



*What do you do with what you don't believe?
Struggling with feelings of exile*

Sports

I USED SOME INSIGHTS FROM SPORTS as a principality [1/98] in my children's message at the church I serve in Barre, Mass. Every Sunday the kids present me with a shoe box with an object, unknown to me till that moment. I have to "preach" on whatever is in there. It was a little homemade ribbon announcing Jesus as an All Star. Your thoughtful issue helped me use this little piece of "culture" in a countercultural fashion. Incidentally, this manner of "preaching" puts the power in the hands of the kids. Their offering shapes my response; they get the first "word" in physical, symbolic form ... and the adults love it.

Ellie McLaughlin
Barre, MA

BILL WYLIE-KELLERMANN'S ARTICLE "Seduction in sports" fascinated this nonathletic person who never "got it." Confirming his observations: On State Street in Chicago today I saw a billboard advertising a sports-talk radio station. The headline: "We're more of a religious station than a sports station."

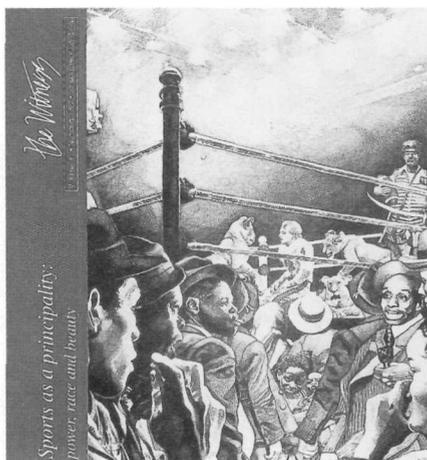
Now I know what that means.

Victoria A. Rebeck
The Christian Ministry
Chicago, IL

THANK YOU FOR SENDING ME A sample copy of *WITNESS* — and especially the topic of SPORTS — the IDOL OF OUR TIME IN THIS COUNTRY is close to my heart.

Helena Schaareman
Bensalem, PA

MANY THANKS FOR THE EXTRA COPIES of the Jan/Feb issue. Of course, we loved the article on Cary [McGehee]. I have had



notes from across the country asking for additional info, like one from Boulder, Colo., requesting pictures and additional data to hold up Cary as a model for their community of children, of which Jon Benet Ramsey was a part.

H. Coleman McGehee, Jr.
Bloomfield Township, MI

I'VE BEEN READING YOUR JOURNAL'S trenchant articles on the role sports play in American culture [1/98]. I received a complimentary edition of your magazine in the mail, and I hope to be able to take out a subscription soon. Your obvious expression of social conscience and spiritual values prompts me to include you among addressees I've been mailing for several years on the now well known Mumia Abu-Jamal case in Pennsylvania and related issues.

The HBO documentary special film, "Mumia Abu-Jamal: A Case for Reasonable Doubt?", updating info on the case along with articles by Mumia, can be accessed at the following PC website: <www.mumia.org>. A video can be obtained from Blockbuster Video Stores.

Two abolitionist mailing lists worth being on are those of the following two organizations: Pennsylvania Abolitionists United Against The Death Penalty, P.O. Box 58128, Phila., PA 19102, phone (215) 769-5408; Equal Justice, USA, a project of the Quixote Center, P.O. Box 5206, Hyattsville, MD 20782, phone (301) 699-0042.

Stephen C. Martorano
Philadelphia, PA

Classifieds

Working for peace in Ireland

Corrymeela is a Christian Community working for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Corrymeela works with Youth, School, Church and Community groups bringing people of all ages and traditions together. For information contact: Corrymeela Community, 8 Upper Crescent, Belfast, N. Ireland, BT7 1NT. Phone 011 44 1232 325008. Fax 011 44 1232 315385. <belfast@corrymeela.org.uk>.

Order of Jonathan Daniels

The Order of Jonathan Daniels is a dispersed religious community-information for persons of both genders, single, committed, or married, living and working in the world, who are evangelists for Scriptural justice and liberation. Contact OJD, 567-23 Sagamore Ave., Portsmouth, NH 03801-5550.

Episcopal Urban Intern Program

Work in social service, live in Christian community in Los Angeles. For adults 21-30. Apply now for the 1998-99 year. Contact: The Rev. Gary Commins, 260 N. Locust St., Inglewood, CA 90301. 310-674-7700.

Vocations

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

Classifieds

Witness classifieds cost 75 cents a word or \$30 an inch, whichever is less. Due 15th of month, two months prior to publication.

Letters

Immigration

THIS IS JUST A SHORT NOTE TO commend you for *The Witness* publication you put out in a world that badly needs to read and become aware of the issues you address. I am impressed by everything I read in the December, 1997 issue. Also so many of your staff are women; the picture of the Flight into Egypt on the cover and its appropriate title; your philosophy “offering fresh and sometimes irreverent views of our world; pushing boundaries, err on the side of inclusion, and ENJOY bringing your views into tension with orthodox Christianity”!!! I love it! Our world needs more of this!

What a wonderful work you are doing!!! The list of themes of the 1997 issues is so ON ... please continue to address these vital issues. I'd like to offer a topic that I believe in so much: the 12 Step Program of Alcoholics Anonymous and all other programs that spun off from that one. I've been a member of Overeaters Anonymous for 12 years and AI Anon for 5 years. They have saved my life and within its membership — and the spirituality the steps enfold — have effected miracles day by day.

I will hold you in my prayers.

Rose Mary Linhoff
School Sisters of Notre Dame
St. Louis, MO

Northern Ireland

I WANTED TO CONGRATULATE you on the quality of the articles about Northern Ireland. The articles painted an excellent picture of the nature and roots of the conflict here. Many would balk at the complexity of the situation but it is truly encouraging to see *The Witness* tackling the Northern Ireland “troubles” in such depth. I believe your readers will have a much greater understanding of the difficulties in resolving our conflict and will also be much more aware of the numerous peace groups and initiatives which bring people from all sides together in Northern Ireland — giving real hope for a peaceful future for all. [See classifieds for info. on how to connect with the Corrymeela community.]

Peter Anderson
Corrymeela Community
Belfast, Northern Ireland



Saddam, Uncle Sam, four horsemen of Apocalypse

Eleanor Mill

Dealing with weapons of mass destruction

Excerpts from a statement from the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR):

The FOR congratulates Secretary General Kofi Annan, President Bill Clinton and President Saddam Hussein for coming to a diplomatic agreement which, at least temporarily, has averted the impending attack against Iraq.

1. The FOR calls on President Clinton to commit our nation to resolving our differences with Iraq diplomatically and to renounce the use of war as an implement for enforcing U.N. resolutions on the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. We further ask our government to remove U.S. military forces from the region to diminish the chance of war by accident or misunderstanding. We cannot calculate the effect on Iraq, its neighbors, and U.S. military personnel of U.S. weapons penetration of stored chemical or biological agents.

2. The FOR calls for the immediate lifting of the U.N. economic embargo of

Iraq. UNICEF and the World Food Program have documented that over one million Iraqis, 60 percent of them children, have already died due to the U.N./U.S. imposed sanctions.

3. The FOR calls for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction. While the elimination of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction is important, it cannot be separated from regional and international efforts to eliminate such weapons. It is incumbent on the U.S., as the only nation that has used nuclear weapons, to lead the effort for the complete elimination of all such indiscriminate weapons.

4. The FOR calls for the establishment of an international summit to deal with the outstanding regional political issues. Much of the arms race in the Middle East and the gulf has been driven by underlying and unresolved regional issues.

FOR, 521 North Broadway, Box 271, Nyack NY 10960; <Dhostetter@igc.org>; <www.nonviolence.org/for>.

The Witness

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8 Keeping faith in exile: Jews hiding as Christians by Lisa Gayle

Living in a climate where open practice of their faith can be dangerous, Jews throughout history have sometimes resorted to observing the religious rites of the empire, while teaching their children a subversive faith at home.

12 'Nourishing spirit and imagination': an interview with Walter Brueggemann by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Given the decline in the Christian church's influence in the U.S., Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says it's time to restructure our approach to worship. Like those in exile we need to be able to express our grief and nurture what we consider sacred within a hostile environment.

17 What do you do with what you don't believe?

A roundup of views considering what we may not believe and some people's manner of resolving the tension.

20 Ursula LeGuin: taking exception to expectations by Jane Slaughter

Science fiction writer Ursula LeGuin has tackled sexism in her genre. Now she tackles Christian chauvinism in our culture.

22 Ambiguity: the essence of faith: an interview with Verna Dozier by Julie A. Wortman

Verna Dozier, author of The Dream of God, explains how her faith grows more rooted when she does not insist on the false power that comes with defining one's beliefs as the right ones.

Cover: Music by Ursula Roma, mixed media. Distributed by the Syracuse Cultural Workers, 315-474-1132.

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. Manuscripts will not be returned.

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Refashioning our faith

By Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Consider it a gift to my kids that I find dinosaurs suspect. When Lydia, now 12, was in preschool her teacher announced that they had recently discovered there was no such thing as the brontosaurus. It was, rather, an apatasaurus — vegetarian, not meat-eating, and with an altogether different head. Yeah, right, I thought. Give me a pile of bones and I could make you five or six reasonably sized animals for any one dinosaur you want to assemble.

As for the big bang and evolution, it seems to me you couldn't write a more alienating creation myth. Many people explain their place in the world by talking about the corn maiden or a goddess who fell from grace or of a turtle who went deep into the seas to bring forth earth so that humans could have a home. The story of Adam and Eve has considerable merit in this light. But a random bang that sent the whole thing spinning? A scenario in which apes blur in to humans and humans eventually blur into something else? My God, what's the point? One might as well plunder the earth's resources and live at the expense of whatever fitter predator is yet to come.

All this is to say that each of us take exception to some of the prevailing beliefs held by our communities.

This issue was first considered when angels, shepherds and kings hovered in anticipation. It is fitting that it is released when the readings draw attention to angels and an empty tomb.

Contributing editor Anne Cox preached a Christmas sermon in 1996 that acknowledged people's skepticism

about the Christmas story. Her honesty sparked any number of conversations.

It won't surprise you, given the opening paragraphs, that I don't have too much trouble with virgin births and ascensions, but plenty of people do. This issue is dedicated to examining the kinds of contortions we go through while attempting to stay in community with people whose dominant beliefs we don't share, whether this is in church, school, family or nation. In some cases, we choose to cut all ties. More often, we stay while inwardly debating whether it is cowardice to remain silent or adolescent to speak up.

Sometimes our life and the lives of others may depend on conforming. I think of the early Christians who pretended to be Jews and of the Jews who survived Christian persecution only by "converting" and "worshiping" among the baptized while struggling to preserve what was sacred to their hearts in the deepest secrecy (p. 8). I think of the compromises our ancestors often made in order to pass on life to us — changing names, changing faiths, lying about their nations of origin.

Enmeshed in the ambiguity that both Verna Dozier (p.22) and Walter Brueggemann (p. 12) say is central to our faith are some challenges we rarely acknowledge. Glossing over these can prevent us from taking opportunities to wrestle with the texts and traditions of our community.

Brueggemann's voice is particularly important to me because he suggests that the church is entering a new era but refusing to acknowledge it. The new era is characterized by a rejection of the values, beliefs, concerns, language and symbols of the Christian church; our ethics and

faith are irrelevant to most Americans. At the same time, the powers seem unleashed and communities splinter in the face of unrestrained consumerism, rootlessness and fear.

Living as Christians, Brueggemann says, feels increasingly exilic. In *Cadences of Home*, Brueggemann writes that we need to express the "displacement, failed hopes, anger, wistful sadness, and helplessness [that] permeate our sense of self, sense of community, and sense of future." We need to recreate a sense of who we are as people of faith.

Brueggemann points to the Psalms as texts that demonstrate remarkable faith, unambiguous anger and confidence that, while times may be harsh, God will bring liberation. He says the fundamental question is whether God acts in history.

Some are alienated from faith because scientific rationalism seems in conflict (p. 28). For others, this pivotal question has been at the heart of New Age explorations. Many people who worship in Wiccan and pagan circles are not concerned about creedal issues, but are busy creating rituals that relate their hopes, needs and courage to the "universe." They are talking to the spirits in trees and rocks, studying alchemy, looking for transformation through incantation. These are not skeptics immersed in rationalism, but often ex-Catholics who thrive on ritual, while looking for a more feminist and less moralistic framework.

Looking at what we do with what we don't believe is an opportunity to learn to be at ease with ambiguity while also honing the edges of what we *do* believe so that we can sustain it.

TW

editor's note

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is co-editor/publisher of *The Witness*, <jeanie@thewitness.org>.

A sacred canopy of belief

by Robert Thieme

A sacred canopy of shared belief used to soar above our heads like a large umbrella, keeping us warm and dry as the contradictory data of real life beat down.

No model of reality contains everything. Life is larger than our models. All we need is an umbrella that is “good enough” to manage the odd drops by keeping them irrelevant. As long as our model of reality makes enough sense of the world to let us act, we hold to our beliefs.

But there is an awful lot of rain these days, 40 days of rain, more than 40 days, and it keeps on raining ...

Our trans-planetary network of computers is a rainmaking machine. It’s really coming down out there. More and more data just doesn’t fit. Our umbrella has more than a few holes in it, and the water is trickling through.

At first we act as if we don’t notice. The real experience of our lives contradicts what we say about life. When we hear ourselves speak, we sometimes sound like ... someone else, someone we used to be or someone we’re overhearing. If we refuse to believe our experience and believe our beliefs instead, we get a headache. We crawl into bed or pop a Prozac, but we keep getting wetter and wetter.

Alas! We’re all too human — stubborn, frightened out of our shivering skins — so we still insist that we’re not wet. We hold the handle of the umbrella more and more tightly, telling ourselves and everyone else how dry we are, what an excellent umbrella we have found. Others po-

lately suppress giggles and move on.

Finally the umbrella is so battered that we can no longer deny what everyone else has seen for a long time, that we’re holding nothing but shreds of wet cloth on a skeletal frame and we’re soaked to the skin.

We want to stay dry, but one legacy of living in the 20th century is that no canopy spans us all. We join organizations to experience the momentary consolation of agreement, but we can’t live there. Life today is like living in a village of grass huts in which everyone has a radio tuned to a different station. However high we turn the volume, we can’t shut out the other songs.

I recently spoke about “The Stock Market, UFOs, and Religious Experience” to an investment conference. I distinguished between things we think we see out there and things we really see. It’s about the psychology of projection and the psychology of investment. I noted that in the U.S. and increasingly in the world, an attitude of respect for other religious traditions creates a good deal of tension. We have to both believe in our own belief sys-

tem and acknowledge that others are entitled to contrary views. Holding mutually exclusive truths simultaneously in our minds is difficult. We’re not even always sure which is the umbrella and which is the rain.

We will try to surrender our freedom to those selling cheap umbrellas, but we cannot avoid our destiny: We are each responsible for inventing ourselves. There is no high ground on which to hide.

Our calling is made more difficult by the digital world. The digital world consists of simulations, models so compelling we mistake them for reality. Sometimes the digital symbols refer only to other symbols, what Baudrillard called simulacra, simulations of simulations, copies with no originals. All those simulations are umbrellas — and rain.

Nietzsche saw it coming at the end of the last century. It’s what he meant when he said “God is dead.” He wasn’t talking about the creator of the universe, but about the gods in our heads, the cultural artifacts that we invent. He saw that our sacred canopy had shredded and the rains were pouring down.

Prophets are people who get wet before everybody else and start sneezing. We try to quarantine them, but reality is a cold it is impossible not to catch.

Electronic media are transforming what it means to be human, the gods we are likely to worship — gods, not God. God is with us out here in the rain.

In the digital world, Nietzsche’s questions are more urgent than ever. Some treat the digital work as if simulations can be more than an umbrella, as if they can be stitched together into an ark. And who can blame them? Who does

We hold the handle of the umbrella more and more tightly, telling ourselves and everyone else how dry we are, what an excellent umbrella we have found.

not want to be warm and dry? But digital simulations of 3-D umbrellas will not keep us dry. The digital world is a rising tide, a *tsunami* impacting our consciousness with revolutionary force, levelling our villages, sweeping away our shrines, sweeping everything, everything out to sea. What games, asked Nietzsche, what festivals shall we now invent? What games shall we play? What games shall we dare to believe?

TW

Richard Thieme writes on the human dimensions of computer technology and the work place. Check out his web site: <<http://www.thiemeworks.com>>.

“NON-commitment”

by Chinua Achebe

Hurrah! to them who do nothing
see nothing feel nothing whose
hearts are fitted with prudence
like a diaphragm across
womb's beckoning doorway to bar
the scandal of seminal rage. I'm
told the owl too wears wisdom
in a ring of defence round
each vulnerable eye securing it fast
against the darts of sight. Long ago
in the Middle East Pontius Pilate
openly washed involvement off his
white hands and became famous. (Of all
the Roman officials before him and after
who else is talked about
every Sunday in the Apostles' Creed?) And
talking of apostles that other fellow
Judas wasn't such a fool
either; though much maligned by
succeeding generations the fact remains
he alone in that motley crowd
had sense enough to tell a doomed
movement when he saw one
and get out quick, a nice litte
packet bulging his coat-pocket
into the bargain—sensible fellow.



This poem, by contemporary Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, was published in *In Person: Achebe, Awoonor and Soyinka* at the University of Washington, Karen L. Morell, editor (Seattle: University of Washington, 1975).

Keeping faith in exile: Jews hiding as Christians

By Lisa Gayle

Some Jewish communities survive with integrity in the middle of powerful hostile forces. What motivated generations to risk their lives and their children's lives to remain secret Jews, particularly when the Christian church and states were adamant about rooting out any vestige of Jewish practice?

There's little general knowledge about hidden communities of Jews, and almost nothing known about their inner lives. When individuals "come out," they lose their Christian community and, sadly, many Jews no longer consider them Jews. The results can be worse. Most of Holland's secret community, hidden since the 1520s, decided it was safe to live openly as Jews in 1920. Twenty years later most were killed. This situation doesn't lend itself to open dialogue.

Trudi Alexy, in her book *The Mezuzah in the Madonna's Foot*, tells of two young doctors, an American Jew and a Spanish Catholic, who developed a close relationship working long hours tending to an endless stream of wounded and starving patients at the end of the Spanish Civil War. After 50 years, in the late 1980s, the American returned to Spain and finally asked if the other doctor's family was Jewish.

The Spanish Catholic took his friend down a long corridor into a room without windows. He lit several candles in

a wrought-iron candelabra and opened an iron-studded wooden door that covered an arched niche in the wall. "Whenever I am troubled or need help, I pray to the Virgin Mary or Our Savior Jesus Christ or to the saints. I say the rosary and go to Mass," he said. "But if all else fails, I come here."

He took a threadbare *tallis* (prayer shawl) and ancient phylacteries (amulets containing passages of Scripture) from the niche, put them on in the manner of Orthodox Jews and began to bow and rock as he recreated the age-old manner of Jewish prayer.

The American asked, "Where did you learn to do this?"

"My father taught me. His father taught him and so on into the past. I taught my sons, and I can only believe they will teach theirs."

The ways individuals feel connected to deep spiritual places are extremely personal. Other ways of asking about that deep place are: Who is your God? How do you make sense of the world? How do you preserve and deepen relationships that are holy, including the relationship to Self? How do you see the world healing? How do you pass on the most authentic experience of your values and beliefs?

I am struck by how ritual and belief are intensely personal and intensely familial, with the community, at best,

sanctifying flexibility.

Jews are reminded of this yearly during the most solemn moment of the year, Yom Kippur. Traditionally, we have taken stock of our relationships with others before Yom Kippur, when we plead for God's forgiveness for past sin (times when we have acted out of separation from Holiness).

The beginning of Yom Kippur's evening service is the *Kol Nidre*, a legal declaration recited in front of a formal court of three, which is required for the legal procedure of granting dispensation. It retracts all vows that apply to the coming year. The *Kol Nidre* seems to contradict the past month of preparation:

All vows and oaths, all promises and obligations, all renunciations and responses, that we make to God between this Yom Kippur and the next, all of them we retract. May we be absolved from them all, may we be released from them all, may they be null and void, may they all be of no effect. May these vows not be vows, may these oaths not be oaths, may these responses not be

responses (translated by Arthur Waskow).

Trudi Alexy interviews an ex-priest known only as Matthew. He is a genealogist from a family of secret Jews descended

from those forcibly baptized in Spain in 1391. He explains, "In those days most of those forced to become Christians did not take their conversion seriously at first, and nobody expected to have to stay Catholic for very long. They felt that eventually the rules would change ... they say, 'I may be baptized, but I am still a Jew. What's a little holy water to a Jew?' So we went to mass on

Most of Holland's secret community, hidden since the 1520s, decided it was safe to live openly as Jews in 1920.

Lisa Gayle is a Detroit writer and member of T'chiyah Reconstructionist Congregation.

Sundays to make the police happy, and when everyone bowed saying *Mea culpa*, we bowed and said *Aleynu*, then went home and said prayers to ask God to forgive us for going to church. That is when the *Kol Nidre* was first said, to let God know that we didn't really mean to keep all the baptismal vows we had to swear when we converted."

My sense of Judaism is that it is anarchistic in the best sense of the word — individual families and communities decide on how best to actualize their values, with a tradition of passionate discussion and multiple paths. Undoubtedly this was born of necessity, yet it is a strategy to pass on values in an intense and meaningful way.

Last Passover, the Dalai Lama attended his first Seder. He was seeking answers to questions of how to survive in exile. Like many holidays, including Shabbat, the focus for the Passover celebration is the home. Every family's Seder tells and retells an important piece of Jewish history in the way that family chooses to pass it on, emphasizing the stories and traditions that are most meaningful for them.

There are *Haggadahs* (the book that tells the Passover story) for every orientation. I was given one written by Communist Party members in 1953. I remember pictures of an old European *Haggadah* with a hunting scene in the front. Since graven images are forbidden, some speculate that the hunting scene, because it didn't look Jewish, would protect the book and perhaps its owners.

In 1970, Passover came between

mammoth anti-war marches and Black power demonstrations getting prime-time TV coverage. During that Seder, my cousin excused herself from the table. She came back stoned and somewhat belligerent. "What's hallelujah mean, anyway?" she challenged.

After a long, uncomfortable pause,



Barcelona Haggadah, mid-14th century

my mother said, "It means right on."

"Well, why can't we say it then?"

Again silence, until my mother said, "Of course."

We rollicked through that Seder feeling very brazen, a family reaching out to a struggling member while breaking and connecting to tradition at the same time.

For a long time, I was content to learn about Eastern European Jewish history. Then my husband and I adopted Jacob, who was born in Guatemala. While looking at the way his hair curls, similar to mine, I wondered if there might be a biological Jewish connection. Not long after, I heard about Jews living in the village of Venta Prieta, now a neighborhood of the Mexican city of Pachuca. We had the honor of visiting them last summer.

The road northeast from crowded Mexico City passes through fields of corn separated by desert scrub and giant cactae. To the east is Teotihuacan, the Aztec pyramids of the Sun and Moon. In the distance, the huge mountains are purple and silent, witness to much history, including the Spanish Inquisition that followed Jews who settled in Spanish-conquered America. One-quarter of those who came to New Spain in the 1500s had Jewish roots. There were also Jews whose families were expelled from Spain by 1492, fled to Amsterdam, and then came to the Americas hoping to find religious freedom.

In the mid-16th century, there were 15 synagogues in Mexico City. If hidden Jews were counted, Jews would have outnumbered Catholics. The Inquisition began in 1571. A Diego Rivera mural in Mexico City shows Jews, stripped,

bloody lash marks on their backs, on the way to their deaths.

To survive, Jews moved further away from the centers of the Inquisition, many going as far as what is now New Mexico. They practiced in secret. Bits and pieces of Jewish ritual and prayer, often mixed with Catholicism, passed through the centuries. Sometimes the only practice

kept was the avoidance of pork or the separation of milk and meat. Sometimes people who observe the traditions no longer know their origins.

This was repeated in India, China, Portugal, Morocco, Ethiopia, Turkey. A word, a belief, a moment of prayer and a deep feeling of being Jewish is sometimes all that reminds outsiders of these people's original faith.

In the small village of Venta Prieta, now a neighborhood in the Mexican city of Pachuca, the Tellez family secretly kept aspects of Jewish tradition alive. The congregation is very insistent on

In 1970, Passover came between mammoth anti-war marches and Black power demonstrations getting prime-time TV coverage. During that Seder, my cousin excused herself from the table. She came back stoned and somewhat belligerent.

their story, that they remained hidden Jews for several hundred years. While they have enthusiastically accepted religious education from Samuel Lerer, a rabbi in Mexico City, and have developed religious practices more in line with mainstream Judaism, the elders have refused conversion, saying it is unnecessary because they have always been Jews.

There are some possible inconsistencies in the Venta Prietans' story. They were members of a Protestant group, Iglesia de Dios, from 1875 through 1940. They used to pray on their knees. They still use hand motions that look like the Catholic sign of the cross.

However, many such customs crop up in other groups who have survived in isolation. Barros Basto was taught by his grandfather, a Portuguese hidden Jew, to say to himself before entering a church: *In this house I enter, I adore neither the wood nor the stone, but one God who governs all the world.*

Adonai, my God, in my thoughts (touching his brow);

Adonai, my God, on my lips (touching his lips);

Adonai, my God, in my heart (touching his chest).

When performed rapidly, the gesture resembles the sign of the cross. It's not so different from my friend who silently says the *Shema* (Hear, O Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is One) when his AA group says the Lord's prayer.

Of the ambiguity, Matthew, the ex-priest, says "Many of those who became 'Super Catholics' were Marranos who put off the church's spies by asking, 'Would I name my son Jesus if I were not the most Catholic of Catholics?' ... When a Marrano kissed the foot of the Madonna by his front door, who would have guessed that a *mezuzah* (a small tube containing a parchment scroll of biblical passages which traditional Jews attach to their door post) was concealed in the foot?" **TTV**

When you no longer 'pass'

"There's something else I want to tell you."

"What?" I groaned.

"Remember Miss Sallie who used to work for us in the tavern?"

Dad's lower lip quivered. He looked ill. Had he always looked this unhealthy, I wondered, or was it something that happened on the trip? I felt my face — skin like putty, lips chapped and cracked. Had I changed too?

"It's hard to tell you boys this." He paused, then slowly added, "But she's really my momma. That means she's your grandmother."

"But that can't be, Dad! She's colored!" I whispered, lest I be overheard by the other white passengers on the bus.

"That's right, Billy," he continued. "She's colored. That makes you part colored, too, and in Muncie you're gonna live with my Aunt Bess . . ."

I didn't understand Dad. I knew I wasn't colored, and neither was he. My skin was white. All of us are white, I said to myself. But for the first time, I had to admit Dad didn't exactly look white. His deeply tanned skin puzzled me as I sat there trying to classify my

own father. Goose bumps covered my arms as I realized that whatever he was, I was. I took a deep breath. I couldn't make any mistakes. I looked closer. His heavy lips and dark brown eyes didn't make him colored, I concluded. His black, wavy hair was different from Negroes' hair, but it was different from most white folks' hair, too. He was darker than most whites, but Mom said he was Italian. That was why my baby brother had such dark skin and curly hair. Mom told us to be proud of our Italian heritage! That's it, I decided. He was Italian. I leaned back against the seat, satisfied. Yet the unsettling image of Miss Sallie flashed before me like a neon sign.

Colored! Colored! Colored!

He continued. "Life is going to be different from now on. In Virginia you were white boys. In Indiana you're going to be colored boys. I want you to remember that you're the same today that you were yesterday. But people in Indiana will treat you differently. ..."

— Gregory Howard Williams,

Life on the Color Line

(*Plume*, 1996)

Peoples' Global Action

Peoples' movements from all continents met in Geneva Feb. 23-25 to launch a worldwide coordination of resistance against the global market, a new alliance of struggle and mutual support called the Peoples' Global Action (PGA) against "Free" Trade and the World Trade Organization. Visit the web page of the PGA at <<http://www.agp.org>> or send a message to <playfair@asta.rwth-aachen.de> with the sentence "PGA bulletin #0" in the subject line, to receive the PGA Bulletin.

Indigenous activists threatened

Indigenous leaders, environmentalists and human rights activists in the Mexican state of Morelos are fighting a government-sponsored project to build a multi-million dollar resort on land considered sacred by the community.

Leticia Moctezuma Vargas, a teacher and activist, has been peacefully campaigning with other members of the Tepoztlan community to stop the project, which could seriously damage the local environment. As a result of her participation in the protest, she and her young daughters have been beaten and have received death threats.

In April 1996, Moctezuma Vargas and her daughters joined a rally. At the rally, she saw three officers drag Marcos Olmedo Gutierrez, an elderly member of the community, wounded but alive, into a police vehicle. He was later found shot to death.

[Amnesty International requests letters urging a prompt and thorough investigation into the attacks and threats against Vargas and her community; asking that those responsible be brought to justice; and requesting immediate measures to protect Vargas and her family. Write to: Lic. Emilio Chuayffet Chemor/ Secretario de la Gobernacion/ / Bucareli 99 1er piso, Col. Juarez/ 06699 Mexico DF, Mexico. Salutation: Dear Minister. Airmail postage: 60 cents.]

— *Amnesty Action*, Winter 1998

Clean energy option

Early this year California will become the first state in the nation to allow its citizens to choose their power supplier. Along with this power to choose comes the chance to protect the environment by buying electricity from clean, renewable sources such as wind farms, solar panels, and geothermal plants.

Competition is expected to be strong in this new power market, and energy companies are revving up their marketing to lure customers.

To help Californians sort through their alternatives, the National Resources Defense Council has developed a power-shopping guide, available on NRDC Online at <www.nrdc.org/howto/encagp.html>.

— *The Amicus Journal*,
Spring 1998

Guns in the pews

Last year, Texas passed an amendment to the state's 1995 concealed weapons law which added churches — along with hospitals and amusement parks — to the places where Texans may carry concealed weapons. State Senator Jerry Patterson says he pushed for the amendment at the insistence of Texas ministers, who were disturbed that the old law restricted their ability to carry weapons to and from work.

The law provides for individual churches to post signs reading "No guns allowed," or inform parishioners of a no-guns policy.

— *The Christian Science Monitor*,
1-27-98

Park patrons under surveillance

The installation of police surveillance cameras in Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village was accepted with very little public protest, according to a report in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (1-20-98). *The Inquirer* attributed the quiet acceptance of the cameras in the politically liberal district to residents' despair over

the severity of the drug situation in the park, which one resident likened to "running a gauntlet." Norman Siegl, head of the New York ACLU, was one of a few lone voices denouncing the measure, calling it "an undemocratic and Orwellian approach to governing."

Sacred anti-drug violence

William Bennett's approval of beheading drug dealers and Daryl Gates' counsel that drug users be shot to death show a strong intuitive grasp of sacred violence: literal blood-letting squashes the victim class and produces social meaning far more effectively than tamer forms of scapegoating.

Cultures less influenced by Christianity, like China and Singapore, employ this very strategy: druggies die. Powerful scapegoating strategies push the U.S. to do the same, but Christianity thwarts its full expression, annoying those anti-drug enthusiasts who make TV's drug-busting docu-dramas like "Cops" so popular. This deprivation of scapegoating's full righteous satisfaction accounts for the pervasive belief that we are "soft on crime," even though drug-warring has made us the world's second largest jailer.

— Paul M. Bischke,
Fellowship, 1-2/98

Bread for the World focuses on Africa

Bread for the World's 1998 Offering of Letters Campaign will be directed toward promoting African agricultural initiatives. Churches wishing to join the campaign can order a guide from Larry Goodwin at Bread for the World, 301-608-2400, <offering.of.letters@bread.org>.

Short takes

‘Nourishing spirit and imagination’: an interview with Walter Brueggemann

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Walter Brueggemann is an Old Testament scholar at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Ga., whose views on the importance of imagination and the role of the poet are grounded in Scripture. We interviewed him in this issue to learn more about doubt and belief.

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann: Does anything come to mind when I tell you that the topic of this issue is, What do you do with what you don’t believe?

Walter Brueggemann: I suppose what comes to mind is the obvious “I believe, help my unbelief.” Also the legitimacy and the importance of doubt for a faith that is alive.

J.W.-K.: Are there places within our declared faith where you find things to be too much of a challenge to your reason?

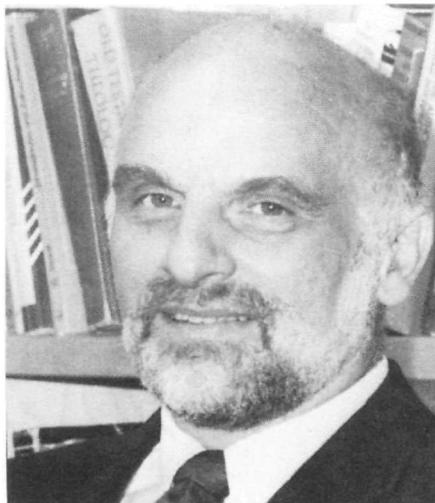
W.B.: Well, one can touch the usual bases — the virgin birth and resurrection and stuff like that, but I suppose that the real issue is whether we keep believing that God’s promises will win.

If you think about it, every day you can get talked out of believing that God’s justice will prevail, because the evidence to the contrary is so immense. The doubt that I know about, and that I think a lot of people know about, is really about the most central and elemental claim — the reality of God’s power in the world.

J.W.-K.: You suggest that the culture is offering an exile experience to Christians

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is co-editor/publisher of *The Witness*, <jeanie@thewitness.org>. Artist **René Joseph** lives in Minneapolis. Artist **Cheryl Phillips** lives in Detroit.

— even though it may not be what we’ve imagined for ourselves, living here in a first-world empire. But you say that this very environment is actively working to make sure that we don’t have the imagination needed to believe.



Walter Brueggemann

W.B.: The large rubric for that is the disestablishment of the church. As a church, we are no longer economically or culturally privileged. Inside the social reality of disestablishment — the ideology of individualism that is propelled by television advertising and all of the technological definitions — it is very difficult to communicate the categories in which we Christians think. I think that our own spirit for imagination just shrivels in such a context of commodity and abusive conflict.

The practical problem, it seems to me, is to create enough space so that we can nourish the spirit and practice the kind of imagination that keeps us believing that

miracles of transformation are possible in this world.

The pressures are really much greater than our awareness or acknowledgment of the changed situation we’re in. Until we acknowledge that, it feels we’re just going to keep trying the same old ways, and that’s very thin.

J.W.-K.: In *The Prophetic Imagination* you write that part of the way that the church is made captive to consumer culture is that consumer culture is anti-history.

W.B.: Television thins our memory so that everything is immediate. You live in the now and there is no past and there is no future. I was teaching a Psalms course this morning and we were talking about the capacity of people in the Psalter — in really tough situations — to still be able to hope and to pray.

What came clear as we looked at that is that those people in situations of defeat, where they could have ended in despair, had this huge reservoir of remembered miracles, remembered healings and remembered transformations. They were able to put their present moment in the context of that dense memory which permitted them to look at the present differently.

The more we are in a rat race of individualism, where we don’t take time to construct the memory and relish the memory, the more that common deposit disappears and we become victims of the present tense.

J.W.-K.: I felt tremendous relief reading *Cadences of Home*. You suggest that the churches ought to be offering a forum, offering texts, that allow people to admit that they’re sad and need to grieve.

I’ve noticed in the last year or so that I have really strong needs that the liturgy is not meeting. I come to the service feeling exhausted and weary — the political action that I’ve attempted has mostly failed, all I see is the victory of the

other side — and yet I either hear the texts or they are interpreted for me as indicating that I represent the establishment. Despite my efforts and profound disappointments, I have been taught to see myself as the rich, young man. I'm a white, middle-class person of privilege who's supposed to be doing more.

W.B.: Right. I have been amazed in this Psalms course. I have about 40 students and we did a lot of hymns and everything was fine, but when we got to the Psalms of sadness, grief and anger, it was like a volcano erupted in the classroom. The students talked about all this stuff that they had stored up and had no place to put. These are mostly privileged people. I think that's how it is with us, but I think the church invites us to engage in denial of all that.

J.W-K.: There's even a way in which it feels like you're not being faithful — like you're letting down the defense of God — by admitting that things are crummy.

W.B.: That's right. That's why I keep saying to the students that these Psalms are an act of faith. But the church has schooled us otherwise for so long that it makes us very uneasy.

J.W-K.: I am glad that you believe the American church should embrace these texts, because I've been feeling jealous of the African indigenous churches that are ritualizing all kinds of grief, anger and ways to purge themselves.

I need to be able to find a way to do this and it will require a revision of the framework that I've had. I will still have to acknowledge my culpability for being part of this nation, but I also need to be nurtured as a minority — as someone working for social change for religious reasons.

W.B.: That's right. That is why I find

the metaphor of exile so important. It gives us a massive space to say, "You're not going to pin all that domination stuff on me because that's not how I'm living my life."



René Joseph

The doubt that I know about, and that I think a lot of people know about, is really about the most central and elemental claim — the reality of God's power in the world. The practical problem, it seems to me, is to create enough space so that we can nourish the spirit and practice the kind of imagination that keeps us believing that miracles of transformation are possible in this world.

J.W-K.: How do exilic people rid themselves of disillusionment about whether God is actively concerned with our lives or has any power?

W.B.: Well, I don't know how we're ever going to do it, but I think that the liturgy has got to break with the pattern of confession of guilt and forgiveness. The church, for good liturgical and historical reasons, has made the centerpiece of our worship how bad we are. We're taught that if you don't confess a lot of guilt, then you can't proclaim a lot of grace — and that puts us out of business. I don't think that that's how the Psalter works at all.

I recently read a very close analysis of about 50 complaint psalms. And what this writer, Fredrick Lindstrom (a Swede), showed is that these people — who are in trouble and complaining to God — don't include a word of guilt. Instead, they say, "This stuff is happening to us. We don't deserve it. We're not going to put up with it, because it's not our fault." Of course, those are all the Psalms that by and large the church has disregarded.

I think we need to appeal on the one hand to the great stories of the Exodus — the wilderness and the creation — and then also practice these laments and complaints. In this way, you have a context of larger affirmation inside of which you have honesty about how it really is now. Working that dialectic liturgically is closer to the Bible and is closer to how we live our lives. When the church puts so much liturgical energy into the confession of sin, it is simply debilitating.

The real problem that most of us live with is not guilt, but is a threat of chaos. That requires a very different articulation of the Gospel to give an

assurance that the promises of God are reliable and will hold in the midst of the threat.

If you look at the exilic Psalms, they really knew that their capacity to stay together as a community of faith was in great jeopardy and they engaged in a lot of remembering and truth-telling.

J.W-K.: You write that liberals have done a fine job of critiquing the current order but offer very little in the way of faith that God might actually intervene and help transform it.

W.B.: The kind of liberalism that I struggle with in my life really doesn't believe in the active workings of God. I think the liberal creed is "God has no hands but our hands." And that way lies defeat!

Rejecting this does not mean a collapse into a rigid conservatism, but a new posture that invites both liberals and conservatives to be spirit-led to newness.

J.W-K.: Do you see any shift?

W.B.: Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon call themselves post-liberals. And while I think there are some real problems with what they do, I think their emphasis upon the concrete disciplines of a distinct community is right.

'Praise is the jazz factor of the Christian life.' I don't know a lot about jazz, but I think the point is that it is always innovative and it is always taking a form beyond whatever was before.

The kind of liberalism in which I've grown up didn't have any sense about our being distinctive as Christians. We were just kind of the nicest guys in the culture. And, uh, it's hard work being the nicest guys. ...

J.W-K.: Can you say just a little about Hauerwas and where you would draw exceptions?

W.B.: Hauerwas is a Methodist, mainly influenced by John Howard Yoder, who was a Mennonite. So Hauerwas calls himself a Methodist Mennonite. He talks about a community of intense missional disciplines that lives its life and does not really engage public policy questions in any direct way with the bet that if the church community really orders its life

faithfully, it will be so powerful and so attractive that it will make a difference in public life.

Douglas John Hall says what Christians must do in North America is withdraw from society in order to re-engage society with deliberate identity. And what he says about Hauerwas, that I agree with, is that Hauerwas tends to talk about withdrawal but doesn't talk very often about the re-engagement.

J.W-K.: What you and Douglas John Hall hope for seems similar to what we've been promoting at *The Witness*. Julie Wortman, my co-editor, has moved to live in the Greenfire community in Maine. It's a community of women who are exploring what Gospel values mean in their lives without the support of the institutional church. Many of them are ordained, but they don't want to do parish ministry in the traditional model. Yet there's not a feeling that they're only going to work to resolve their own questions. They're a resource, and, as necessary, I'm sure they'll speak.

At *The Witness*, we've been struggling with the fact that some of us come out of a really confrontational faith-based form of political action and yet we keep

What we know

In Cadences of Home (Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), Walter Brueggemann recommends creating a congregation which is "a zone of freedom grounded in what the baptized know." He writes the following list of things we know:

- That our sense of loss and sadness is serious and honorable, and one need not prop up or engage in denial.

- That our rootedness enables us to belong, so that we are not swept away by every wind of doctrine, every mar-

ket seduction, or every economic coercion, knowing who we are.

- That the promises of the creator surge in our life and in our world, so that the manipulatable despair of the hapless which turns folks into commodity consumers, is not the live edge of our existence.

- That there is a holy, awesome presence that persists against the emptied profanation of promiscuous, economic and lustful sexuality; that true desire is for the presence that overrides all of our trivialized desires that are now robbed of authority.

- That the world is not morally coherent, but there is a deep incongruity in which we live that we need neither to resolve, explain, or deny. A raw, ragged openness is linked to the awesome reality of God's holiness.

- That we are always about to be domesticated; we have these narrative models of resistance, defiance, and negotiation that remind us that there is more to life than conformist obedience or shameful accommodation. We know the names of those who have faced with freedom the trouble that is caused by faith.

coming to the conclusion that it feels to us like this is a time to regroup. We want to find what matters most and go as deep as we can with those things — in advance of something that's coming which we're not sure about.

W.B.: I think that's exactly right. The whole pattern of confrontation — and that's my tradition too — assumed that there was a power on the other side of the table that was taking us seriously. They might have taken us seriously by being angry with us or quarreling with us, but they knew we were there.

The changed situation is that there's nobody on the other side of the table even noticing us. Therefore, to keep our muscles toughed up for confrontation is just kind of tilting at windmills. There was a time when the great denominations made prophetic announcements and it mattered! Nobody pays attention to those anymore.

J.W.-K.: It's the same thing with the kind of civil disobedience that my community comes out of. When the newspapers won't report it and the people passing won't take your leaflets, then ...

W.B.: ... you're out of business.

J.W.-K.: Yeah, it's like doing it in a vacuum. The only thing you can say to yourself is you're preventing yourself from being corrupted by your environment, but that's a small gain for ...

W.B.: ... for the price you pay. It certainly is. I do think that the changed situation requires us — your word is exactly right — to regroup. And I don't think we know what comes next, but that's what we have to do.

J.W.-K.: Steve Charleston, a Choctaw bishop in the Episcopal



All that jazz

Cheryl Phillips

Beyond flat prose

Is there indeed a word from the Lord which would let me live? ... [When a poet reveals the meaning of the text,] it is not a new truth, but rather one long-known truth is now greatly enhanced in riches, texture, availability, demand. My life is mapped in mystery and I accept that new life; but it is also mapped in vulnerability and it frightens me. The mystery gives regal authority and freedom in the face of an IRS audit. The vulnerability permits me to come out from behind my desk, my stethoscope, my uniform, my competence, my credentials, my fears to meet life a little more boldly. Yet again, as the word is spoken one more time, we move through the wearisome death-ridden days of our life and come back once again to Easter to be stunned into disbelief, and then beyond disbelief, to be stunned to life, now filled with fear and trembling.

— *W.B., Finally Comes the Poet*
(*Fortress, 1989*)

Church, prophesies that in the next 30 or 40 years there's going to be a major shift, another reformation. And we've done some interviews with Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung who says that there are Korean mystics who prophesied the same thing.

Both of them suggest that the change won't be through a movement like we had in the 1960s. We won't have a few people out front leading the charge. It won't be a movement that we can easily recognize. In Charleston's view, it seems that people will be tending the wells of what is sacred. In time, the wells will grow and merge. An organic shift will happen. They also say that in all likelihood some last hurrahs of patriarchal oppression, struggle and pain lie between here and there.

W.B.: At 64, to say 30 or 40 years ... But I do, I do resonate with that. I think that God is going to do a new thing that's beyond our horizon and we've got to be in a position of attentive waiting. And I think very many people are finding lowered voices and smaller communities make a lot of sense if you're in a posture of waiting.

J.W.-K.: It's interesting to me, too, that you write about how Protestants may need to take a second look at some of the things that they threw out — things that you can handle as elements of faith.

W.B.: Recovery of the concreteness of the sacramental is terribly important. We are tempted to a process that has become terribly intellectual.

J.W.-K.: There are so many snide remarks made by Christians about New Age spirituality. Some of it is probably right, but a big piece of what those circles of people have

been trying to do is tell the truth about their lives and institute a kind of ritual that allows them to be in touch with the sacred through some object that they've made a liturgical focus that carries meaning for them.

W.B.: It's obviously easy to mock it, but we need to pay attention to what's going on and be instructed.

J.W.-K.: Do you see examples of places where folks within the Christian tradition have made an attempt to recover some of those things?

W.B.: I suspect it happens in very small local communities. Very many people are disillusioned with the big formal operation and are taking initiative. Think, for example, of many of the nuns' communities — while they keep bringing the priest in to do the eucharist, they really do a lot of other stuff besides that. They are doing it in a way that is sort of unofficial and unorthodox and they don't care. They're going to do it!

J.W.-K.: That may be in line with thinking about how confrontational politics may not be the most useful thing at the moment. I was intrigued by your suggestion that we look at stories about Esther and Joseph, biblical figures who had to

live in relationship to the powers, but managed to make a difference.

W.B.: In my old guise I would have thought, "That's incredibly compromising." You know, kind of ignoble, but I think it makes an awful lot of sense in terms of how real people in the real world have to practice their faith.

Daniel 1 is so poignant: He advances his career in the Babylonian empire while he is paying attention to kosher food. It's wonderful. I think that sort of ambiguity is the place where people are going to have to live to have any impact on things.

J.W.-K.: When you say that, it feels different to me than my understanding of what Reinhold Niebuhr says about choosing the lesser of evils so that Christians can be players.

W.B.: Well, it's interesting that you say that because I come very closely out of the Niebuhr tradition. We went to the same schools, and the air in which I was educated was all Niebuhrian, but Hauerwas has recently said, and I think he's probably right, that Niebuhr didn't really have any sense of church at all. He became so concerned to make it in the world and to play power that the other side of the dialectic almost evaporated.

So I am highly suspicious of the people who call themselves Niebuhrian realists because by realism they seem to mean that this is the way the world is, so you better live this way.

I think that the disciplines that Daniel enacts keep one's commitment to the world much more tentative than Niebuhr ever wanted to acknowl-

edge.

J.W.-K.: Maybe one of the differences would be not thinking of yourself as a central player.

W.B.: Exactly so, and Niebuhr obviously lusted to be such a player, as have most of us in that theological tradition.

J.W.-K.: But you propose an entirely different way to create change in society. You've said that praise is the most powerful tool. You've also written that doxology can transfigure "fear into energy."

W.B.: Praise is the capacity to exuberantly abandon ourselves. If you go to a serious Black church, the praise is marvelous. As you move up the economic scale until you finally arrive at the Episcopal Church, you find hired soloists because the congregation no longer has the capacity to abandon itself.

Praise is really the communal capacity to be foolish, without thought for self. It is the turning of ourselves over to the mystery of God in a public, elemental way. I'm interested in the ways in which our affluence and our intellectual sophistication make it less and less likely that we can engage in honest doxology. What that means in terms of free market gains is, "I don't have to possess myself; I can give myself away."

J.W.-K.: Yeah, better that we should be achingly insecure and fill ourselves with products.

W.B.: Exactly. I read a book on praise by two Englishmen, Donald Hardy and David Ford, and one of the nice phrases in it is that "praise is the jazz factor of the Christian life." I don't know a lot about jazz, but I think the point is that it is always innovative and it is always taking a form beyond whatever was before. Likewise, what poets do is break up the controlled, predictable lining of life that makes it seem that there are no gaps, jarrings or incongruities. What poets do is violate the shape and the boundary of our imagination. They open us to newness. TW

Seeking food for thought? Join the conversation with a *Witness* study group

Perfect for any congregation, adult religious education class, campus ministry center or seminary seeking thought-provoking study material for small group exchange! Particularly popular during Lent and Advent, *The Witness* study guide program serves as an ideal educational resource for faith-sharing groups. Packets of eight copies (of one issue) of the magazine and a study guide are \$25. *The Witness*, 7000 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210-2872. You can also call us (313-841-1967) or fax us (313-841-1956) to place a Visa or Mastercard order. For a listing of back issues that might offer good topics for conversation, see the back issues ad on p.29.

What do you do with what you don't believe?

Mystery

This is my first year in seminary, and over the course of this semester, I have abandoned and rediscovered my faith a thousand times. In the times I have turned away, I have forced myself to live “as if” it all has meaning. I listen to the prayers, hear myself speak or sing the responses, extend my hands for the bread and press the cup to my lips. And each time, without fail, I move from the rail changed, able more fully to live in the dynamic tension between utter rejection and passionate faith, finding in that electric, elastic space Mystery.

Because I am in a crucible of sorts, where knowledge and data and faith and experience converge, I have no choice but to learn to live more comfortably, more presently, in the absurd paradox of being a Christian. Indeed, if I come away from seminary having learned nothing else, I will be grateful.

If all I do here is to be something more than a grand, amusing academic exercise, my faith must be stripped to less than the bones. It must become so transparent — maybe organic is a better word — that it moves through me, and I through it.

Artist **Robert Shetterly**'s work is published by Borealis Press in Ellsworth, Maine, 1-800-669-6845. Artist **Michael Borst** lives in Santa Fe, N.M.



Annunciation series: return of the messengers

Robert Shetterly

And with this comes a marvelous freedom: the realization that I do not have to analyze everything. I do not have to understand everything. I do not have to wrestle every experience, each bit of information, into submission. I can, with God's unfailing aid, get out of my own way to allow the Divine Mystery an intimate place in my life.

— Jackie O'Sullivan
<jackieosullivan@worldnet.att.net>

Living as a Narnian

One word, Ma'am," he said, coming back from the fire; limping because of the pain. "One word. All you've been saying

is quite right, I shouldn't wonder. I'm a chap who always liked to know the worst and then put the best face on it. So I won't deny any of what you've said. But there's one thing more to be said, even so. Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things — trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself, suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a world of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia.

— C.S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*

Walls

Safer this way
Hedge of suspicion
Uncertainty's stacked stones
Spiked pits of false expectations
"No Trespassing" signs on mind and soul
No buttercups
No wild flowers
No hope at all

— Sally B. Sedgwick
<forward@eos.net>

Without creed

When I took over this tiny inner-city congregation minutes from Manhattan across the Hudson in New Jersey, the church was almost dead, not a financial pot to pee in, six people left. Kept alive by a government grant to operate an independent after-school care program which pays half my salary as executive director.

Beautiful old Gothic church, falling apart like so many other beautiful churches in inner city neighborhoods ... except that neighborhood is slowly “gentrifying” with folks from Manhattan.

No staff, no lay leadership. After despairing and a few weeks of initial shock/insomnia, it hit me ... hey! No traditions! No one to say “We’ve never done it *that way!*” What clergy all *dream* of — *reinvent the church* but ground it in Anglican theological/spiritual/incarnational tradition without turning it into a “respectable” British Shakespearean production liturgically. No one in the congregation would know a *Sanctus* from an *Agnus Dei* from a Gospel.

What’s the tool for ministry when you have no money and nothing but yourself? Hang around the streets and talk to people.

The Good News is that, 13 months later, we’re averaging 35 to 50 people — Anglo, Jamaican, Italian, gay, lesbian, elderly, single, God’s beloved rainbow. At last count, 25 were ex-Roman Catholic, 2 were Baptist, 15 had no church affiliation and 7 had never been baptized.

What was the first thing I tossed out? Take a deep breath, don’t have a panic attack — the *Nicene Creed*! I’ve been saying this set of propositions since I was an acolyte at age 7. What the hell does it mean, with all its Greek philosophical constructs, to a congregation in which folks haven’t the foggiest notion what it has to do with Jesus — “visible and invisible ... seen and unseen ... begotten not made ... of one substance with ...”

Six months after my arrival, every person in this new member class asked the same question in six different ways.

“Why is the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son? I mean, I don’t know what that’s all about, you know? Does it mean I can’t know Jesus unless I know this or what?”

I had to come clean with myself. I’ve been afraid to say this out loud, the phrase that dares not be uttered — “*I don’t care if we don’t say the Nicene Creed every Sunday.*” From what medieval scholars tell us, the Nicene Creed was never intended to be recited 52 weeks a year!

I tossed out the Creed and substituted the Apostles’ Creed, which, as a theological outline of what is in the Bible, is clearer, more precise and more “bottom line” for these urban types.

I also tossed out the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) and the Hymnal. Oh, we have it in the pews alright and we use it on special occasions. But the 1979 BCP is a tool of *counter-evangelism*, as is the 1982 Episcopal Hymnal, with a few exceptions. When you are dealing with young, hard-boiled, urban types, both are impossible to use, both are guaranteed to put bored looks on your congregation’s face and be dull, duller, dullest!

When you’re re-inventing church, forget the juggling of a book, yet another book, yet a paper bulletin. So we can either whine, complain, or bravely bid farewell to some of the external manifestations of the Anglican ethos and try to reinvent some other way of communicating Christ through our heritage.

I print out a whole booklet every week, in legal-landscape, pay about \$60 a year to a Copyright Clearance place and use six different hymnals from which I can make copies and duplicate for church use only. Folks all gave it thumbs up for being “spiritually friendly.” And some volunteers assemble it! We dutifully recycle them.

Anglican means you communicate inclusivity and you welcome the divorced Catholic, the gay or lesbian person, the welfare mom with three kids, the uptight Wall Street broker, the wisdom of the 79-year-old men/women stalwarts who held on for a new vision of their church, the couple who can’t agree on a church and the Protestant who refuses to go “Roman.”

You provide that spiritual pathway with the eucharist. You come to the realization that most of our church fights today about inclusive language, sexual orientation and the like, most folks haven’t heard about and couldn’t give a fig. We just *do* theological inclusive language. We don’t get hung up about “father” but also tell folks it’s alright to image God as mother as well. An 82-year-old woman came up to me and said, “*That is the best thing any preacher ever said to me! My father was a drunk and I’ve always looked to God as a caring mother. Father didn’t mean anything to me!*”

Our incarnational spirituality is that if we believe that in Jesus we get a look at who God is, then it means the Good News will not be encumbered by books, papers and songs which nobody can sing because you might not see who Jesus is.

— Steven Giovangelo
<Giovangelo@worldnet.att.net>

Barnacles

In the weeks and months leading up to my ordination to the diaconate, I spent a lot of time in prayer reflecting on the ordination vows I would be taking and what the full implications of saying “I will” to them would mean. I struggled, knowing that I would say “I will” to one phrase of the examination—that of “patterning [my] life in accordance with teachings of Christ”—but that given the current stance of the church *vis-à-vis* same-sex partnerships, some would think I was lying. I wondered how, then, could I honestly look

the bishop (and God) in the eye and answer that I would do my best with God's help?

I took my dilemma to my spiritual companion, a wise sister of the Order of Saint Helena. When I told her where I was struggling, she looked at me and answered with a knowing smile: "You have to figure out what is of Christ and what is of the church."

I sat there for awhile, and then replied, "You mean that Christ's teachings are like the hull of a ship and the church's teachings have, in some cases, become like barnacles that have attached themselves to the hull!" She nodded a "yes."

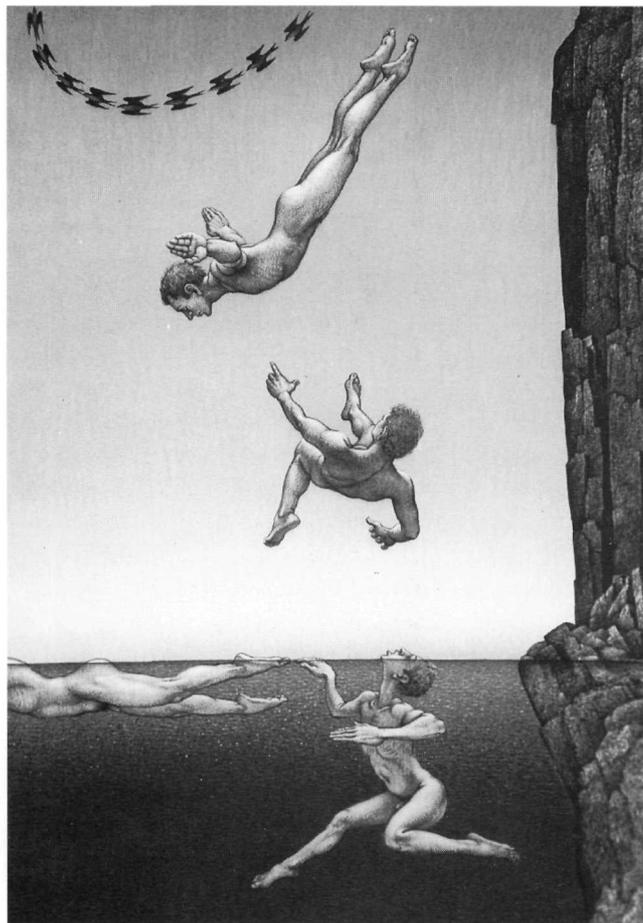
For anyone who has ever brushed up against a barnacle, the exterior shell is extremely sharp, cutting flesh easily and causing great pain and stinging. Its toughness is to protect the living creature within. In this case, some of the church's teachings — while desiring to protect the Spirit of Christ's love, radical inclusivity, justice and mercy — have, instead, become painful and sharp, driving people away. Surely pain and exclusion were not the original intentions of Jesus' utterances.

Lee Alison Crawford

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Thorns and wounds

My gay friend Jane, who, like me, used to drink a little bit more than was perhaps good for her, said on the winter solstice this year that for her, being a pagan, the solstice is not just about the darkest night of the year but also about the darkest night of the soul. She and her goddess-worshipping friends celebrate this because the seeds of new growth lie in this darkness and develop in the winter to bloom in the spring. I said, What do you pagan



Sink or swim

Michael Bergt

homos do at your midnight celebrations, put a bunch of dogs in wicker baskets and push them off cliffs, with Holly Near playing on a nearby boom box? And she looked over at my big Italian crucifix on the kitchen wall, at the thorns, at the bloody wound, the nails through his palms, and then she turned to me with a look of such amused condescension that all I could do was laugh. As soon as she left, though, I went and stared at the crucifix for a long time. I believe in it, and it's so nuts. How did some fabulously cerebral and black-humored cynic like myself come to fall for all that Christian lunacy, to see the cross not as an end but a beginning, to believe as much as I believe in gravity or in the size of space that Jesus paid a debt he didn't owe because we had

a debt we couldn't pay?

— Anne Lamott,

Operating Instructions

(*Fawcett Columbine*, 1993)

Once a priest?

Over 30 years ago, a young Roman Catholic priest whom we knew fell in love with a parishioner. He asked for release from his vow of celibacy and, eventually, the Vatican granted his request. He and his wife have remained faithful lay members of the Church of Rome and brought up their two sons to be faithful members of the Church of Rome.

Once the "pastoral provision" for married Anglicans seeking ordination in the Church of Rome was made public, our friend discovered that the RC hierarchy of his diocese didn't know what to do about himself and other "former" priests who had asked to be released from their vows of celibacy — take note that *none* asked to be released from their vows of poverty and obedience.

In his Christmas card this year, our friend described a luncheon hosted by Cardinal O'Connor for these "former" priests. Since the Church of Rome declares "once a priest, always a priest," he noted the Cardinal's discomfiture.

"They just don't know what to make of us," he wrote.

In the past 20 years, the Vatican has been much slower to release priests from their vow of celibacy. Both the priests and the women whom they marry are faithful adherents to the teachings of the Church of Rome.

'Tis a pity that that church can't count its blessings.

— Odessa Elliot

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Ursula LeGuin: taking exception to expectations

by Jane Slaughter

As a celebrated science fiction writer, Ursula Le Guin is famous for not sharing assumptions. For 40 years, she's bent our world into fantastic shapes or invented new ones: What if people were androgynous, and never knew, after making love, which one would get pregnant? What if Eve took back all the animals' names? What if a teenage boy could invent his own planet? What if some wolves horrified their families by becoming werhumans?

Her utopias are spiked with rough edges; no people who are "all good and nice and kind and noble and better than me," she insists. "Nobody likes people who are better than they are."

In Le Guin's most reprinted story, the chilling "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," the city-state of Omelas is a place of abundance where everyone is comfortable. Most citizens try not to think about the bargain that's made their little world a utopia; one child is kept in a dungeon under conditions of unspeakable neglect. If it is freed, the happiness of the city will be destroyed. Everyone, it seems, assumes that the greater good for the greatest number is the principled choice. But some walk away.

Le Guin challenged science fiction conventions head-on in a 1973 talk that was reprinted in a special Le Guin issue of *Science Fiction Studies*. She said, "One of the great early socialists said that the

status of women in a society is a pretty reliable index of the degree of civilization of that society. If this is true, then the very low status of women in SF (Science Fiction) should make us ponder about whether SF is civilized at all. ... SF has either totally ignored women, or presented them as squeaking dolls subject to instant rape by monsters—or old-maid scientists desexed by hypertrophy of the intellectual organs—or, at best, loyal little wives or mistresses of accomplished heroes. ...

"In SF, where are the poor, the people who work hard and go to bed hungry? Are they ever *persons* in SF? No. They appear as vast anonymous masses fleeing from giant slime-globules ... or dying off by the billion from pollution or radiation. ... Now and then there's a busty lass amongst them who is honored by the attentions of the Captain of the Supreme Terran Command, or in a spaceship crew there's a quaint old cook, with a Scots or Swedish accent, representing the Wisdom of the Common Folk.

"The people in SF are not people. They are masses, existing for one purpose: to be led by their superiors. ...

"I think it's time SF writers — and their readers! — stopped daydreaming about a return to the Age of Queen Victoria."

Coming out as a feminist, she says, lost her some portion of the traditional science fiction readership, which, in the pulp fiction days, had been "mostly adolescent males. Of whatever age." She and others fought to write science fiction as literature and to treat the social and political "what if?" themes as seriously as the technological.

Besides scads of honors in the science fiction field, Le Guin's books have been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and received the National Book Award and the Howard Vursell Award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her audience has grown far beyond sci fi fans to include many other readers who like their reality with a twist—and often with an intense ethical exploration.

Le Guin says she seldom runs up against orthodoxies in the sci fi community anymore. But she does become "deeply annoyed" by a prevailing assumption in society at large: that everyone believes in God, usually the Christian God. It's important to her, she says, to let it be known that she is a non-Christian: "Because I live in a country that calls itself Christian. Since Reagan came to power this country has had a sort of orgy of self-congratulation about being Christian. I feel it's incumbent upon me to say so, because people seem to be afraid to say anything against Christianity at all."

The most conspicuous result is censorship. Her own works, especially those for young readers, have come under attack. "The fundamentalist Christians have declared themselves to be my enemies in saying that all fantastic, imaginative literature is evil. Okay. This makes me a little combative. I'm with Voltaire, I say, 'To hell with the priests.' If they take that line they have made me their enemy."

Le Guin points out that most attempts at censorship are not directed against pornography. "Ask any librarian—it's not sex that's the problem, it's the religious thing. It is interference by fundamentalists or other Right-wing groups with libraries and school curricula."

But beyond differences on the proper uses of the imagination, Le Guin finds a wider assumption: "It's not just Christianity. It is assumed in the U.S. that you're some kind of monotheist, that you believe there is a God. You always run

Jane Slaughter is a Detroit-based labor writer. Artist Mary Pierce's image is distributed by the Syracuse Cultural Workers, 315-474-1132.

into this basic assumption of what people are. I meet it in writing classes: everybody's white, everybody's heterosexual, everybody believes in God.

"Reading the newspapers, I get the idea that it's belief that's important, and it doesn't seem to matter what you believe in. I think the movie *Contact* makes that point — you just have to believe.

"Maybe because I'm a scientist's daughter, that really turns me off."

Le Guin was proud of her own daughter when the words "under God" were added to the Pledge of Allegiance in the 1950s. Unprompted by her mom, young Elisabeth kept her mouth shut while the rest of the class recited.

Because Le Guin's work is deeply humane and often concerned with ethical questions, some readers assume that she is religious. "That's because," she says, "they're coming from this culture where you have to believe in something.

"The holding of belief is impenetrable to me. I understand it as a scientist understands it: Yes, I believe Darwin was right, because all the evidence piles up and piles up that he was absolutely, spot-on right. So I believe in Darwin's theory of evolution, as modified by later scientists. But believe in God? I honestly don't know what they mean by it.

"I'm not an atheist in the sense of one who wants to fight with those who believe in God. I am simply not interested in the idea.

"One thing that seems very pernicious to me is the assumption that morality and religion are interdependent. That an unreligious person is an immoral person. An honest look at history and our lives shows that very religious people often behave with profound immorality. There is no connection that I can see."

Although the idea of God doesn't make sense to Le Guin, she's quite comfortable with polytheism: "People like the Hindus or ancient Romans who had little gods everywhere, or Native American religions, which are a fully spiritual approach to reality. What we call Indian gods, the kachinas, for instance, those aren't gods, who demand to be believed in. They are



Prayer to the sun

Mary Pierce

spiritual figures enacted during ceremonies by human beings, representing aspects of the sacredness of the world. They don't have gods, but everything is sacred.

"Now, that makes complete sense to me. This is the religion I understand. But as soon as you get centered into a hierarchy with a boss at the top, I'm out. I've lived in that place."

Le Guin is an adherent of Taoism, which she describes as "a structure of thought which is completely non-theist." She has recently published a version of the works of Lao-tsu, the core of Taoism. Lao-tsu's 2,500-year-old writing, she says, is about how to live: "Very practical. Totally poems, one of those things you chew over your whole life long and it

never stops nourishing.

"Taoism is mystical. Lao-tsu says that the name that can be said isn't the real name. The way that you can go on isn't the real way. But there is a real name, there is a real way. There is something that we cannot apprehend, we cannot perceive, we cannot think, but it is the way to go and we can get on that way and go on it.

"Something like meditation may be one way to approach that way, which is nonverbal. Words and thoughts cannot apprehend it. Here all the mysticisms join. Taoism and Buddhism seem very different. What the Buddha preached, an altruistic way of life, is very different from what Lao-Tsu talks about. But in China the two melded. Zen is an outgrowth of both. And I think the Christian mystics, they're all doing the same thing. They're trying to apprehend what lies underneath what we perceive."

Although she wants to stand up and be counted as a non-theist, Le Guin doesn't usually tackle the matter head-on. "I would rather do it than say it," she explains. "I think it's more effective to have it part of

the silent basis of everything I write. If my stories come from this central position of my own life, they'll be honest and clear. And they won't do anybody any harm. I think artists are responsible to their community to try not to do harm.

"That is a very unfashionable, perhaps dangerous thing to say. It doesn't mean self-censorship. It doesn't mean being afraid to hurt people's feelings. It doesn't mean not to rock the boat. It may mean to hurt people's feelings, it may mean to rock the boat. But you're doing it in the interests of not hurting people, not causing pain, trying to make the world a little more endurable. We are members of a community and we need one another's help." TW

Ambiguity: the essence of faith

an interview with Verna Dozier

by Julie A. Wortman

Plenty of Christians hover on the edge of leaving the church because they find themselves aware that much of what they encounter in the church's worship and theology seems unrealistically absolutist or downright ridiculous. Biblical theologian Verna Dozier, 80, speaks to that reality in her work on ambiguity. Next month the interview continues with a focus on ambiguity and conflict.

Julie Wortman: You're a biblical theologian who has been working on the topic of ambiguity. Some people, especially Christians, might worry that upholding ambiguity is about upholding unbelief.

Verna Dozier: Ambiguity is the essence of faith. Faith involves trusting God. I cast my life on a belief that there is a God, that God is for me and that I can trust that. But I can't prove it.

Ambiguity is the opposite of certainty. It literally means going in two directions at the same time. It is the awareness that wherever you stand, someone just as reasonable, rational and good as you stands in an opposite place. You stand there by faith. That's how you have the courage to stand, but it isn't that you stand where God stands. You stand before God, offering up to God the best you can do at any particular time.

The difference between conservatives

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and liberals may be that conservatives don't acknowledge that. You can dismiss ideas and people by labeling them, and then maybe you won't have to think about them anymore, but the very fact you go to the trouble to label them means that somewhere back in your brain is the reality that you have only one part of the truth.



Verna Dozier

J.W.: What about the sort of conservatism that calls itself orthodoxy?

V.D.: The insistence on one position is a frightened position. If you were not threatened by another reality you wouldn't have to be so strong on yours.

J.W.: So even those who hold hard to orthodoxy are acknowledging ambiguity?

V.D.: Yes.

J.W.: What's the drive to insist on "right belief"?

V.D.: I think it's a manifestation of the drive for power that's in all of us, all the time. I can control you if I can set up the possibility that there is only one position and I hold it. I am proposing that we live open to the possibility that we don't have absolute answers.

J.W.: What difference would that make in our lives?

V.D.: It would give you some dis-ease, some anxiety ...

J.W.: That doesn't seem too attractive!

V.D.: Well, the attraction of it is that you feel as though you were closer to the truth. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." This is freedom from the fear of being wiped out and being dismissed as a no-account, of being on the wrong side. A hymn keeps going through my mind: "When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there." That kind of confidence is a gift that is not granted to many people — even those who talk about it really don't have any assurance that "when the roll is called up yonder I'll be there." That's where faith comes in. It may be a naive way to express the faith that there is a God, that God has a purpose in creation and that God's rule cannot be defeated, but it has power. It has power for me, even though I don't believe that way.

J.W.: My sense of orthodoxy is that it is an enterprise that refuses to entertain another opinion. If the essence of faith is ambiguity, does that make orthodoxy illegitimate?

V.D.: It's a fearful stance. It's a stance of people who are very frightened of the possibility that they may be wrong. I feel that they don't trust God. Faith is trusting in God without the facts.

J.W.: Insisting on the rightness of one side's position has led to schism, persecution, and warfare. Would embracing ambiguity keep people from fighting?

V.D.: It may not keep them from fighting, but it would certainly keep them from persecuting others. Human beings will always struggle to have the position they espouse be the dominant position. But if you embrace ambiguity you will not crucify the person that doesn't have your position, or burn him at the stake, or put him in prison. The world can tolerate

a lot of difference. We see it in nature. Only human beings seem to be unable to tolerate difference.

J.W.: In the church there has been condemnation of worship that draws on native traditions. People have called that syncretism. In some conservative church journals you see a lot of condemnation of non-Christian faiths because they do not proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus as Lord.

V.D.: I grew up on that — I heard that preached Sunday after Sunday, but I don't believe it. Even as a child I knew there was something wrong with that. And as I grew older I saw evidence of how destructive that position was.

J.W.: Many people, who have shared that experience, quit the church or wash their hands of it. Why do you stick with a church that so often espouses positions and doctrines that would seem to deny ambiguity?

V.D.: My immediate reaction is to say, "Because it's the right thing!" [laughter] But the very essence of ambiguity is that I would tolerate another view. And more than tolerate, that I would support in prayer that which is against me.

J.W.: But you do think that Christianity is the right way?

V.D.: It is for me.

J.W.: So when you are saying the Nicene Creed, ...

V.D.: [laughter] That's more than ambiguity! The Nicene Creed is a formulation of an historical period. Even the language is not our language — it's poetry. It came out of a bitter fight in which the major effort was to do away with ambiguity.

J.W.: So when you say the Nicene Creed, what are you thinking?

V.D.: I'm thinking I'm engaging in a ritual and I'm also thinking that it is ridiculous.

J.W.: But you're there!

V.D.: Yes, I'm there. I'm part of a community that says the Nicene Creed. Most of the people who say it, don't think about

it. And then there are those souls who say, "I'm not going to say that, it's ridiculous!"

J.W.: Would you like to get rid of it?

V.D.: Well, I suppose I wouldn't. It came out of a tense period in the life of the Christian community that is worth remembering.

J.W.: Knowing you, I'm assuming your thinking about ambiguity has something to do with your picture of Jesus?

V.D.: Yes.

J.W.: What is your picture of Jesus and what are the pictures of Jesus you reject?

V.D.: Those pictures of Jesus I reject are those pictures that are created in the im-



Eve, the mother of all

Robert Lentz

age of our imagination and our wishful thinking. There was a hymn in our Sunday School hymnal, some of the words were, "If he came again to me, would I know that it was he?" And the chorus is, "Yes, I would know him. Yes, I would know him, the man of Galilee."

I think there is nothing further from the truth. If he came again, I would not know that it was he, because I have created him in my own image. I think that is why I reject the images of Jesus. We not

only make him look like us physically, we make him feel like us emotionally, intellectually, spiritually.

J.W.: But much of your idea about ambiguity being the essence of faith comes out of your understanding of Jesus?

V.D.: It comes out of my understanding of the experiences he had in his own time. There was always more to him than anybody could fathom. He was not without friends and he needed human companionship. We have so many images of the lonely Jesus, but he liked parties.

We say this one person was fully man and fully God. And that in itself is not understandable. I know that this is a theological formulation, but I think it points to the fact that we don't understand him — reason cannot explain him.

J.W.: So how does somebody follow him?

V.D.: Become as nutty as he was! Throw all caution to the winds. Run contrary to every system, every status symbol that we have. I think that the followers of Jesus are considered mad by their time. We have a tendency to romanticize our saints, but we only do that after they are dead.

J.W.: We have a religion called Christianity that is focused on the life of a man that we basically would reject?

V.D.: Absolutely.

J.W.: That sounds nuts. Tell me how you continue going to church, saying the creeds, participating in the worship and leading Bible study.

V.D.: It's the best thing we have. It is something we can cling to, like a plank in a raging sea.

J.W.: Some people who see that the enterprise is crazy, reject Christianity and the church altogether.

V.D.: I would ask what they have that is better? And if their alternative is better for them, I'd give them my blessing. What I believe is not diminished because somebody else doesn't believe it. **TW**

Religion in Batié: a grandmothers' tradition

by Rachel Roberson

For the past 20 months, Rachel Roberson, an active Episcopalian, has been a Peace Corps volunteer in Batié, Cameroon, a village of about 600 families in the western region of the country. Most people in Batié are farmers who grow coffee for cash and food (beans, tomatoes, corn) for their families. Without an Episcopal Church nearby, Roberson began attending Sunday services at the local Catholic church, Sainte Famille de Batié. Roughly 30 percent of Cameroonians are Christian, 30 percent Muslim and the other 40 percent claim traditional religions. Muslims are concentrated in the northern provinces; most people who practice a Western faith in Batié are Christians.

Old church ladies are everywhere. They are the living memory of every congregation, constant fixtures in their pews, orthodox, humble, proper and faithful to the core. At the Catholic parish in Batié, they all sit front-and-center on the wooden benches in once-bright printed dresses and head scarves. They sway to the music, drums and *falafon* (wood xylophone) played by the youth choir. Even if they have to shuffle up to communion bent over bamboo walking sticks, they never miss a Sunday.

Rachel Roberson, 23, is a native of California and a graduate of Northwestern University's school of journalism. At Northwestern she lived at Canterbury House, the Episcopal chaplaincy program's student center. **Spec Art** is an artist in Bamenda, Cameroon.

The whole service is translated for their benefit from French into the tribal language. The translator is an equally old church gentleman who takes the often dour French presentation of the Cameroonian priest and renders it alive with sweeping gestures and tent-meeting volume. He leaves the safety of the lectern and paces the packed dirt floor of the center aisle. The ladies nod vigorously, or sigh or rock with laughter, depending on the lessons that day. I sit in the back with my English Bible and usually practice my French by reading along as the priest intones his part. But I never miss the old man's turn. He jumps up as the priest finishes and bursts into translation. The language — its tempo, its sounds — are completely foreign to my Western ears. It flows and stops almost musically, like popcorn popping up and down a piano

I can't imagine Philomene's Sundays with eight kids and an hour's walk. But for Philomene, faith has as much to do with effort as passionate belief — and the privilege of being able to make the effort is reason enough to make it.

scale. A few months back, the priest reprimanded him for adding his own commentary. Supposedly he doesn't anymore, but translations still run about twice as long as the French version.

"What makes them so long?" I asked the priest, Chrisosthème Dongmo. I have never met the old man, who seems to evaporate after each service, nor have I seen him in any other village context.

"He emphasizes everything. One sentence, he repeats three times," the priest groaned. I think he figured I was complaining. Many people in Batié assume all Westerners think of them as ignorant villagers and want to reinforce their worldliness. "It's long and tiresome, yes?"

"Not at all," I replied. "I don't understand a word, but I believe everything he says."

Usually all four of the acolytes at the altar are students of mine from the local high school. Lost in their one-size-fits-all surplices, they go through the ritual motions with the self-conscious seriousness of teenage acolytes anywhere. Sonia, 12, is a regular. Her Mary Janes are always so well-polished that they pick up the weak candlelight. Martial, 13, usually serves with her, wearing matching plastic shoes made to look like soccer cleats. Both, I know, have walked miles to get to church.

Sonia's family — three sisters, two brothers, two cousins, mother, father and grandmother — fit snugly on one long bench. Sonia's mother, Philomene, exudes warm and motherly wisdom after seeing six of her own children and two of her sister's through early childhood. She's 34 years old. I think of my own memories of Sunday mornings: of my mother rushing around, looking for shoes and socks, making sure my two sisters and I were clean, getting us to church on time. I can't imagine Philomene's Sundays with eight kids and an hour's walk. But for Philomene, faith has as much to do with effort as passionate belief — and the privilege of being able to make the effort is reason enough to make it.

"Why would we not come, if we could?" she said. "If we come, it means everyone is healthy. So we come to offer thanks to God and pray that we will be able to come again next week."

Baptism

Pentecost 1997 and baptism at the Catholic parish: I walk to church with my neighbor Emerance, who is also a student of mine who's dressed in her white baptism dress and wobbling on her mother's heels. Closer to the church we are joined by other students from the school. The girls



all wear a version of what Emerance is wearing. Some dresses are a mass of frilly lace, but most are simple, made by mothers and handed down by siblings. The boys wear stiff, starched shirts, dark pants and dark bow ties.

Baptism is a big day in Batié, and most people, Catholic and Protestant, wait until they're old enough to enjoy it. Today, only one of the 18 newly baptized is an infant. Most are young teenagers like Emerance. I sit near Philomene and Katherine (Emerance's mother) grinning like a fool. I have so few opportunities to sit in an audience and cheer (even silently) for my students. Most of the time I'm ruining their day by making them speak English in front of their friends.

I spend Pentecost afternoon running from party to party snapping photos before the spit-and-polish fades. My students pose with their identical white plastic rosaries, the solemnness of the occasion written all over their faces. They may have been basking in the attention, very rare in the children-should-be-seen-and-not-heard village culture, but someone has also impressed upon them the importance of what has just taken place (without informing them of the celebration involved). Every muscle strains to show their worthiness. I beg for smiles and rarely get them.

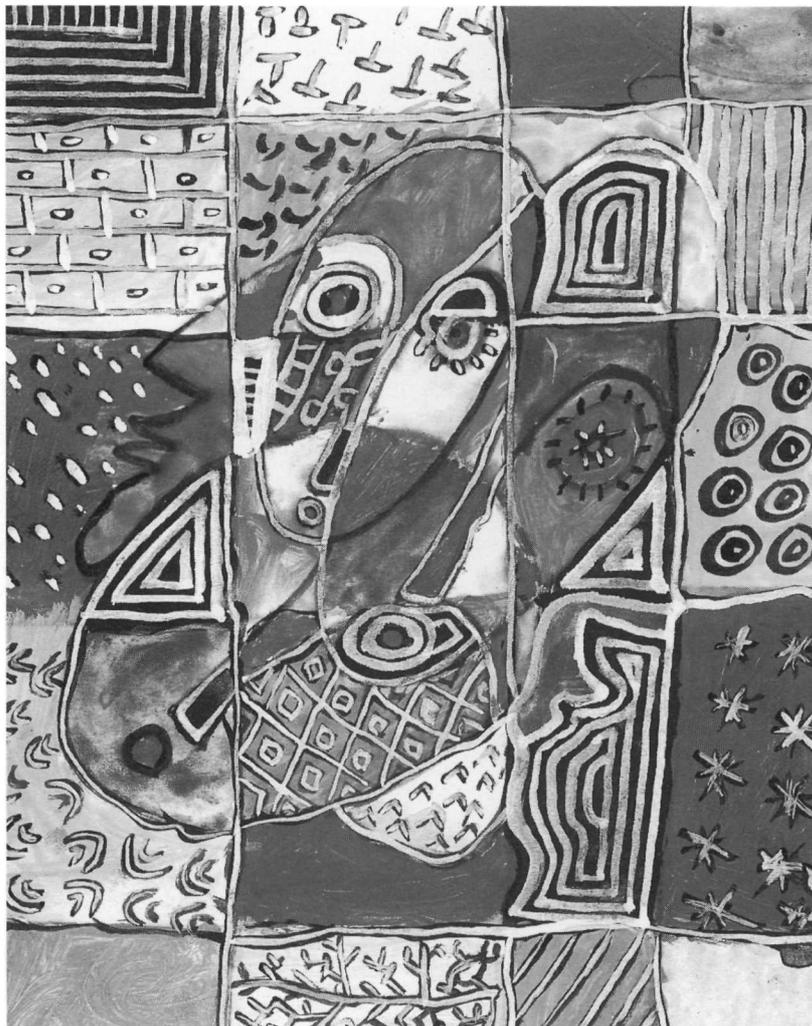
Francile and Nadine, two students who go to the Protestant church in town, want to know, eight months in advance, if I will come to their baptism this year.

"Only if you smile," I tell them.

'Sorcerers'

Francile and Nadine's grandmother is a

church lady at the Protestant parish. She speaks only the local language and doesn't walk much anymore. But she went every Sunday until she got sick. With the help of her family, she traveled to the capital where she visited the best *marabou* in town.



Spec Art

Marabous are traditional healers. Some Cameroonians refer to them, respectfully, as "sorcerers." Some have gone "modern" in the post-colonial era, advertising their services and offering free "consultations." But what they offer are ancient remedies from a time long before Canadian-built hospitals (or Canadians) entered the picture. Their herbs and charms (*gri-gri*) ward off the forces that

cause disease. For Francile's grandmother's generation, the *marabou* is the first line of defense against illness. Christians, Muslims or Other, they turn to tradition when their need is greatest. Yet few people see traditional spirituality as something that conflicts with the services

they attend at the mosque or church. When Francile and Nadine's grandmother didn't get better after her visit to the *marabou*, she went to the city's Protestant hospital. It was stocked with medicines and microscopes, but I doubt she thought she was getting a better deal.

When I try to ask about *gri-gri*, everyone just shrugs. They'll tell me what it does, but they'll always end with "it doesn't work on strangers." I could sit in church in Batié for the rest of my life, and I would always be a stranger.

Behind the dedication of the church ladies, underneath the faith and effort of Philomene's family, beyond the solemn parties of Pentecost/Baptism Sunday, the true force that unites the people of Batié is the tradition of Francile's grandmother and her grandmother before her. There is no sense, as there is in the

West, that you can have only one mystical attachment. Church, *marabou* and *gri-gri* are all part of the same continuous seam.

"I believe in Jesus and go to Mass," Katherine told me. "And I know that, if someone puts a curse on me or makes me fall sick, I will go to the *marabou*. Is there a choice to be made? It is all the same power." TV

Skeptic in the House of God

by Harvey H. Guthrie, Jr.

James L. Kelley, *Skeptic in the House of God* (New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

A reflective, interesting, and enjoyable account of James Kelley's 15 years as both active parishioner of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C., and continuing unrepentant skeptic with regard to the existence of God, this book will be welcomed by some and seen as one more example of the insidious advance of liberal, secular humanism into the church by others. On the last page, the author summarizes what the book is about:

"St. Marks' has been my spiritual home and most important community for 15 years. I'm lucky to have found such a church. It isn't always a comfortable place to be. My skeptical views put me in a minority, and I sometimes feel like an outsider. But my fear that I would feel hypocritical went away early, because, from the beginning, I've been open about my beliefs. I've been a full participant in the life of the church. *Gospel* [the parish paper] editor, elected Vestry member, Sunday School teacher."

Successive chapters document that statement with accounts of life in the parish in terms of racial integration (actually lack thereof), liturgy, a survey of parishioners' beliefs, parish governance and community life, Christian education, women, gays and lesbians, spirituality, outreach, and the realities of divorce and aging in the lives of both parish and author. St. Mark's is seen as an "open parish," in contrast to parishes less open in terms of

Harvey Guthrie is a retired priest who sought to serve the "open church" as dean of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. and as rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Ann Arbor, Mich.

doctrine and inclusiveness, and an afterword discusses examples of such parishes and where and how to find them in mainline denominations. The author's interesting conclusion is that they are most likely to be Episcopal or United Church of Christ.

Pervasive in American culture is a confessional, doctrinal understanding of Christianity, probably Reformed in origin via Cotton Mather et al. Its roots lie more in Greek and Enlightenment philosophy than in the Bible and early Christianity.

This book will be welcomed by some and seen as one more example of the insidious advance of liberal, secular humanism into the church by others.

Contemporary skeptics, agnostics and atheists — including Kelley — share that understanding with believers. Doctrine, or reaction to doctrine, takes priority over the history and experience and life which doctrine seeks to interpret. Theoretical belief in the concept "God," or rejection of such belief, rather than a trusting belief in the Central Character in the life of the People of God, is taken to be the primary issue.

But it was not so in ancient Israel or the early church. The present-tense part of the classic creeds' statement of belief in God has to do with "the holy, catholic Church, the communion of saints" — that is, with the community out of whose life and experience faith is being professed. The past-tense parts summarize the story of that reality, but are not a doctrine which must be accepted as a prerequisite to becoming part of that community. The creeds originated as summaries of the

story of the community into which one is incorporated in baptism — the story which becomes the story of the one baptized.

That is what Kelley is learning existentially through participation in the community at St. Mark's. And that is what St. Mark's is letting happen, even if the confirmation class, seduced by the concerns of our culture's doctrine-first orientation, details what the creeds are not rather than what they really are.

Kelley's rector at St. Mark's, Jim Adams, has it right in explaining why there is no common doctrinal core at St. Mark's or in the Episcopal Church: "What you have instead is a common core of practice. You can form a church around orthopraxy as easily as you can form a church around orthodoxy. ... Our practice is very conservative — in our services from *The Book of Common Prayer*, in our organization. ... The Episcopal Church, going back for centuries, is more interested in orthopraxy than in orthodoxy. Anglicans have never been able to agree with each other on doctrine. And that's why I feel at home in the Anglican tradition."

In spite of our cultural captivity to the other approach, and in spite of current efforts to make the other approach normative for Anglicanism, that is the way it is. James Kelley is discovering the freedom and grace of it in his own way, and they rub off onto the reader. **TW**

**COMING
NEXT
MONTH**

The church in conflict. As some people struggle to find common ground on the controversial

issues facing the church, others hold fast to their "orthodoxy." As we warm up for the showdown at Lambeth, *The Witness* will look at what prospects there are for finding a resolution. Let us know if there is someone (a potential subscriber?) to whom you'd like us to send this issue. Call 313-841-1967 or e-mail us at <office@thewitness.org>.

Serving justice *and* prudence

by Judith Esmay

The historic campus and sedate halls of St. Paul's School in Concord, N.H., were the setting in January for a Province I Conference on Investing Profitably for Economic Justice. Convened by Douglas Theuner, Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire, the gathering drew more than 90 people from every part of New England. Church trustees, vestry officers, community development leaders and others sat beneath wood-paneled walls and leaded windows to hear how socially responsible investments serve both justice and prudence.

The keynote speaker was Amy Domini, founder and chair of the Domini Social Equity Fund and consultant to the Episcopal Church on socially responsible investing. Domini first outlined three ways investments can be an exercise of social conscience. Investors can place funds in a portfolio screened to exclude certain companies or types of companies — such as tobacco, alcohol, or weapons — and include others that work positively to meet human needs.

They can also engage in shareholder activism, using their investor status to pressure corporations to operate more responsibly. It was an act of shareholder activism when John Hines, then Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, stood up in a 1971 meeting of the board of directors of General Motors to urge the corporation's disengagement from business in apartheid South Africa.

Finally, investors can place funds in community investments, making money available to help finance projects that meet the needs of those at the bottom end of the economic spectrum or who take an alternative approach to business. Community development financial institutions — banks, loan funds, credit

unions — are not bound by the rules that govern conventional banks; they can lend money where conventional banks cannot.

Domini acknowledged that most church officials are concerned about the low rate of return on funds invested in community development. It's true, she said, that at 3 percent interest such investments will yield less money than funds invested in a portfolio of stocks and bonds at 8 percent interest. That would appear to mean that conventional investments earn churches more money annually for spending on

All of the church money invested at 3 percent in community development is working actively for mission purposes — with a 103 percent return.

mission projects. But, she pointed out, *all* of the church money invested in community development is working actively for mission purposes — to improve lives and increase opportunity. In mission terms, the community development investment provides a 103 percent return, and the same money can be reinvested year after year to provide the same high return.

Following Domini, the directors of five New England community development funds described their operations: Juliana Eades, New Hampshire Community Loan Fund; Bonnie Cronin, Massachusetts Working Capital; Rebecca Dunn, New England Coop Fund; Toni Gold, Episcopal Social Responsibility Fund (Conn.); Robert Windsor, Pelham Fund (Mass.); and Leslie Belay, Episcopal City Mission (Mass.). They in turn introduced borrowers — people who have used community development funds to purchase affordable housing and start new businesses.

Dan Neville, carpenter and resident of a stately house built in 1820 and converted to apartments, told how a loan enabled the apartment dwellers to form a cooperative and purchase the house when their landlord defaulted. That was five years ago. When one of the five apartments recently changed hands, it was sold under an arrangement that ensures that it will always remain affordable for lower income families.

Everett Harlow described the graphics arts business he started with Working Capital funds and the advice and assistance he continues to receive from others in his cooperative of business borrowers.

Clark Arrington was one of the founders of Equal Exchange, Inc, coffee importers concerned for justice and ecology on the coffee plantations as well as justice in the American workplace. Now 12 years old, the company is worker-owned, invites outside investors, employs 30, and enjoys sales of \$5 million annually.

John W. Spaeth, financial officer for the Diocese of Connecticut, pointed out that community development loan funds have a collection record envied by banks. Loan fund officers work closely with borrowing cooperatives both before a loan is made and during repayment. Borrowers are never alone in their economic dilemmas; help is always at hand. To make socially responsible lending even safer, pooled funds accept investments and direct moneys to a variety of community development institutions.

A conference participant asked how investing in community development squares with the hoary New England precept, "neither a borrower nor a lender be." Domini answered: "Every time money is put in the bank, a loan is made." Socially responsible investment, she said, means taking responsibility for the way your money is used when you've entrusted it to others.

Conference proceedings were videotaped by Reel Vision, Inc., a Working Capital loan recipient. Edited copies of the tape are available from Lesley Belay, Episcopal City Mission, 138 Tremont Street, Boston MA 02111; the cost is \$10 plus \$3 s/h. 

Exiled from culture or church?

by Andrew W. McThenia, Jr.

John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die* (Harper Collins, 1998).

John Shelby Spong purports to speak to believers in exile. Much of what this Bishop of Newark has to say has been said before in his other books. But he attempts to bring some 20 years of thought together in *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*.

Spong is upset about many things. He begins with a critique of ancient statements of church belief. Both the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds seem to him irrelevant and based on a world view that has long since been "obliterated by the expansion of knowledge" (4). He concludes his detailed critique with the announcement that he has been forced into exile "from the presuppositions of my own religious past" (20).

He moves on to describe that exile as being similar to the exile of the Jewish people under the lash of Babylon. But his exile is not, according to Spong, driven by the power of foreign invaders but instead by the "steady and relentless advances in knowledge [which] altered forever our ability to believe in the God

content that stood at the heart of our sacred tradition" (29). In the following four or five pages he takes the reader on a breathtaking journey through the history of western thought from the world of ancient Greece to the galaxy of the late Carl Sagan. He pauses just long enough to give us detail on light years and solar system distances, presumably to prove how out of synch the Biblical texts are with the galactic truth of Star Wars, before announcing that the notion of the Ascension can no longer have any claim to intellectual integrity (33). He moves on to assert that Darwin's work "caused most of the remaining principles by which human life was understood in religious terms to go up in smoke" (36). In the tradition of the late John A. T. Robinson (author of *Honest to God*), he says we "must discover whether or not the death of the God we worshiped yesterday is the same thing as the death of God" (41). He concludes his description of the exile wondering whether we can sing the songs of Zion when we are lost in the cosmos.

What is most puzzling about this book for me is to figure out what exactly Spong is in exile from. And what forces have exiled him. As I understand exile, it means leaving a world which recognizes your truth claims and entering a world which considers those truth claims false or marginal. The dominant world may seek overtly to destroy your culture and religious symbols, as in the destruction of the Temple of Solomon by the Babylonians; or one can be exiled

in a culture that simply disregards or trivializes important truth claims. Exile does not necessarily mean picking up and leaving geographical space. One can be a stranger in his home country, a resident alien as it were. Spong claims that "honesty requires that we confront the Bible's limited grasp on truth" (7). He seems to assert the priority in truth and value of the meaning system of what he calls postmodernity. "We live inside a different understanding of reality, and we possess a different experience of both life and the universe" (141). He does not assert that priority as a result of any careful argument or demonstration. He simply asserts it, assuming the authority of modern science and enlightenment rationalism, while giving back of the hand dismissals to "traditional Christian theology."

Spong says he is a believer who increasingly lives in exile. Yet I think that his exile is more from the community called the church than it is from the culture. And his notion of church seems frozen in time. Ironically he seems quite comfortable with the liberal rationalist culture of 40 to 60 years ago when the battle for the Bible was between literal-

ists and liberal rationalists. At the same time he seems not at all uncomfortable with a world view which accepts as normative the claims of

modern science. He mentions the postmodern world, but his language is that of a good, old-fashioned modernist. He seemingly accepts without question that the world of the enlightenment represented an advance of truth that simply crowded God out.

I come from a part of America where the battle for the Bible is real and intense. It is not a battle between literalists and

I think that Spong's exile is more from the community called the church than it is from the culture.

review

Andrew W. McThenia, Jr. is the James A. Morefield Professor of Law at Washington and Lee University School of Law in Lexington, Va., <awm@wlu.edu>.

liberal rationalists, however. It is a struggle over whether the Bible will be harnessed by the forces of Right-wing politics and made a text of domination, or whether its imaginative and subversive themes can be nurtured and the myriad stories of God's grace seen as texts of resistance and texts that keep hope alive. The question is whether we have the imagination to go to those stories in order to remember who and whose we are in a culture of narcissism which has terminal amnesia. What really worries me about Spong is that I fear he has left the sacred texts at home as he entered exile and carried with him only the tools of classical liberalism. One of the powerful lessons of the Jewish exile is that the sacred memories were carried to Babylon and the stories were retold and re-membered in a new light. Jewish people were sustained by the power of those texts. Maybe they were not willing to sing the songs of Zion as demanded by their Babylonian captors, but they were trusting enough of God's power to express heartfelt rage about

their plight. "O daughter of Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall be he who requites you with what you have done to us! Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rocks" (Psalm 137:7-9).

Spong seems obsessed by the notion that he must debunk the "theistic God" by exposing the weakness of that God by logical argument. "To attribute to God omnipotent power in our world is thus logically to assert that the God who possesses this power must have chosen not to use it. The only real alternatives to this conclusion are found in asserting that God is limited, uncaring, malevolent, or nonexistent." It is possible that if he would read the Book of Job rather than dismiss it as having an out-of-date or faulty world view, then he might see something of the limitation of logic or argumentation. He might have some appreciation that we cannot harness a God who can come to us out of a whirlwind. And it just might be that the Book of Job is the very sort of text one ought to carry into exile.

All too often, for this reviewer's taste, Spong resorts to dismissive ad hominem comments like the following: Traditional Christian theology has made Jesus into a "kind of celestial visitor from another planet, not unlike Superman or Captain Marvel!" Now that may pass as serious discussion in some places, but where I come from it gets tiresome pretty fast — and that quote comes from only page 13. Toward the end of the book, Spong talks of transforming Easter and making it a part of our postexilic future, but first he says that "the miracles of physical resurrection, the angels who roll stones away from tombs, and the bodies that appear out of nothing and disappear into thin air must be dismissed for the developed legends that they are" (191). There are more than enough such trashings salted throughout the book to keep one entertained or on edge. Take your choice. Maybe that is good shock therapy in the Diocese of Newark, but out in the hinterlands where folks are trying to make sense of life in a culture which treats their faith claims as irrelevant, it is not much fun to think about being in exile with one who insists that anyone who could imagine that the resurrection was a political, spiritual, and physical reality must be either terminally stupid or demented.

It is regrettable that Spong has chosen to speak this way because it robs him of his dignity and allows one to dismiss his thesis all too easily. In the latter part of the book, particularly in the chapters entitled "What Think Ye of Christ" and "The Future of the Church," Spong gives his imagination more room to move about. There is less anger, less defensiveness and may also be more of the voice of one who is attempting to come to terms with real exile. Spong is a man of courage and an important person in the life of the church. I wish for both our sakes he had let this book cook a little longer. Maybe then we could have had a genuine conversation. **TW**

BACK ISSUES WITH CONNECTIONS TO THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

The following back issues of *The Witness* contain articles which may relate directly to What You Do With What You Don't Believe or simply to the spirit of this month's topic.

- *Be Ye Perfect* (3/93)
- *Dialogue* (4/94)
- *Economies of sin* (3/95)
- *Fasting in Babylon* (12/96)
- *Glamour* (11/94)
- *Is it ever okay to lie?* (4/96)
- *Staying in my denomination* (10/94)

Other available back issues:

- *Africa: Come, spirit, come* (6/95)
- *Allies in Judaism* (10/97)
- *American Faces of Islam* (5/96)
- *Body wisdom* (5/95)
- *The Christian Right* (10/96)
- *Church structures and leadership* (5/97)
- *Christians and animal rights* (10/93)
- *The communion of saints* (11/93)
- *Defying presumptions: gay/lesbian Christians* (6/97)
- *Economic justice* (5/94)

- *Family reunions/family history* (7/96)
- *Holy matrimony* (12/95)
- *Hospitals: quality, access and spirit* (6/96)
- *Immigration: the flight into America* (12/97)
- *In need of a labor movement* (9/96)
- *The Left* (3/94)
- *The New Party* (11/95)
- *Northern Ireland: winds of peace* (11/97)
- *Raising kids with conscience* (3/97)
- *Resisting sprawl* (10-95)
- *Silence* (1-2/96)
- *Sports as a principality* (1-2/98)
- *Unmasking the death penalty* (9/97)
- *When the church engages rage* (12/92)
- *Witness in the world* (gen'l conv. issue, 7-8/97)
- *Women's spirituality* (7/94)

To order a back issue, send a check for \$3.00 per issue ordered to *The Witness*, 7000 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210-2872. To charge your back issue to Visa or Mastercard, call (313) 841-1967, or fax (313) 841-1956.

Living in the same era, these two people of faith tested the assumptions of their times. Both are presented as saints in Robert Ellsberg's book, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, prophets, and Witnesses For Our Time* (Crossroad, 1997).

Galileo Galilei Scientist (1564-1642)

"The surest and swiftest way to prove that the Copernican position is not opposed to Scripture would be to show with a multitude of proofs that it is true and the contrary can in no way be maintained. Thus, since no two truths can contradict one another, this and the Bible would be seen to be, of necessity, harmonious."

The scientist Galileo, who was born in Pisa in 1564, achieved his original fame through his invention of the thermometer, his experiments in physics and mechanics, and his refinement of the telescope. The telescope inspired a passion for astronomy that would lead, eventually, to his condemnation by the church. The issue was Galileo's determination to prove the theory of the Polish scientist Nicholas Copernicus (d. 1543) that the earth revolved around the sun.

Those who challenged the geocentric view of the universe had to contend not only with the ancient authority of Aristotle

Galileo fell on his knees and formally abjured any heretical opinions he may have had.



Holy Wisdom

Robert Lentz

Saints who resist prevailing norms

by Robert Ellsberg

and Ptolemy but with the evidence of the senses: the sun, after all, clearly appeared to rise and set. More importantly, however, there was the apparent evidence of many scriptural passages that referred to the motion of the sun. For the church this was the most decisive issue. The works of Copernicus and his theories — except insofar as they were presented merely as “hypotheses” — were formally condemned by the Holy Office.

Still, Galileo labored to prove that Copernicus was right. A number of scientists and even interested theologians were sympathetic to his efforts. Many of them, like Galileo, disputed the notion that the authority of Scripture should be extended to scientific matters. In the famous words of Cardinal Baronius, “The Holy Ghost intended to teach us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.” Nevertheless, Galileo was formally instructed to desist from his work on Copernican astronomy.

When he violated this injunction he was summoned to Rome by the Holy Office.

The trial of Galileo occurred in 1633. In light of his advanced age (70) and his poor health, he was treated with reasonable courtesy. Rather than the customary prison cell he was housed in a comfortable room. Nevertheless, he needed little reminder of the perils of his situation. The pope had issued a document threatening him with torture if he did not cheerfully submit to the findings of the court. In the end Galileo was condemned as “vehemently suspected of heresy” for maintaining the doctrine “which is false and contrary to the Sacred and Divine Scriptures, that the sun is the center of the world and does not move from east to west and that the earth moves and is not the center of the world.”

Galileo, who throughout his ordeal had maintained his devout faith and firm commitment to the authority of the church,

*Witnesses,
the quick and the dead*

Excerpts from *All Saints*, ©1997 by Robert Ellsberg, used with permission of The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York. Artist Robert Lentz's icons are distributed by Bridge Building Images in Burlington, Vermont, 802-864-8346.

at this point fell on his knees and formally abjured any heretical opinions he may have had. Convinced of his sincere repentance, the court spared him the sentence of imprisonment. Instead he was confined to house arrest in Florence for the rest of his life. There he continued his scientific work. But by 1638 Galileo, the man who had first seen mountains on the moon, was completely blind. On January 8, 1642, he died.

For many centuries Galileo's ordeal remained a blot on the Christian conscience. Only in the 1990s did Pope John Paul II authorize a papal commission to review his trial and condemnation. The result was a papal decree formally absolving Galileo of heresy and acknowledging the error of the church's previous judgment. The error was attributed, in part, to the church's deficient understanding, at that time, of the nature and authority of Scripture.

And so it has come to pass that the Galileo case, long a symbol of ecclesial obscurantism, has become a signal of the church's ability to recognize and repent of its historical failings. There remains a tendency to claim that the church, as it was once said of the earth, cannot move. To this the legendary words ascribed to Galileo remain appropriate. In making his abjuration, he is said to have whispered under his breath, "Nevertheless it moves."

Anne Hutchinson Puritan Prophet (1591-1643)

"It was never in my heart to slight any man, but only that man should be kept in his own place and not set in the room of God."

The Puritans who settled Massachusetts in the 1630s were motivated in part by a desire to escape religious persecution. But they did not come to create a haven of religious freedom. On the contrary, they believed their holy common-

wealth would stand as "a city on a hill," a beacon of purified Christianity in which biblical values of piety and sobriety would govern the conduct of its members. Severe punishment awaited those who fell short of these standards, a fate that was extended too to those who criticized the Puritan code. Rarely was there ever such a concentration of persons so godly, so sober, and so eager to cast the first stone. Among the most famous victims of Puritan justice was Anne Hutchinson, a mystic and healer, whose particular heresy was to maintain that it was a blessing and not a curse to be a woman.

Anne Hutchinson arrived in Boston in 1634, accompanied by her husband, William, a prosperous businessman, and their several children. They were committed Puritans, though of the two Anne was by far the more zealous. She was an unusually independent woman for her times, a skilled midwife with a particular gift for herbal treatments. She was also an avid student of the Bible, which she freely interpreted in the light of what she termed divine inspiration. Though she generally adhered to the principles of Puritan orthodoxy, she held extremely advanced notions about the equality and rights of women. These positions had put her in some tension not only with the established Church of England but also with her own coreligionists. Nevertheless, she had decided to emigrate in the belief that New England afforded greater religious freedom, as well as wider opportunities for women.

In Boston the Hutchinsons quickly achieved a prominent social position. Anne's services as a midwife were in great demand, and many a family soon found themselves in her debt. Before long she also began inviting women to join her in her home for prayer and religious conversation. In time these meetings became extremely popular, attracting as many as 80 participants a week. Hutchinson would present a text from the

Bible and offer her own commentary. Often her spiritual interpretation differed widely from the learned but legalistic reading offered from the Sunday pulpit. In particular, Hutchinson constantly challenged the standard interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve. This was a vital text for the Puritans, key to the doctrine of original sin, but it was regularly cited to assign special blame to women as the source of sin and to justify the extremely patriarchal structure of Puritan society.

Increasingly, the ministers opposed Hutchinson's meetings, ostensibly on the grounds that such "unauthorized" religious gatherings might confuse the faithful. But gradually the opposition was expressed in openly misogynistic terms. Hutchinson was a modern "Jezebel" who was infecting women with perverse and "abominable" ideas regarding their dignity and rights. Anne paid no attention to her critics. When they cited the biblical texts on the need for women to keep silent in church, she rejoined with a verse from Titus permitting that "the elder women should instruct the younger."

In 1637 she was brought to trial for her subversive views. She was 46 at the time and advanced in her 15th pregnancy. Nevertheless she was forced to stand for several days before a board of male interrogators as they tried desperately to get her to admit her secret blasphemies. They accused her of violating the fifth commandment — to "honor thy father and mother" — by encouraging dissent against the fathers of the commonwealth. It was charged that by attending her gatherings, women were being tempted to neglect the care of their own families. ... Anne was held in prison during the cold winter months. Her family and a stream of sympathizers continued to visit her, and to them she continued freely to impart her spiritual teaching. In the spring she was banished from the commonwealth along with her youngest children. **TW**

Witness praise

GOT SAMPLE IN MAIL — LOVED the breadth, depth & radicality — multiracialness.

Bruce B. Schultz
New Orleans, LA

I THINK YOUR MAGAZINE is wonderful, like no other. The way you cover the problems, issues, and topics you take up is refreshing and enlightening. I admire the faith that's there in the words and between the lines.

Gerard Borstel
Washington D.C.

MY SISTER GAVE ME A GIFT subscription for the past two years. She couldn't this year 1998, and I find reading/reflecting on the topics presented too vital to even consider not subscribing. P.S. My Mom insists on taking my old copies & she won't give them back.

Anne B. Shaw
Adelphi, MD

I HAVE BEEN RECEIVING over the years two periodicals: *The Witness* and a small paper from Cambridge, Mass. called *Peacework*. Both *The Witness* and *Peacework* have been my inspiration, "keeping me going." I am 85 years old,

work in a soup kitchen and for the past five or six years have worked on the street with the poor and the homeless. I belong to the Catholic Workers movement. We opened a C.W. house on Dorothy Day's birthday last year, 1997. Fred Boehner and his wife, Diana Counay, have done wonders here for the poor. Fred was here on Thursday and left with his favorite gift. I pass all my *Witnesses* on to him for Emmaus House and they all love *The Witness* and appreciate my donation

William D. McGarry
Albany NY

Fundraising appeal

THE WITNESS IS AN IMPORTANT magazine and remains an important part of our reading. We are glad to share a bit of our surplus cash (indeed some from investments) with you. We were worried that Mr. Theuner's letter was addressed to the president of General Motors, not to us. However, certainly we benefit from the American boom, even though as overseas missionaries we may not have quite as much of the cake as some do.

Judy and John Gay
Lesotho, South Africa

Grieving rituals

YOU GRACIOUSLY SENT ME A SAMPLE copy of *The Witness* [3/97]. Being that the religious community of women that I belong to is going through a painful downsizing

decision to leave our beautiful Motherhouse and build a smaller and more practical home, your March 1997 issue on grieving and letting go was very appropriate. Your magazine was packed with insightful and inspirational articles.

Sr. Ben Leising, O.S.F.
Williamsville, NY

Advent letter

THANKS FOR INCLUDING ME among those to whom you have mailed your *Witness* Advent letter.

I am both fascinated and pleased that this monthly analysis and challenge is one I helped move along its way some years back. *The Witness* remains the principal voice within our church which relates our faith to the issues of today's social order.

Please extend my good wishes and congratulations to everyone on the staff.

John Harris Burt
Marquette, MI

INTERESTING ADVENT LETTER: Board members' thoughts and agendas full of "stimuli": Bishop Shimpfky — poverty of ... worshiped scarcity"? A subject to be pursued?? Or did he have a specific referent to the resources of *The Witness*?

"Keep the watch."

Pam Coswell
Watertown, NY

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