reconcile condemnation of homosexuals with the criteria of morality that are truly central to the Christian message."

By the late 1970s gay/lesbian issues were among *C&C*'s top priorities, so that a pseudonymous Presbyterian minister "Calvin Gay" could begin a 1978 article attacking homophobia with the disclaimer, "this article covers ground already somewhat familiar to *C&C* readers ..." *C&C* continued to give strong attention to gay and lesbian issues for the rest of its career, with AIDS becoming a major concern. At times its writers tried to shame the mainstream into rethinking their homophobia, as when Louie Crew described how one local church had treated him in an article called "At St. Luke's Parish, the Peace of Christ is Not For Gays." At other times, *C&C* became one of the few safe spaces in Protestant journalism to express simple outrage at the mainstream, as in a piece on "The Last Committee on Sexuality (Ever)" which denounced and withdrew from the whole "dialog" process in which straight Christians debated whether gays and lesbians are sick.

Drawing on both themes, Crew wrote about a friend who was dying of AIDS, but could not find any sense of peace because he believed that God hated him. "I am an atheist to the God he feared," said Crew. "I believe that kind of a God is a fraud [but] if that God turns out to be real, let the sucker burn me." However, his friend saw angels at the foot of his bed. It signaled that at least God, if not God's reputed followers in the churches, had a message of grace for gay and lesbian people. **TW**

# Travelling mission continues

by Karen D. Bota

Jane Spahr contends that in the six years since she was denied a call to be co-pastor of a Rochester, N.Y., congregation because she is a lesbian, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has become even more exclusive of gays, lesbians and bisexual people. With Amendment B, the so-called "Fidelity and Chastity Amendment," the denomination has revised its Book of Order, part of the church's constitution, to require all unmarried ministers, deacons and elders to be sexually celibate.

The amendment's passage has reinvigorated Spahr's ongoing work with the project That All May Freely Serve. The grassroots effort works within the confines of current church policy through education and dialogue to convince churches and presbyteries that the Presbyterian General Assembly must give presbyteries the right to ordain qualified candidates for ministry, regardless of their sexual orientation.

That All May Freely Serve is an evangelism effort launched by Downtown United Presbyterian Church (DUPC) in 1993, with the goal of winning approval for Spahr and other openly gay and lesbian ministers to serve the congregations which call them. In 1991 DUPC had invited Spahr to be one of their four co-pastors in full

knowledge of her sexual orientation, but the Presbyterian Church's Permanent Judicial Commission eventually issued a ruling denying DUPC's call based on a

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*"We've visited churches,  
faith communities, colleges,  
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United States. We're  
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of partnership to deepen the  
work — regional evangelism  
is what we're trying to do,"*

*— Jane Spahr*

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1978 policy reached following a church-wide study of homosexuality and the ministry. Spahr, a member of the Redwoods Presbytery in California, was allowed to remain a minister in good standing because she had been ordained in 1974, prior to the study.

Today, That All May Freely Serve is a joint mission project of the DUPC and the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Tiburon, Calif., with 6,500 on its mailing list. The connection with the Tiburon church allows Spahr to remain in good standing in her Redwoods Presbytery, and models effective congregational partnership.

"We've visited churches, faith com-

munities, colleges, universities and many seminaries, all across the United States," Spahr says.

Ordained elders, deacons and members of Presbyterian churches — heterosexual and gay — travel in teams and address Sunday adult education forums, specially-called meetings, groups in dorms and chapels, and anywhere else they can share their experiences.

"We're teaching a different model of partnership across this country to deepen the work — regional evangelism is what we're trying to do," Spahr explains. "We've answered thousands of letters as well as speaking. It's been an amazing process."

After General Assembly this year, the group decided to enter phase two of their work. "Besides educating and advocating all across the country, in our next phase we are going to set up evangelists in four areas: New York City, Baltimore, Chicago and here in northern California," Spahr says. Each region's evangelist will work differently, but each will work toward hiring open persons who down the road, it is hoped, will be ordained or installed as pastors of a church. Spahr plans to visit those regions three times this year to help them organize and raise funds.

"It will be a grassroots effort all across the country," says Spahr. "We've found educating makes such a big difference."

Spahr is pleased that many Presbyterian congregations have begun putting forth "covenants of dissent" in response to Amendment B.

"Church members are rising up, and that's very exciting to hear," she says. "It's going to change the system."

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**Karen D. Bota** is a freelance writer living in metropolitan Detroit and promotion consultant for *The Witness*.

# Chastity and church

by Bill Wallace

**R**ecently, the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., passed a new policy on sexuality. Henceforth, all ordained and lay leaders must limit sexual activity to the union of man and woman in marriage. And, if said leaders are single, they must live a celibate life.

I hope the Episcopalians don't follow the Presbyterians. My parish, Emmanuel in Boston, would be up the creek without a paddle in terms of institutional compliance. There would hardly be any staff and little vestry left. We'd be looking to find new facilitators for most parish commissions. The choir would be little more than a quartet. And, if the policy were to be placed over the rest of the parishioners, we'd be a pretty lean bunch. There is an upside. If Emmanuel traveled this straight and narrow path (puns intended!), I would have more time on my hands. No same-sex unions. Few weddings. Of the straight couples whose marriages I've solemnized since coming to Emmanuel, few would have made this chastity cut.

More exasperating than the church's determination to put its head in the sexual sand of social change, at the expense of

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**Bill Wallace** is rector of Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Boston, Mass.

a quicker suffocation, is the reality that, once more, the church seems to be right about the wrong things.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing from his prison cell in the concentration camp at Tegel, on July 28, 1944, reframed the meaning of chastity: "The essence of chastity is not the suppression of lust, but the total orientation of one's life towards a goal. Without such a goal, chastity is bound to become ridiculous. Chastity is the [sum and substance] of lucidity and concentration."

The life and death of Jesus were the consequence and culmination of such a life of chastity. Jesus practiced and preached that purity is not an unsoiled life, but a life lived single-heartedly for others. The gospels, more or less, are comprised of two basic parts. First, a curt account of Jesus making his way to Jerusalem by means of a singled-hearted ministry of and message about religionless compassion over against the religious observance of ritual cleanliness. Second, a detailed account of what happened when Jesus got to the holy city. The end of Jesus was brought about by his announcement, in word and deed, that the hallowed houses of God are in opposition to God's compassion for all humanity; and, that this disparity demands

a change of heart. What religion calls repentance.

Yes, the Presbyterians will prove, if they are as bad as their word, that a large number of ordained and lay leaders live unchaste lives, as do the leaders of all religious establishments. But they will fail to see that our unchastity has little to do with sex and a lot to do with neglect of those in need. Again, the church will be wrong in regard to the right things.

So what does it really mean for us to live a truly chaste life, that is, to be right about the right things? It's the courage to move the context of chastity out of the nicely appointed bedrooms of the morally confused, morally constricted middle class into the world of others who, in one way or another, are suffering.

Then, how chaste we are, how chaste we aren't, will be related to what strength we have or don't have to submit to a spiritual life emblematic of the executed Jesus, who was there for others at all costs. "The transcendental," Bonhoeffer said, "is not the infinite and unattainable tasks but the neighbor who is in reach in any given situation." And yes, what went for Jesus will go for us. We'll die. The truly chaste church goes out of business, that is, the kind of business the church is usually about: preservation, importance, power, control, envy, pride, property.

A couple of weeks ago, I visited the Boston Living Center, a community exclusively oriented to offering hospitality to those with HIV and AIDS. While taking a tour of the facility and its programs, the guide said that they had the opportunity to buy their building at a great price. "But," the guide said, "that would be a bad symbol; a mark of permanence. Our goal is to close down for lack of clients."

Would that the church was chaste enough to have such a sense of an ending.

## Dine with *The Witness* at the Advocate!

The Episcopal Church Publishing Company and *The Witness* staff invite readers to their awards dinner on July 18, 1997 at 6:30 p.m. at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia. The event, which will benefit the historic church, takes place during the Episcopal Church's triennial General Convention and is a wonderful opportunity for *Witness* supporters and their friends to share

their common vision for a church committed to peace and justice.

The dinner will also benefit Project H.O.M.E., an organization devoted to providing housing and job training for Philadelphia's homeless citizens. H.O.M.E.'s Back Home Cafe staff will prepare and serve the meal.

For information on making reservations call *The Witness* at 313-841-1967.



# Women priests in England: an update

by Berit M. Lakey

When the Church of England began ordaining women to the priesthood in 1994, hundreds of women were ready and waiting in the wings. Two years later, more than 1,600 women had been priested. A recently completed survey conducted by the National Association of Diocesan Advisers in Women's Ministry estimates that by now more than 10 percent of the clergy in the Church of England are women.

The Association's survey was reviewed at the group's annual get-together this past April. The 35 women who attended represented about 80 percent of the English dioceses. All but two were priests and most had worked within the church for many years before being ordained. They rejoiced in finding that almost one-quarter of the women priests in the Church of England as of July, 1996 were rectors or vicars, but they also worried about the obstacles facing the majority of women if they want to move from being assistant curates into more responsible positions.

The stories shared by the Advisers showed that many bishops are uncertain about what kinds of jobs are "suitable" for women, and moreover that the "old boys network" and prejudices held by those who control a large number of positions often result in women not being aware of possible openings, many of which are never announced. Other issues facing

**Berit M. Lakey** is an organizational development consultant to non-profit and church organizations working in the Washington, D.C. area.

women clergy include lack of recognition of their levels of pre-ordination experience and professional skills, maternity leave, and housing. In addition, discussions about the progress experienced by women clergy in the Church of England indicated that women's lack of self-confidence and knowledge about how to maneuver in a church system entrenched in tradition also serve as obstacles to their promotion.

Some structural obstacles to the advancement of women priests emanate from the wings of the church that continue to oppose the ordination of women.

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*Many who work in women's ministries in England feel that the church has undermined the long-range position of women clergy by bending over backwards to avoid offending those who continue to oppose the ordination of women.*

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Parishes that vote to oppose the ordination of women on theological grounds and parishes that vote not to accept women as their rectors/vicars are allowed officially to register these positions and be excused from considering women clergy and from civil sex discrimination

laws that otherwise cover the church. Parishes opposed to women's ordination may also request visitation by one of the "flying bishops" in England who have been approved for ministry to those parishes who on the grounds of conscience cannot accept women priests (otherwise known as "the other integrity"). Many of the participants in the Advisers conference feel that the church has undermined the long-range position of women clergy by bending over backwards to avoid offending these forces and hope for, but are not optimistic about, the demise of these provisions.

As a group, the Advisers in Women's Ministry are beginning to realize their

need for strategic thinking about how to continue the struggle for the empowerment of women in the church. Some are weary of "becoming like the men" and resorting to manipulative power struggles, while others worry about being used by the powers-that-be to deflect pressures for further change.

Still others feel that further change is inevitable. While most bishops have appointed an adviser related to women's ministries, usually a clergywoman, the advisers have varying degrees of influence and little, if any, power. Many feel the tension of being accountable both to their bishop and to women who are struggling with issues "on the ground."

The conference, led by Janice Robinson of the College of Preachers at the National Cathedral in Washington (and a *Witness* board member), culminated in the formulation of a vision statement that will serve as a guide for the work of the Association in bringing about further change in the Church of England. They will work toward relationships within the church at all levels that are characterized by partnerships that demonstrate mutuality and willingness to engage our differences, and that encourage creativity in our individual ministries; structures that make room for and encourage creativity in the organization of ministry and where women are both welcomed and sought for senior positions, including that of bishop; relationships and structures that are rooted in prayer and combine to focus the work of the church on the spread of the Kingdom of God and the Gospel in the world.

## Matthews elected leader of Canadian diocese

Victoria Matthews has been elected diocesan bishop of the Diocese of Edmonton, making her the first woman elected diocesan bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada. She was also the first woman elected to the episcopate in the Canadian church, having been elected suffragan bishop in the Diocese of Toronto in 1993.

# Earthkeeping ministries

by Anne E. Cox

The first North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology (NACCE) in 1987 ended in squabbling among various factions of Christian environmentalists and produced no clear statement on the topic. A decade later, we now have a clear and concise articulation of strategies for addressing earth-human relations from the organization.

NACCE sponsored A Congress of Earthkeeping Ministries, subtitled "Discerning the Signs of These Times," in September, 1996. It was designed to discern "the stumbling blocks preventing Christian individuals and churches from taking a right relationship to Earth," and then to propose strategies for addressing them.

The more than 100 participants in the Congress considered four critical movements — science and cosmology, Christian ecofeminism, ecojustice, and alternative economics. The report from each "town meeting" summarizes current trends, a vision for the year 2000, the challenges to achieving this vision, and strategies to help churches overcome the identified obstacles.

Many of the strategies in the summary report can be quite helpful for individual congregations or judicatories committed to working toward an ethic of care for all of creation. They tend to be specific and manageable, such as using creation-centered liturgies in Epiphany, on St. Francis Day and Earth Day and holding worship services outdoors as a strategy to break open the tendency in many congregations to objectify the earth.

The Christian Ecofeminism group

specifies studying Celtic Christianity and the lives of medieval women saints along with praying for the peaceful death of outmoded institutions in order to nurture an earth-honoring spirituality.

Some of the strategies specifically recognize the connections between various justice issues. The Alternative Economics group encourages churches to participate in international work camps as a way of making connections that break through the dominant-culture North American world view of "unlimited growth."

Similarly, the Ecojustice group encourages practicing inclusion by forming "partnerships with churches in Black, Hispanic and Asian neighborhoods," which is a strategy that also reveals the Eurocentric perspective of the participants in the Congress.

NACCE endorses the strategies reported in this summary as ways to address "the greatest moral issue of our time — our continuing destruction of the Earth."

The challenge I see is getting from a good, clear document to reality. Just because NACCE endorses the strategies does not mean that they will filter to congregations, especially since few have even heard of NACCE, and are unlikely to seek it out — indeed, each of the four town meetings identified complacency and resistance to change on behalf of the planet as major stumbling blocks in the churches.

The missing piece in the document is a clear strategy for organizing national church bodies, dioceses, presbyteries, synods and conferences. NACCE's mission statement includes building church partnerships facilitating regional and local earthkeeping ministries. Unless the organization is specific in its strategy for doing just this, the stumbling blocks they identify will continue to trip up efforts to halt our continuing destruction of the Earth and bring life into balance.

## Four candidates announced for presiding bishop

The 29-member joint nominating committee for the election of a presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church announced a slate of four nominees for presiding bishop in mid-April. The four bishops are: Frank Griswold of Chicago, Robert Rowley of Northwestern Pennsylvania, Richard Shimpfky of El Camino Real (California) and Don Wimberly of Lexington (Kentucky). The election will take place at the church's General Convention meeting in Philadelphia this July. — ENS

## Carey provokes Outrage over anti-gay stand

Ten members of the English gay/lesbian activist group Outrage invaded Lambeth Palace on April 20 in protest of the airing of a television documentary in which Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey ruled out the possibility that the Church of England would sanction or bless same-sex relationships.

Group members roughly confronted Carey as he escorted dozens of bishops and other church leaders around the palace grounds during a photo opportunity arranged for press. The dignitaries had gathered at the archbishop's official residence to participate in preparations for the 1998 Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops, which is scheduled to address some issues surrounding human sexuality.

"The discipline of the church has not changed," Carey said in the protested broadcast. "The discipline of the church is that we recognize two lifestyles. One is marriage and the other is celibacy, and there can't be anything in between and we don't recognize same-sex marriages."

Following the Outrage incident a Lambeth Palace spokesman said: "The archbishop's view is that this sort of illegal and disruptive behavior is unacceptable and does not make a significant contribution to this or any other debate."

— Episcopal and Anglican Communion news services

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Anne E. Cox is a *Witness* contributing editor in Tenants Harbor, Maine. Copies of the Summary Report are available for \$5 from NACCE; PO Box 40011, St. Paul, MN 55104; 612-698-1349; email: 75202.1215@compuserve.com.

# Health care reform needed

by Jane Slaughter

**R**emember health care reform? It was only four years ago, in 1993, that Congress and the rest of us were debating how to clean up the mess that leaves the U.S. with some of the worst health statistics in the developed world and 100,000 deaths each year from lack of care.

Vicente Navarro, M.D., author and professor of health policy at Johns Hopkins University, sat on Hillary Clinton's Health Care Reform Task Force back then, arguing forcefully — and against the odds — for a “single-payer” plan that would eliminate the need for insurance companies and provide care for all.

Of course, the insurance companies had their way, no new plan was passed, and in the time since 1993, the corporate takeover of medicine has accelerated, with for-profit hospitals gobbling up non-profits.

Navarro, who was Jesse Jackson's health care advisor during the 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns, says, “The large insurance companies are basically running the health sector of this country. The insurance conglomerates are forcing people into HMOs [health maintenance organizations] in a system whereby profit is the major motivation. In the health sector, profit and need do not coincide.”

Navarro left his native Spain in 1962 because, he says, “Franco and I were incompatible, and he was more powerful than I was.”

Formerly a cardiac surgeon, for many

years Navarro has devoted himself to such projects as his book *Dangerous to Your Health: Capitalism in Health Care*. Today, he stresses, “The majority of Americans do agree that health care should be a right. But just because they want something doesn't mean they're going to get it. The problem is the political system, which is heavily, heavily corrupt.”

Navarro points out that both Democrats and Republicans are funded by insurance companies and the rest of big business. “Health care is one of the most successful industries in this country now.”

What happens when a business mentality dominates health decisions? First, the percentage of people who have insurance through their jobs is declining quickly, from 80 percent a few years ago to 60 percent today.

Second, “there is no evidence,” says Navarro, “that the for-profits are more competent or more efficient than non-profits. What happens is that for-profits choose the ‘best’ patients, so that they get the young, the healthy, and exclude the chronic, the elderly, and that is allowed by law. Sometimes people who are more in need, who are more vulnerable, are those who have less opportunity to pay for medical services.”

Third, such companies do less for those who make it into the system. “The evidence we have,” says Navarro, “is that clinical practice in the U.S. is changing much because doctors have to look over their shoulders at what the HMOs, most of which are controlled by insurance companies, will allow them to do.

“Many times also doctors are seduced into the system by making their salary

dependent on how much they can save for the company. The doctors have an extra incentive not to spend much, because they themselves will get part of that saving.” Several surveys show HMO patients far more dissatisfied with their care than are traditional fee-for-service patients.

The single-payer model Navarro continues to advocate is based on the Canadian experience. There, he says, residents, through their taxes, pay into a medical trust fund that eliminates the need for insurance companies. The government is the “single payer” to doctors, hospitals, and nursing homes, which remain in the private sector. Patients have complete freedom of choice as to their providers. Every Canadian carries a health security card which is all they need to receive free care at any facility in the country. Everyone is under the same system—from the prime minister to the unemployed.

“We spend 20 percent of health care expenses on administration and profits,” says Navarro, “while in Canada they spend less than 9 percent. If we were to save that 11 percent, we could provide comprehensive coverage for everyone” — including the 40 million people now uninsured.

The main forces backing single-payer during the 1993 fight were the unions, senior citizen organizations (though not the huge American Association of Retired Persons — “They had too close a connection with Prudential,” says Navarro), and the American Public Health Association.

The churches, Navarro says, were not on board.

“The sense of morality the churches have is very opportunistic, in that they do not confront the sources of power in this country. Their sense of the moral tends to be very individual and never touch on collective responsibility.” **TW**

**Jane Slaughter** is a freelance writer in Detroit, Mich.



# Same-sex marriage

by Kristen J. Leslie

*Same-Sex Marriage, Pro and Con. A Reader, Andrew Sullivan (Ed.), New York: Vintage Books, proj. 1997, \$14.*

Last week I received a phone call from Nell. She was calling to remind me of her anniversary. Four years ago she and her partner stood in front of a chapel filled with friends and family and exchanged sacred vows. It was not the first same-sex wedding I had attended, but it was the first at which I officiated. In 1993 I did not know all the issues surrounding the debate. Now I do. Andrew Sullivan, a senior editor for *The New Republic*, has gathered legal briefs, scriptural references, essays, poems, editorials and excerpts from congressional hearings which document two thousand years of opinions on same-sex marriage.

Sullivan sets the stage by placing the discussion in its globally historic context. From Plato through the middle ages, to deviant marriage patterns in 17-19th century Chinese society, lesbian rituals in Dahomey (West Africa), and contemporary practices in Sweden and Denmark, Sullivan makes it clear that this is neither a new issue, nor a Western one. The anthology includes chapters on the religious issues, court cases, arguments for and against same-sex marriages, the Defense of Marriage Act and the Hawaiian challenge, same-sex parenting issues, and concerns of polygamy and adultery.

The debate about same-sex marriages could easily be seen in the larger debate about the place of lesbian women and gay

men in society. Instead, Sullivan asserts that "[w]hen we talk about the same-sex marriage debate ... we are also talking about the marriage debate."

The majority of the arguments in this volume are tied to marriage: who can get married, why they get married, interracial marriages, marriage for procreation, marriage and morality, and who actually has jurisdiction over the legality of the marriage.

Same-sex marriage, according to Sullivan, is both a civil rights matter and a religious matter, and he attempts to document both the secular and religious aspects of the debate. The religious argument predictably starts with the most often cited scripture lessons: Gen. 2, Lev. 20, Rom. 1, and 1 Cor. 6. Sullivan's choice to use the translation from the King James Version, because it is the most gripping English translation ever printed, does not convince me of this translation's merit. An excerpt by John Spong represents a liberal theologian's struggle with the church's refusal to work with the issue.

On the other end of the spectrum, Dennis Prager, a conservative Jewish voice, writes about how gay liberation threatens the health of society. I was left wondering if there was not a less rabid voice who could better elucidate a sane conservative view (Prager suggests that the next step after gay liberation could be incest liberation). As a theologian, my own fairly high expectations of this religious discussion were not met. Sullivan seems to allow the voices to represent the polar opinions. This is not true elsewhere in the book.

The civic/legal canons rest on Supreme Court cases and some lower court hear-

ings. Sullivan starts by pulling together 10 of the foundational court cases which not only chart the history of the same-sex marriage debate, but present the major arguments. I was surprised by the variety of issues that have influenced this debate: the right of privacy, interracial marriage, sex discrimination, sodomy, and equal protection under the law. The current debate seems to be focused on the Defense of Marriage legislation.

There are many reason why I find this book valuable. Most strikingly, it names the complexity of the issues. Sullivan attempts to take the discussion out of a dichotomous pro and con, liberal vs. conservative context, allowing the variety of voices to paint the shadows and intricacies. In this volume you can find radical/liberal voices opposed to same-sex marriages and conservative voices struggling with protecting their rights to privacy and protection from governmental meddling. Both queer theorists and political conservatives use the issue of family-first to argue their points.

Clergy, politician, and lawyer alike could benefit from reading this volume. Those preparing for same-sex marriages could benefit because it may help prepare them for the arguments they may hear. This volume is not geared toward the couple who needs a helpful resource for planning a same-sex wedding. Nor is it a comprehensive book for those interested in a theological discussion. It is a good book about what has ruffled peoples' feathers when it comes to two people of the same sex who want the state and the church to recognize their commitment. **TW**

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**Kristen J. Leslie** is completing her doctorate before assuming responsibilities as associate professor of pastoral theology at Yale University.

*review*

Ten years ago, Melanie Morrison gathered with some friends in the living room of a fellow United Church of Christ pastor, to pray while his congregation voted on whether or not he should resign. The vote was split and the pastor — who had recently been outed as a gay man — left the congregation.

A similar vote, 34 years earlier, echoed in Morrison's memory. When she was five, her father — also a UCC pastor — had left his congregation after half the members voted against his decision to welcome an African-American family into the church.

"It was a very formative experience for me," Morrison says of the controversy which uprooted her family from their home in Maywood, Ill. and took them to East Lansing, Mich. "There were phone calls at night and my father was accused of being a communist."

Morrison's lifelong commitment to fighting racism and her own experience as a lesbian and a Christian led to her current ministry with Leaven, a non-profit organization which offers resources on racial and sexual justice. Morrison grew up hearing about *Koinonia* Farm, the interracial community founded by Clarence Jordan in Plains, Ga. in the 1940s. When she joined *Koinonia* after graduating from college, she found her faith both deepened and challenged. "At *Koinonia* I discovered the Bible — and I also discovered that the Bible had some things in it that really weren't talked about in my church," Morrison says. "I

*The efforts for institutional change must go on, but we must find ways of surviving — and more than surviving, celebrating with each other.*



Melanie Morrison

## Celebrating with each other

by Marianne Arbogast

was really shocked to discover that this Bible, which I was finding so liberating through the lens of people like Clarence Jordan, was dripping with sexism."

Unwilling to sacrifice either faith or feminism, Morrison decided to study Scripture intensively. In her final year of seminary, she fell in love with a woman — a Dutch exchange student — for the first time.

"Even though I came from a progressive background, from a family that has proven to be enormously supportive, it was frightening," Morrison says. She and her partner remained mostly closeted, coming out only to a carefully chosen few. These included Eleanor Morrison, Melanie Morrison's mother and a professor at Michigan State University who had written books on human sexuality.

After several years of a trans-continental relationship, Morrison moved to the Netherlands in 1981. She lived there

for six years, going to school to maintain her visa and pastoring a Dutch Reformed congregation. She was active in the resistance to the placement of NATO cruise missiles on Dutch soil, and wrote about the peace movement for the Fellowship of Reconciliation and for *Sojourners*.

The latter commitment precipitated a personal crisis. When *Sojourners* ran a piece asking readers to protest anti-gay legislation, but added that they did not condone homosexuality, Morrison registered a protest — without speaking in the first person. Later, when the magazine published an article condemning homosexual relationships, Morrison was stunned.

"I was enraged, but I was also horrified at how I had lost my voice," she says. "Here I was, pastor of a congregation where I probably could have been out, but I wasn't encouraging other people to tell their stories, because I was not willing to tell my own."

*Witnesses,  
the quick and the dead*

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*.

A year later, Morrison and her partner separated and she returned to the U.S. After a year of solitude, house-sitting in the country and reading Audrey Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Carter Heyward and Barbara Deming, Morrison decided that she needed to be out more publicly.

"While I have the privilege in the UCC of being able to do that without losing my ordination, finding work as a pastor is another matter," Morrison says. "Seminary teaching jobs are also hard to find."

She began talking with her mother about their mutual desire to work with church people on gay and lesbian justice issues, and together they established Leaven. Their first work was to meet with a small UCC congregation near Kalamazoo, Mich., whose pastor, Cyril Colonius, had just been outed as a gay man. After half the members voted against him, Colonius and Morrison decided to begin a new ministry.

"It was not our intention to found a gay and lesbian congregation, but a congregation that from its inception would be open to all people," Morrison says. Phoenix Community Church drew worshippers from many backgrounds, many of them gay and lesbian Christians who had long felt unwelcome elsewhere. Phoenix did not initially pursue denominational affiliation, but after two years, the congregation decided to join the UCC.

"We sent word, all excited, to the Association Church and Ministry Committee — and we didn't hear anything back," Morrison says. "This was my denomination! I got on the phone with the chair of the Committee and asked, 'How do you think this feels?'"

Phoenix was accepted only after a year-long process of dialogue and visits to the UCC congregations in the region.

"People got up and very vulnerably told their stories," Morrison recalls. "We met with all kinds of responses, some of them very unkind. On the day of the vote,

there was a long conversation at the microphone, people witnessing for and against our inclusion while we sat there, voiceless and voteless. Amazingly, there were 29 votes against Phoenix's membership and 92 for it."

Meanwhile, a national church agency had contracted with Leaven to develop and write a human sexuality curriculum for local congregations. The Morrisons also led workshops and retreats, and developed "intensive seminars" in which participants meet for four to eight months for study and reflection. Although seminars on feminist theology and spirituality were popular, Morrison was troubled early on by the lack of racial balance.

"It became clear to us that we could not adequately deal with sexism and

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*While I have the privilege  
in the UCC of being able  
to come out without losing  
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as a pastor is another matter.*

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heterosexism without also looking at racism," she says. "Unless feminism is truly about liberation for all women, it becomes just another form of self-aggrandizement for women of privilege."

With Anita Stallworth, an African-American chaplain at Wayne State University, Morrison created and led a seminar called "Difficult Conversations" as a forum for interracial dialogue about racism. Another seminar, "Doing Our Own Work," offered a chance for white women to examine their own participation in racist structures.

Morrison believes such conversations are critical.

"So many of us have what someone has called 'multiple and shifting identities,'" she says. "I'm not just a lesbian — I'm white, North American, well-edu-

cated. When any of us get stuck in only one piece of that it usually results in false naming. For example, I'm distressed by how often I hear white gay and lesbian people speaking of 'the' gay or 'the' lesbian community, as though it's monolithic and white."

Morrison disputes the notion that those who suffer prejudice are more likely to understand it in other forms.

"I do believe that the experience of marginalization is often a door to empathy, but it does not make one immune from marginalizing others," she says. "The nature of structural power is that it's invisible to those of us who hold it."

Morrison, who lives with her partner, April Allison, on land that they plan to share with a Leaven retreat center, is the author of *The Grace of Coming Home* (Pilgrim Press, 1995). She is also currently finishing work on a doctoral dissertation which focuses on lesbian women's experiences of Christianity.

"A core Protestant principle has been the recitation of some Pauline statements like 'We are all sinners saved by grace,'" she says.

"Lesbian women bring deep suspicion to such statements. There is politics to sin and grace. In the way the church works and the way doctrines function, some of us are more sinners than others. Something that needs to be named 'sin' is the very practice of attributing sin to socially designated vulnerable targets."

A co-founder of CLOUT, Christian Lesbians Out Together, Morrison believes those who struggle toward full inclusion must not put their lives on hold in the meantime.

"We must claim our rightful place here and now, and find ways of caring for each other and ourselves. CLOUT gatherings are joy-filled, outrageously irreverent, fun-filled times. The efforts for institutional change must go on, but we must find ways of surviving — and more than surviving, celebrating with each other." **TW**





Candlelight AIDS march

Jim Solheim/ENS

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