

The Witness

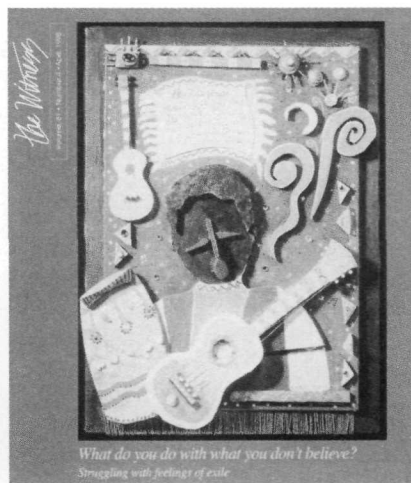
Volume 81 • Number 7/8 • July/August, 1998

*Trickster spirit:
a paradigm for social action?*



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

THE APRIL ISSUE of *The Witness* is wonderful. I did not have a lot of time when I picked it up to start reading so I started at the back where the shorter items are. I was hooked by the time I finished reading the interview with Verna Dozier. The whole issue is bold, courageous and much needed for the Episco-



pal Church at this time. I love the concept of ambiguity being the essence of Faith! Right on!

I don't want to give up my issue — which I usually take to our parish library to be read by others. So I will buy another.

Thanks for keeping our minds open.

**Judy Yeakel
Langley, WA**

AS AN ATHEIST, I have subscribed to *The Witness* because of its position on peace and justice issues, and its articles in these areas that are hard to find elsewhere. I was particularly pleased to find an interview with one of my favorite authors and co-anarchists, Ursula LeGuin.

Jane Slaughter did an excellent job of



Classifieds

Working for peace in Ireland

Corrymeela is a Christian Community working for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Founded in 1965, Corrymeela works with Youth, School, Church and Community groups bringing people of all ages and traditions together. To become a "Friend of Corrymeela" or for information contact: Corrymeela Community, 8 Upper Crescent, Belfast, N. Ireland, BT7 1NT. Phone 011 44 1232 325008. Fax 011 44 1232 315385. E-mail <belfast@corrymeela.org.uk> Web site www.corrymeela.org.uk.

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.

AFSC staff openings

The American Friends Service Committee maintains a list of current staff openings on its home page: <<http://www.afsc.org>>.

Arun Gandhi at Kanuga

Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mohandas K. Mahatma Gandhi, will lead a conference entitled A Garland Instead of Ashes: Nonviolence in the Midst of Violence, September 14-17 at Kanuga. Explore the secrets and successes of nonviolence in workshops led by experienced staff. Kanuga Conferences, PO Box 250, Hendersonville NC 28793; 828-692-9136; kanuga@ecunet.org; www.kanuga.org

N. Michigan bishop search

The Discernment Committee for the election of the Bishop of the Diocese of Northern Michigan will be accepting candidates' names for the position of bishop between June 15 and August 15, 1998. Nominations must be submitted on a prescribed form which may be obtained by calling the Diocesan Office (800-236-0087). Names may be submitted by the candidates themselves or by others.

Persons submitting the names of others must confirm their willingness to be candidates. All candidates who enter the process will be asked at a later date to submit resumes and DCO profiles and to complete a questionnaire. To assure all candidates are treated equitably, no nominations will be accepted after August 15.

The Diocese of Northern Michigan has been on the forefront of ministry development, attracting the attention of the Anglican Communion. We are a rural diocese of 30 congregations in the beautiful Upper Peninsula of Michigan. We seek candidates who will understand, accept, and respect the diversity of congregations in Northern Michigan in their development of baptismal ministry and will provide visionary leadership embracing mutual ministry (total ministry). All baptized Episcopalians are encouraged to apply.

Copies of the Diocesan Profile are available from the Diocesan Office. To request a copy, call or write. All correspondence should be addressed to: Discernment Committee to Elect a Bishop, Diocese of Northern Michigan, 131 E. Ridge St.; Marquette, MI 49855.

Classifieds

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

drawing out Ms. LeGuin and her credo. The result is a well-rounded portrait of a humanitarian, a thinker and a strong advocate for equality and justice. Her book, *The Dispossessed*, a science-fiction model of anarchism, remains one of my all-time favorites.

Thank you. It proves once again that my subscription money and my reading time are well-spent.

Suzanne Astisdel
Detroit, MI

THE LATEST ISSUE (April) alone was worth a year's subscription.

It was fantastic!

Alice Allen
Mashpee, MA

JUST A YELP at the wrong by-line (Richard not Robert Thieme) on *A Sacred Canopy of Belief* on p.6 of *The Witness* that arrived this morning.

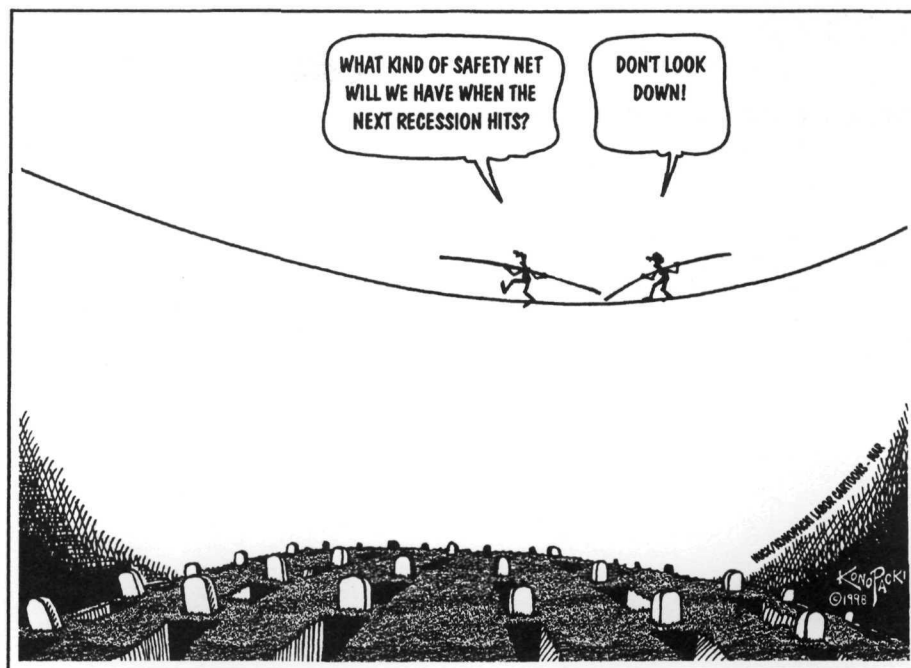
More substantively, a great editing job, and more than that, the issue had the impact of cool fresh air. What a terrific variety of POVs all "coming from the same place." Made me very much want to (1) do more for *The Witness* and (2) send you a check for a subscription, which I will. Lisa Gayle's article went straight to the depths of my heart, as I am a "clarified" Jew who was an Episcopal priest for 16 years and immersed in that world for 20 before leaving 4+ years ago to pursue this new vocation. I have wandered so often into theme parks of "disneyland religion," designed to house imaginary cartoon characters, run smoothly, and exclude anything that looks like "reality," I had almost forgotten that pockets of possibility and promise like *The Witness* still allow our voices to coalesce ...

Richard Thieme
Milwaukee, WI

<http://www.thiemeworks.com>

HAVING NOT READ *The Witness* in a long while, I was delighted to pick up a copy recently [4/98].

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann may be right that the Big Bang isn't a very appealing creation myth (although Matthew Fox has restored some sense of awe and wonder to it), but I wonder if you dislike dinosaurs because you have never heard about the woman who



started the first dinosaur craze. Mary Anning (Lyne Regis, 1799-1847) made three of the greatest paleontological finds of all time before she had turned 30. Though a poor dissenter, she formed friendships with well-off Anglicans who were clerics, fossil collectors and geologists and eventually joined the Church of England herself. Though unschooled, she helped shape the development of science. Though she had a deep faith which helped her to do difficult and dangerous work, her discoveries unsettled the beliefs of others. Though she could not vote herself, her campaigning for a local Reform candidate helped to bring down a corrupt Tory political machine.

I first started looking for books about Anning while I was teaching fours and fives at the Riverside Church Weekday School where the tykes rekindled my own fascination with prehistoric creatures. Not finding one, I gradually fell into writing her biography myself, which is now nearly completed. Festivities are being planned for 1999 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of her birth.

Thomas W. Goodhue
Brightwaters, NY

[Ed. Note: Mary Anning sounds wonder-

ful, although knowing of her work doesn't change my impression that dinosaurs are too big, too old and too uncertain to be meaningful except as myth.]

I THOUGHT I HAD FOUND kindred spirits when I subscribed to *Witness*, but when I opened my April issue I could not believe my eyes. The lead article, "Refashioning Our Faith," sounded so much like the anti-intellectual arguments of some of my fundamentalist "creationist" friends that I was sure I would find "April Fool" at the end, but as I read on I realized that the "liberal" label for the magazine did not necessarily include biblical interpretation.

I belong to a Presbyterian church that welcomes theological diversity, and so far the bonds of friendship and shared work have held. We teach that the Bible includes poetry and prose, history and stories, doctrine and experience, and that we should approach scripture with "literary and historical understanding," as our Confession of 1967 says. That does not solve all the problems, however, as there is an element of mystery in personal and corporate spiritual experience. Some members interpret the virgin birth, the ascension

letters continued on back page

The Witness

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

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.

The editor whose editorial appears on page 5 crafted this issue.

*Cover: Eternal Tree by Elly
Simmons. Available from the
Syracuse Cultural Workers,
catalogues are \$1, 317-474-1132.*

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Coyote wants more

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

We're in trouble. In case you hadn't noticed.

The myth is that things have never been so good, we're all in the stock market, the dream is in reach.

But a good friend, Deb Choly, who has sued the state over prison conditions in Michigan, was updating us on changes (all more proscriptive) when she said, "I believe that with GATT and NAFTA we've just moved into warp speed and we're about to enter hyper space of global capitalism where no local laws that protect workers or the environment will have any effect."

Meanwhile the activities of people of faith seem pretty tame and predictable.

We write checks, write letters to the editor, sign petitions, join boycotts, participate in vigils, occasionally go to jail. These activities don't seem, these days, to have the edge needed to really challenge the powers.

Yet, it's only getting harder to get the media to cover critical issues, so public discourse is extremely shallow. Even though a rabbi, a Baptist pastor, several bishops and a gaggle of politicians spent a day trying to work through solutions that might put some 2,000 people back to work and end the Detroit newspaper strike that is dividing the community, no media outlet saw fit to cover it. It makes you crazy to see all this good-will and hard work thwarted. But increasingly the media are owned by the same handful of conglomerates, so whether you approach TV or radio reporters, newspapers or book publishers, the same corporate types

make the final decisions.

We're deep into the technological world that George Orwell predicted in 1984 in which no one has any privacy or independence. We are now accustomed to video camera surveillance everywhere from the gas station to store dressing rooms. Outdoor microphones that catch seemingly private conversations are the norm. And even your innermost thoughts posted by email are vulnerable to interception.

So, what do people of goodwill do? The answer may be simple.

Maybe we stop being so earnest, stop trusting that if we just play by the rules, it will all come out right and instead engage in periodic mischief!

Part of the charm of the middle class is its faith in the system. Now and then it has been able to call the system to account by sheer faith (as in the aftermath of Watergate). Yet you've got to wonder if it will be profitable to send Andy Griffith and Aunt Bea up against gun manufacturers, media conglomerates and corporations with record-breaking profits that don't hesitate to throw workers into chaos as they relocate in Mexico.

I'd trade 10 Andy Griffiths for one Michael Moore any day (p.19). Moore, who rose to national fame with his film *Roger & Me*, doesn't fight with traditional middle class tools. He doesn't just write letters, start boycotts, speak out in church basements or even practice civil disobedience. He is altogether less predictable and his unconventional arrogance takes viewers by storm, cracking open the absurdity of the corporate crime and corporate welfare that make middle- and working-class Americans destitute. He also reveals the cost of downsizing — the

despair, the substance abuse, the broken families, the suicides. And, somehow, he also makes us laugh.

It's Moore's brand of activism that I want to recommend. It's time that our activism become less deliberate and more quirky. We need the energy of the trickster who uses lies to reveal truth, appetite to bait, vulgarity to appall, wit to entrap.

Lewis Hyde in his best-selling *Trickster Makes this World* suggests the trickster is essential to culture — when the rules and power arrangements have become rigid, we need people from the margins to disrupt the order, to startle us into seeing the possibility of other arrangements (p. 37)

Arguably, Jesus is just such a person. Both Carole Fontaine (p. 8) and Harvey Cox (p. 12) reveal ways that biblical figures, and even God, have acted as tricksters.

"[Trickster's space is] ruled by the disarming charm of the very young child," Hyde writes. "It is a traveler's space where everything is on the road, cut loose from any clear locale. Here the citizens walk their livestock backward and speak a weird reversing language."

Fortunately Jesus can accompany us into trickster territory — he speaks from the margin and the crossroad. He travels light. He varies his responses — sometimes healing, sometimes rebuking, sometimes fleeing. He takes authority yet refuses to defend it with violence. And he teaches a third way, a way to resist oppression without taking up arms. Carole Fontaine says that when humanity will not listen and has put God in a box, God too will resort to trickster methods. **TW**

editor's note

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

When the work of your heart becomes surveillance art

by George Waldman

My reaction was emotional when the young woman at my front door handed me the subpoena. But I took it gently and said “thank you.” She seemed to expect more, or maybe less, as she paused for a moment and finally looked me dead in the eyeballs before turning away.

Then it sunk in what had come to me, and I felt the same bewilderment and anger I felt about 1,000 days ago in July 1995 when one of the newspapers in Detroit unilaterally canceled a contract with my sister labor unit, forcing all unions connected to go out on strike.

Leaders of both sides had left us with few options. The editor and publisher of *The Detroit News* announced he would smash the unions. Those who wanted to return would have to go crawling back, he said. I felt the same anger four days before Christmas in 1996 when I got a letter telling me I was fired for taking part in a civil disobedience rally. As a colleague, also fired, said, “It was just mean what they did.”

Now the companies subpoena all the photographic work I have done since the strike began. They own all the photography I did with them before the strike. Now they want all I have been able to do since. Maybe they want my work to see if

there are images to support the firings of others, or to support an effort now in the courts to shut down the tiny strike paper — whose photography department I coordinate — because they complain it “unfairly competes.”



George Waldman's photos of strike activities, like this Labor Day sit-in, are being seized as evidence against strikers.

The legal mysteries recall a commitment voiced by the chief executive officer of Detroit Newspapers more than two years ago: to keep the issues in court until all the strikers have either left town or died.

But this new tactic truly is bewildering. Strong media outlets in this country have fought for years to avoid subpoenas that have “a chilling effect” on the ability to gather news from people who might fear retribution. Journalists have gone to jail on contempt charges rather than give up evidence that law enforcement agen-

cies or those involved in civil suits could have found in other ways. To avoid a subpoena, an editor at my own newspaper, the *Detroit Free Press*, once told a fellow photographer to leave town for a few days, check into a motel somewhere and put it on an expense account.

Once again, the actions of these newspapers have not conformed to the principles of the profession or their own past policies and previous editorials. I tried to avoid this subpoena, warned that it was coming. But the young woman who came to the door looked so much like a friend of my son.

At some point, I'll have to decide if I should ignore it and risk going to jail. For now, I'll go along with the union-appointed attorney. She says three other photographers and I should base our objection to the subpoenas on “proprietary rights.” I'm not a business person; I don't know what that means. I can't find advice from anyone who knows First Amendment rights. Most of them work for the corporations.

I'll go along with the “proprietary rights” argument through the preliminaries, which could take forever, with objections and appeals. And if it comes to going to jail?

Could that happen in this legal world? My spouse of 32 years, who understands long-term trials, says, “Just keep it in the courts until they all have left town or died.”

TW

George Waldman is a locked-out photographer from *The Detroit Free Press* and the publisher of *Voices of the Strike*, a collection of photographs and essays by locked-out workers. *Voices of the Strike* (\$25) is available by calling 313-964-5655. This article first appeared in the *Detroit Sunday Journal*.

In July 1995, six unions representing more than 2,000 workers went on strike against the Detroit Newspapers (DN), the company that manages *The Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press*. Despite a National Labor Relations Board ruling that the DN engaged in unfair labor practices and despite the unions' offer to return to work, the company continues to lock workers out.

A Continuing Saga

by Leslie A. Reese

a continuing saga
this is a continuing saga
this is a song that continues/this is a song loved by
spring:
This is the slippery-backed happy rascal scandalizing
summer
this is a continuing saga
this is the thing that keeps going around in circles
this is the whirlpool/this is the fool/this is the ritual/this
is the medicine
scooping out your guts and working its toil and pain
in autumn
this is that song again/this is that poem again
this is your toenails growing some more

this is you crying again
this is the continuing saga
this is the part where you cry
this is the part where you want to die/live forever
speaking the language of winter
so you won't have to do
this, again is a song that continues
the continuing saga
the thing that keeps going around in circles
this is the butterfly/this is the caterpillar/this is 18 legs
turned into wings
this is the way we chop the wood/this is the way we eat
the food
this is the way we reap our good/this is what we'd
know if we could

this is the medicine
this is the lovemaking
this is the lovetaking
this is the undertaking
this is the overcoming

this is the story that continues to unfold

this is the needle skipping on your favorite part of the tune
this is somebody baying at the moon
this is this/that is that

this is

this is
this is

the continuing saga
this is poor people who are poor/rich people who are
poor
poor people who are rich
this
is rich this is rich

this is a spiritual/this is that poem again
this is your life again/this is your strife again
this is your knife again/this is your life again

this is what's my line?

this, again, is a song that continues
this is repetitious for no reason again
this is what you already know
this is the thing that keeps going around in circles
this is the medicine that scoops out your guts again
"this is the medicine that heals you"
this is the aftertaste

this is the part where you start crying
this is the part where you start crying
this is the part where you start dying
this is the part where I stop lying

this is the part where I start looking for a dictionary
this is when I need my thesaurus

this is my going off again

this is your life again
this is the song that continues to continue

this is when I go in search of musicians
this is when I go looking for sex
this is when I need some tylenol
this is when I start writing my bible
this is when you start living your bible
this is the part where you cry

this is the part where you cry

this is the part that laughs

this is

this is

this is

the

continuing.....
sagaaaaaaaaa.....

— included in *Upside Down Tapestry* (Broadside Press, Detroit 1987).

Poetry

Tricksters in the Bible

by Carole R. Fontaine

*trickster tumbles
at the edge of the world:
his face is set
toward the wilds,

but where he passes
cultures rise

women trick
inside the tent,
under the cover
of veils or night,
and on their backs
culture thrives*

This little poem, which arose spontaneously out of the present writer's "scholarly" investigation of trickster behavior in the Bible (*Semeia* 42 (1988):84-102) nicely sums up our problems with the notion of biblical tricksters. We need them, apparently, for these ambivalent ne'er-do-wells always seem to be at their comical worst just when a culture is facing new territory and breaking new ground. On the other hand, we don't particularly care for being the target of their culture-making jokes. Even worse, given the exalted place which Holy Scripture holds in the life and practice of the Church and Synagogue, it is natural to be just a bit alarmed when literary critics start suggesting that not only is tricky conduct apparent in the

Bible, it is sometimes highly valued and even becomes a hallmark of God's interactions with communities that can be as hard of hearing as they are hard of heart. Is the Bible really a "divine comedy" of errors, reversals and restorations? Should we be laughing? That hardly seems appropriate, given the gravity of the existential questions the Bible poses—but maybe, just maybe, we will discover at the end that the joke really is on us!

Modern readers in the U.S. are probably more familiar with the paradigm of the "trickster," that deadly serious hero of lighthearted tales from West African and Native American cultures, than they might think. From Wile E. Coyote of the "Road-Runner" cartoon cycle to the ebullient Kramer on *Seinfeld*, we are used to the antics of these characters

who, full of schemes for trapping others, seem to wind up repeatedly falling into their own snares. From our kindergarten days of Uncle Remus stories, with B'rer Rabbit and B'rer Fox, we learn to laugh heartily at the tricksters as they amuse us with their cunning and artful dodges. Always trying to "get ahead" or "beat the odds," they go out of the frying pan and into the fire. Their machinations are stock elements in our comedies. Indigent peoples made stories out of the

keenly observed tricksters of nature, and in the mirror of those tales, saw a human—and a divine—reflection. Like the kitten going head-first into the paper bag to hide, the animal tricksters forget that even though they cannot see us, we can still see them ... and therein lies the joke! We laugh appropriately, but we seldom think of our own behaviors in justice-making and Kingdom-bringing as a variation on this old theme. But perhaps we should.

We have been in the habit in our use of the Bible in religious education or worship contexts of highlighting the morally uplifting, spiritually inspiring elements within our received tradition. We want to

*Those who find themselves
disadvantaged, on the
"outside," make use of
trickery and other forms
of manipulative behavior
(like gossip, misinformation,
nagging, playing possum,
distractions and deceptions)
because they do not have
what sociologists refer to as
"assigned power."*

be faithful like Abraham (Gen. 22 is good behavior, for which one should be rewarded?!), we want to be favored like David (the Philistine mercenary??), or chosen like Jacob (the "Heel-Grabber"?). We don't always stop to examine more closely the behaviors of our "heroes of faith": Abraham bluffing assorted rulers into thinking Sarah is his

sister to save his own skin, or David's trickery regarding the House of Saul or Uriah the Hittite, and of course, what preacher or teacher can forget (though we might like to!) Jacob the Trickster? Jacob tricking Esau into selling his birthright for a dish of lentil stew; Jacob conning his handicapped father into giving him his brother's blessing; Jacob cozened by father-in-law Laban into bedding the wrong bride; Jacob struggling with a divine entity by night, to walk away "chosen" and

Carole R. Fontaine is professor of Hebrew Scriptures at Andover Newton Theological School and co-editor of *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods, Strategies* (with Athalya Brenner). Artist **Meinrad Craighead's** work appears in *Woman Word: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter* by Miriam Therese Winter (Crossroad, 1990).

newly named “Israel”—but limping (so this is “chosen”?!), and later tricked by his own children, just as he tricked his father. Trickery is apparently a common commodity for those paradoxical figures who wind up “getting the job done,” even in Holy Writ. But wait: Who is that laughing behind the tent flap? Another trickster, of course!

In fact, the trickster archetype found in the Bible is a necessary element if the fulcrum of worldly power is to shift toward justice. In a world where the “first-born” is truly first: invariably blessed, protected, guaranteed inheritor of all that there is, the presence of the trickster upsets the apple-cart of the status quo. It is not the first son who will inherit the promise in Genesis, nor, in the relentlessly patriarchal world of the ancestors, is it always Father who knows Best. Significantly, women — mothers, to be more precise! — are often the ones who Arrange Things. They see to it that the “correct” child is the one to carry the promise forward, violating the status expectations of the narrative and social world in which these stories were born. It is no wonder that little, late-comer nation Israel envisioned itself as the heir of second-born leaders and slaves set free. Such tricky reversals are no less than a major theme in the biblical story: potent promises gone awry into the hands of the outsiders instead of colluding in the accumulation of power for the elite. What kind of God favors slaves over chariots (Ex. 15), a widow over a general (Judg. 5), an old woman over a nubile young co-wife (Gen. 21), a mother’s scheme over a father’s decree (Gen. 27), a small shepherd over a mighty champion (1 Sam. 17)? The Hebrew Bible’s God, that’s Who.

Biblical scholars and preachers of other eras, times when only the (white, male,

educated) elite were allowed the official power to interpret our sacred texts, found the trickster behavior of God & Friends to be ... well, somewhat disreputable, to be explained away as “primitive” or “sinful,” or better yet, “a Mystery.” How dare the text go so far out of its way to authorize the underdogs, misfits, and throw-aways of antiquity?! Such shameful be-



Pharaoh's Daughter

Meinrad Craighead

havior might be expected of women and slaves, perhaps: These persons of lower rank, after all, have not been trained to uphold the code of male honor which is the stock-in-trade of the invested, yet inviolable elite. Rachel bargains away a night with her husband to her sister in her quest for a successful pregnancy and later tricks her father when she steals his household gods (Gen. 30-31). The midwives in Egypt who served the Hebrew slave population trick the mighty Pharaoh on his throne by suggesting that female biology accounts for their inability to carry out the ruler’s plan of genocide. Miriam tricks Pharaoh’s daughter into hiring Moses’ own birth-mother to be his wet nurse; Bithiyah, as tradition has named this daughter of the royal house, turns right around and tricks her father by rais-

ing Moses as her own. Later, Zipporah tricks God with the sight of blood from her son’s (husband’s?!) emergency circumcision (Ex. 1-4).

After all this, are we really surprised when it turns out in the Christian Scriptures that a carpenter is king, and death is not the final word God speaks to a world beset by tragic injustices and everyday betrayals? In some ways, it has been ordained from “In the Beginning” that such strategic reversals of fortune would be known in Israel not as signs of a world gone mad, but as typical of divine intervention. Prophets left holding the bag when the Holy One goes all soft and compassionate, forgiving the wicked yet again, may lament this sort of divine quirkiness, but to the lost, the broken and the suffering, it looks rather different. Yes, it may well turn out that the “Day of the Lord,” a festival of national triumph built on the backs of a populace paying for the grand lifestyle of its rich and famous, will be a day of dismay, a veritable Feast of Fools where those at the top tumble

to the bottom, and God does the unexpected.

Now, it should be noted that it is not only Israel’s God who displays the traits of a trickster among the divine beings known to the ancient Near East. From Sumer to Egypt, deities locked in struggles with one another resort to deceptive behaviors when they must. Inanna tricks Enki to steal away wisdom for her city; Isis tricks Amon-Re to learn a cure for snakebite which she teaches to humanity; the Storm-God tricks the Dragon whose greed threatens fertility. These motifs are, in many cases, a simple function of the polytheistic world-view of Israel’s neighbors: Those with less clout will repeatedly challenge those with more, in order to equalize or reverse the flow of energies that constitute power, be it cos-

mological, national or personal. Those who find themselves disadvantaged, on the “outside,” in the margins as it were, make use of trickery and other forms of manipulative behavior (like gossip, misinformation, nagging, playing possum, distractions and deceptions) because they do not have what sociologists refer to as “assigned power.” Assigned power is just that: assigned (usually by the elite in favor of the elite), but masquerading as divinely ordained, cosmically correct and unquestionably true — in short, an unsailable “given.” Those who challenge such power arrangements, divine or human, can wind up in personal “hot water” (the Greek Prometheus comes to mind), to be sure — but the very risks they take in their trickery move their special groups forward culturally to inhabit a new level of integration. The trickster exists to redistribute power: From the Snake who Beguiles to the Lamb who Redeems, readers of the Bible watch the interplay of potencies move from the “Haves” to the “Have-Nots.” The gifts of consciousness (“they knew that they were naked ...”), freedom, or salvation arrive, more often than not, through the comic, cosmic juggling of such masters of sleight-of-hand.

So the biblical God is not unique in “his” (another trick?!) trickster-hood; rather it is something of a family trait in the world out of which those stories grew. If Israel’s God is not engaging in trickery because He has to in order to defeat divine rivals (because, as Second Isaiah is so fond of telling us, He has none), then just what is going on in the characterization of God as trickster? The biblical trickster figure is often in profound solidarity with those whom power has passed by, and allows us to see a divine spark in the “view from below.” Rather than routinely promoting the prospects of the favored elite (no matter what the Books of Samuel and Kings would have us believe), this deity seems to take real plea-

sure in overturning our expectations.

Not driven to trickery by the assaults of more powerful gods nor exhibiting it as a kind of “evil inclination” personality trait, the Holy One invites our participation in cosmic laughter and urges us toward reorganizing our strengths, dreams and energies toward a more wholesome form of social organization.

*When the power-brokers
simply will not listen,
when the center forgets
the margin — well then,
a trick may be in order.*

In literary and theological terms, it may be that we are witnessing in the trickster archetype an intense struggle for meaning in these textual “glitches” in the transfer of power, the shadow of fiercely opposed groups with competing goals and understandings of the character of God. When the power-brokers simply will not listen, when the center forgets the margin — well then, a trick may be in

order: There is a baby floating in those rushes, a woman judge in charge of an all-volunteer army of subsistence farmers, a “lying spirit” in the prophet’s mouth (1 Kings 22:22), a message concealed in the ways of the ant and eagle (Prov. 6:6; 30:19).

If “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all,” as the rich wise man complains (Ecc. 9:11)—well, who made the world that way, and is it such a bad thing after all?

“Time and chance,” the very unpredictability of a God who bends low and stands the certainties of the world on their heads, such things are the signs of the Great Trickster among us. It is no wonder we tremble in fear at the coming of such a One! The gift of the power of laughing at our own frustrated expectations may be greatest trick of all. When we join in the joke, paradise is regained. We can finally let go of our own notions of pride and precedence, take our place in the game and exit laughing. **TW**

Suggestions for further reading

Nancy R. Bowen, “Can God be Trusted? Confronting the Deceptive God.” Pp. 354-65 in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (FCB 8; Sheffield, U. K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

Claudia Camp, “Wise and Strange: An Interpretation of the Female Imagery in Proverbs in Light of Trickster Mythology.” *Semeia* 42 (1988): 14-36.

Carole R. Fontaine, “The Deceptive Goddess in Ancient Near Eastern Myth: Inanna and Inarash.” *Semeia* 42 (1988): 84-102.

Esther Fuchs, “Who Is Hiding the Truth? Deceptive Women and Biblical

Androcentrism.” Pp. 137-44 in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1985).

Ronald Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch: the Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel* (Decatur, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1987).

W. J. Hynes and W. G. Doty, eds., *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts and Criticisms* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1993).

Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

Schubert's unmanaged symphony

A story circulating on the Internet tells of a managed care company president who was given a ticket for a performance of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. Since she was unable to go, she gave the ticket to one of her managed care reviewers. The next morning she asked him how he had enjoyed it. She was handed a formal memorandum which read as follows:

1. For a considerable period, the oboe players had nothing to do. Their number should be reduced, and their work spread over the whole orchestra, avoiding peaks of inactivity.

2. All 12 violins were playing identical notes. This seems an unneeded duplication, and the staff of this section should be cut. If a volume of sound is really required, this could be accomplished with the use of an amplifier.

3. Much effort was involved in playing the 16th notes. This appears to be an excessive refinement, and it is recommended that all notes be rounded up to the nearest 8th note. If this were done it would be possible to use paraprofessionals instead of experienced musicians.

4. No useful purpose is served by repeating with horns the passage that has already been handled by the strings. If all such redundant passages were eliminated then the concert could be reduced from two hours to 20 minutes.

5. The symphony had two movements. If Mr. Schubert didn't achieve his musical goals by the end of the first movement, then he should have stopped there. The second movement is unnecessary and should be cut.

In light of the above, one can only conclude that had Mr. Schubert given attention to these matters, he probably would have had time to finish the symphony.

The "other time"

"We have history but not myth. Only

through art do most people find it. Listening to music, you enter the other time. Music makes its own time, literally. When you read a novel, you are living in another time. All arts create time outside of time, which is not clock-time. It is, in a sense, dreamtime.

"What's on the wrong track is television, the mindless babble that people leave on and sort of semi-watch. It doesn't take them into any other time; it just cuts up present time into these weird little sections interspersed with advertisements. Children's Saturday morning television makes my hair stand on end. It's a segmentation and a fragmentation of time."

Ursula K. LeGuin,
Parabola, Spring 1998

Murder linked to human rights advocacy

Death threats to associates of Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedera, the Roman Catholic bishop who was murdered April 26 in Guatemala City, are confirming the widespread conviction that the killing was politically motivated. Gerardi was bludgeoned to death in his garage just 48 hours after he presented the Recovery of the Historic Memory (REMHI) human rights report in the Cathedral.

The REMHI report documented over 55,000 human rights violations during the armed conflict and attributed responsibility for almost 80 percent of those to the Guatemalan armed forces. Since Gerardi's death, threats have been reported by another bishop and a priest who worked with Gerardi, two members of REMHI's forensic anthropology team and other human rights workers.

Gandhi's legacy gone?

India's decision to become a nuclear power "finally laid to rest" the legacy of Mohandas K. Gandhi, according to a June 1 editorial by Jonathan Schell in *The Nation*.

"India's act is the culmination of a growing conflict that Gandhi worked vainly to contain from his earliest days as an activist: the hostility between the Hindus and Muslims of South Asia," Schell writes. "That conflict is unique for having taken virtually every form that human conflict can take ... All that remains is nuclear war itself — something that people who know the region say may be more likely than it was between the Soviet Union and the U.S."

Schell reports Gandhi's response to the atomic destruction of Hiroshima: "The moral to be legitimately drawn from the supreme tragedy of the bomb is that it will not be destroyed by counter-bombs even as violence cannot be by counter-violence. ... Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred."

Schell comments, "The prophet is still honored, but not anymore, it appears, in his own country."

Peace Tax Fund

Revisions to the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Act (HR 2660) have addressed Treasury objections based on added administrative costs and reluctance to allow taxpayers to designate where their taxes will be allocated. The bill allows the Treasury to specify where the moneys are spent, so long as they are not used for military purposes. Also, the federal Joint Committee on taxation has certified that the Fund would likely increase revenues to the Treasury rather than add costs. To voice support for the bill, phone the White House at 202-456-1414, fax 202-456-2461 or <president@whitehouse.gov>.

Short takes

Harlequin Christ

by Harvey Cox

One of the earliest representations of Christ in Christian art depicts a crucified human figure with the head of an ass. For years experts have disputed what it means. Some think it may be an arcane sign, others a cruel parody. Either could be the case. But it might also be true that those catacomb Christians had a deeper sense of the comic absurdity of their position than we think they did. A wretched band of slaves, derelicts, and square pegs, they must have sensed occasionally how ludicrous their claims appeared. They knew they were "fools for Christ," but also claimed that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of humanity. Christ himself for them must have been something of a holy fool.

Furthermore, even in the biblical portrait of Christ there are elements that can easily suggest clown symbols. Like the jester, Christ defies custom and scorns crowned heads. Like a wandering troubadour, he has no place to lay his head. Like the clown in the circus parade, he satirizes existing authority by riding into town replete with regal pageantry when he has no earthly power. Like a minstrel, he frequents dinners and parties. At the end he is costumed by his enemies in a mocking caricature of royal paraphernalia. He is crucified amidst taunts with a sign over his head that lampoons his laughable claim.

The symbol of Christ the clown seems eminently right for the earliest period of

Christian history. It could not persist, however, when the church's view of itself moved from the ridiculous to the sublime. What place is there for caricature when the church's regal vestments are taken seriously? When its crowns and scepters are made of real gold instead of thorns and wood? A church that actually holds power and reigns has little capacity for self-caricature or irony. So during most of the centuries of Christendom, with an exception here and there, the image of Christ the clown disappeared, at least officially. The carnival spirit persisted in the medieval street skits and morality plays. Though the hierarchy often disappeared, the comic gait, with its suggestion of ambivalence and self-parody, never completely disappeared. It simply went underground. Only now, in our secularized, post-Christian era, is it able to emerge again. A weak, even ridiculous church, somehow peculiarly at odds with the ruling assumptions of its day, can once again appreciate the harlequinesque Christ. His pathos, his weakness, his irony.

Our whole relation to Christ, and to the whole of existence for that matter, is one of conscious play and comic equivocation. Only by assuming a playful attitude toward our religious tradition can we possibly make any sense of it. Only by learning to laugh at the hopelessness around us can we touch the hem of hope. Christ the clown signifies our playful appreciation of the past and our comic refusal to accept the specter of inevitabil-

ity in the future. He is the incarnation of festivity and fantasy.

Faith as play

For us the problem is how to reconcile a high degree of critical self-consciousness with a burning desire for experience, which is not spoiled by too much self-analysis. The popularization of social science has made us all painfully aware of the sources of our feelings and ideas. Yet we also yearn for joyful immediacy. We want to believe but we are unable. We want to be coolly sophisticated yet not lose the simple directness we think is vital in human life. Is such a posture possible?

Christ the harlequin, the man of sorrows in the foolscap, symbolizes just this

A weak, even ridiculous church, somehow peculiarly at odds with the ruling assumptions of its day, can once again appreciate the harlequinesque Christ.

combination of merriment and seriousness. Henri Bergson in his famous essay on laughter said that a situation is invariably comic if it belongs simultaneously to two independent series of

events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time. The problem is this: As sophisticated and self-critical postmoderns, we know our religious symbols are human phenomena. We are often bored with them. We know our beliefs are historically conditioned and our faith influenced by social factors galore. We are no longer even interested in doubting them. The coming of Christ the harlequin means, however, that symbols, belief, and faith need not simply be jettisoned. That was the simple-minded critical response of an earlier generation, one that had not yet uncovered for itself the playful element even in such a serious thing as faith. Our ability to laugh while praying is an invaluable gift. It is not understood either

Adapted by permission of the publisher from *Fest of Fools*, Harvard Univ. Press, © 1969 by Harvey Cox. Artist **Michael Bergt** lives in Santa Fe, N.M.

by the sober believers or by the even more sober atheists among us.

Christ the harlequin is the joke in the middle of the prayer. Even better, perhaps, he is the prayer as joke or the joke as prayer. He is the spirit of play in a world of calculated utilitarian seriousness. It is a spirit for which Christianity, ironically enough, has somehow become one of the few remaining spokespersons and guardians. In the U.S., a land of puritan Protestantism and jansenist Catholicism, this comes as a surprise. But it should not be as surprising as all that. The close kinship of play and religion is something scholars have been uncovering for some years now.

Johan Huizinga has discussed the relationship between religion and play in his book, *Homo Ludens*. He points out that ritual and religion actually emerged very long ago in humanity's capacity for play. In tribal societies ritual is obviously loaded with play acting and "make believe." The men carve the masks and then scare each other with them. The women, who know full well their husbands and brothers are behind the masks, scream in terror at them. In ritual cures a certain complicity of doctor and patient is obviously involved. In the hunt and fertility dances, the dancers "become" the animals and clouds, but they know full well they are enacting these parts.

Despite this evidence many people still have great difficulty in seeing religion as a form of play. They have been taught to place "play" at a very low level of importance. This, however, is the prejudice of an industrial society, and is in no sense a universal judgment. Plato in *The Laws* not only made worship a form of play but taught that "life must be lived as play."

In my view, not only are prayer and play analogous but their kinship provides us with a sound contemporary access both to our religious tradition and to the future.

Prayer, whether spoken, danced or sung, provides a form for human fantasy. By praying, a person shows that he is not a slave of the past, of the "facts" or of fate. When the structure of a prayer is provided by ritual themes and historical images, the prayer is a bridge to the future. It produces action toward a goal. It is not an escape from the world but the first step in its recreation.

Nathan Scott makes comedy a way of

in Peter Berger's theologico-social essay, *The Precarious Vision*. Here Berger sees eschatology as the comic element in Christianity. The clown refuses to live inside this present reality. He senses another one. He defies the law of gravity, taunts the policeman, ridicules the other performers. Through him we catch a glimpse of another world impinging on this one, upsetting its rules and practices.

Both Scott and Berger, and most of the other theologians who have discussed the subject, agree that the comic spirit is somehow closer to Christianity than is the tragic. In tragedy the hero first defies,

then accepts, as one must, the inexorable. Heroes are fated people. Their heroism emerges if they can meet their fate with dignity and humanity. Comic figures cannot be dignified. Few of us are. But they reveal the clay feet of the monolith. They make us glad. In tragedy we weep and are purged. In comedy we laugh and hope.

For Christianity and for the comic sensibility nothing in life should be taken too seriously. The world is important but not ultimately so. Like the clown, people of faith can snicker at the pretense of the prince because they know the prince is but a person who will return one day to the dust. But more than that, people of faith can even chuckle at their own snickering. They can see the prince and

themselves in a perspective that cuts both down to size but also opens to both new worlds of possibility.

Some hold that the comic is possible in other religious traditions but not in Christianity. The reason advanced is that since for some faiths the world is *maya*, a form of illusion, it need not be taken seriously. This makes possible the fascinating theme of "Lilia" or divine play in Hinduism. But because Christianity is grounded in his-



Wood engraving by Hans Orłowski

Motive Magazine

affirming creation, and Falstaff is the comic figure *par excellence*. In comedy, he says, we learn to see and love people, "warts and all." Comedy disports in the mud and gumminess of life. It has no pretensions. It saves us from trying to be angels, and allows us to say with no apology, "I'm only human." Scott's is an incarnational view of the comic ingredient in Christianity.

Quite a different point of view is found

torical events, so the argument runs, such comic detachment is not possible.

This argument also fails to withstand careful scrutiny. The point in Christianity is not that the world is “unreal” but that it should not be taken with ultimate or final seriousness. Christianity does share a sense of comedy with other traditions. But its grounds are different. Instead of one world of shadow and deception it affirms two real world ages, the passing one and the coming one, neither of which should be seen without reference to the other, or taken with full seriousness on its own. We live “in between.”

There is also the ethical objection. Some sensitive people claim that laughter is not an appropriate response to war, racism, hunger and injustice. Only serious dedication and sacrifice will ever rid the earth of these pestilences. They are

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right. But neither seriousness nor dedication, as we have shown before, is the opposite of the comic. The opposite of the comic is tragic necessity and perhaps

even stoic resignation. The comic sensibility can laugh at those who ferment wars and perpetuate hunger, at the same time it struggles to dethrone them. It foresees their downfall even when their power seems secure. The comic, more than the tragic, because it ignites hope, leads to more, not less, participation in the struggle for a just world.

There is, however, a vexing philosophical problem that lurks in the depths of the question of religion and the comic sensibility. It is the question of whether human beings can ever stand far enough back from their own religion (or irreligion) to get any “comic perspective.” Religion or its equivalent provides our root orientation to reality. How do we “step back” from it without toppling into the abyss?

The comic sensibility suggests a solution to this debate. We are able to gain

Going the second mile

by Walter Wink

Going the second mile, Jesus’ third example [of nonviolent ways to resist evil], is drawn from the relatively enlightened practice of limiting to a single mile the amount of forced or impressed labor that Roman soldiers could levy on subject peoples. Such compulsory service was a constant feature in Palestine from Persian to late Roman times. Whoever was found on the street could be coerced into service, as was Simon of Cyrene, who was forced to carry Jesus’ cross. Armies had to be moved with dispatch. Ranking legionnaires bought slaves or donkeys to carry their packs of 60 to 85 pounds (not including weapons). The majority of the rank and file, however, had to depend on impressed civilians. Whole villages sometimes fled to avoid being forced to carry soldiers’ baggage.

What we have overlooked in this passage is the fact that carrying the pack

a second mile is an infraction of military code. With few exceptions, minor infractions were left to the disciplinary control of the centurion (commander of 100 men). He might fine the offending soldier, flog him, put him on a ration of barley instead of wheat, make him camp outside the fortifications, force him to stand all day before the general’s tent holding a clod of dirt in his hands — or, if the offender was a buddy, issue a mild reprimand. But the point is that the soldier does not know what will happen.

It is in the context of Roman military occupation that Jesus speaks. He does not counsel revolt. One does not “befriend” the soldier, draw him aside and drive a knife into his ribs. Jesus was surely aware of the futility of armed insurrection against Roman imperial might; he certainly did nothing to encourage those whose hatred of Rome would soon explode into violence.

But why carry the soldier’s pack a second mile? Does this not go to the opposite extreme by aiding and abetting the enemy. Not at all. The question here is how the oppressed can recover their initiative and assert their human dignity in a situation that cannot for the time being be changed. The rules are Caesar’s, but how one responds to the rules is God’s, and Caesar has no power over that.

Imagine, then, the soldier’s surprise when, at the next mile marker, he reluctantly reaches to assume his pack, and the civilian says, “Oh, no, let me carry it another mile.” Why would he want to do that? What is he up to? Is this a provocation? Will this civilian file a complaint?

From a situation of servile impressment, the oppressed have once more seized the initiative. They have taken back the power of choice. They have thrown the soldier off balance by depriving him of the predictability of his victim’s response.

— *Excerpted from The Powers That Be, a condensed volume based on Wink’s award-winning Powers trilogy, Doubleday 1998.*

perspective, even on our most cherished beliefs and values. But we do so not by moving beyond symbol worlds, rather we do so by juxtaposing them. Bergson's theory that the comic occurs in a situation open to disparate orders of interpretation suggests that a person is capable of living in these disparate spheres. Their very disparity supplies the leverage for the comic perspective. It is not only modern people with their multiple symbol worlds who stand astride this fulcrum. Primitive people had it too insofar as they recognized the curious discrepancy between the worlds of fact and fantasy.

Wherever people live at the vortex of multiple worlds of meaning, the comic is possible. Only in a closed, monolithic universe is it excluded. Such a sober universe can be created by an inquisitorial religion, by a totalitarian state, or by a sleekly efficient technocracy. In the first two, however, there remain resources for comic criticism as the bawdy street plays of the medieval period and the underground jokes in police states prove. In fact, it is the rulers' fear of heresy and dissent that produces the thumb screw and the gestapo. The horror of the technically ruled society is that no such tortures are even needed. Dissent is quashed in more subtle ways and comic criticism is killed by kindness. Certainly technological blandness is more our danger today than either clericalism or state terror. This may be why Wolfgang Zucker in a brilliant essay on the clown says that in a world tending toward "absolute mechanization" and faced with the "myth of an unchanging mechanism," the clown, once nearly lost to our consciousness, "becomes necessary again." He is the one who "affirms by denying."

The clown does affirm by denying. But in denying he is also affirming. He enables us to laugh at our failures and successes, at our fears and also our faith. By involving us in his denial he lures us into affirming after all.

If playfulness is the only way we can deal with our past, laughter enables us to live with the future. Laughter of course can be strained, cruel, artificial, or merely

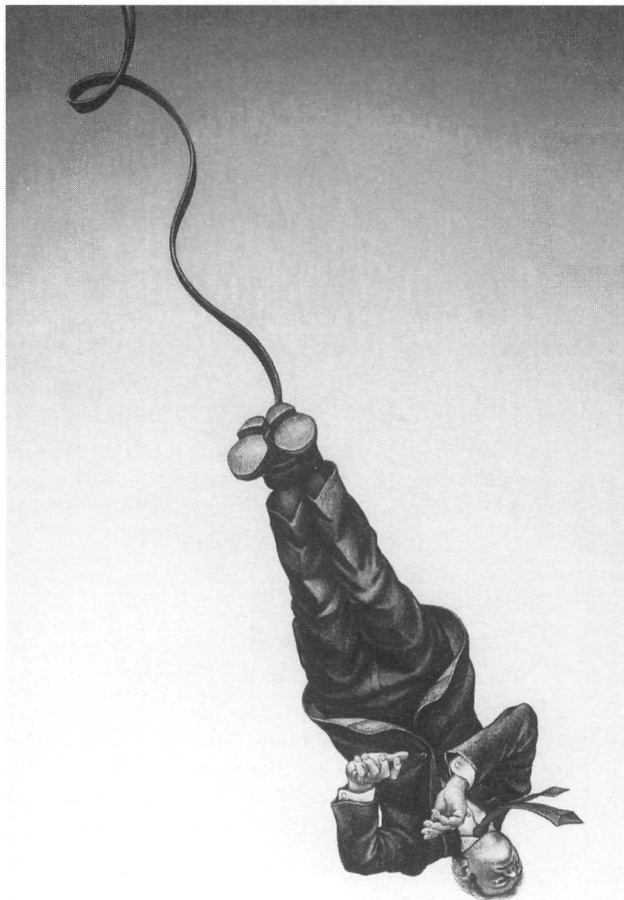
why Dante reports that when he finally arrived in Paradise after his arduous climb from the Inferno, he heard the choirs of angels singing praises to the Trinity and he says, "*mi sembrava un riso dell'universo*" (it seemed like the laughter of the universe).

The laughter of the universe in heaven? Of course. In hell there is no hope and no laughter, according to Dante. In purgatory there is no laughter, but there is hope. In heaven, hope is no longer necessary and laughter reigns.

Comic hope is the mood of our embryonic religious sensibility today. It has left behind orthodox credulity, existential pathos, and sanguine optimism. It supplies the only possible idiom for faith at a time of dead gods, museum churches, and antiquarian theology. Theologians are right that hope is the characteristic form of faith for modern people. But our hope is neither the serene confidence of medieval people, nor the liberal's bright expectation of better things around the corner. Ours is a more or less formless hope, but a hope nonetheless. It is a hope in search of content, a hope that some form of hope will once again be made available to us.

Given the empirical evidence around us, this hope can be held only in the most daring act of effrontery. But laughter is hope's last weapon. Crowded on all sides with idiocy and ugliness, pushed to concede that the final apocalypse seems

to be upon us, we seem nonetheless to nourish laughter as our only remaining defense. In the presence of disaster and death we laugh instead of crossing ourselves. Or perhaps better stated, our laughter is our way of crossing ourselves. **TW**



Michael Bergt

habitual. It can mask our true feelings. But where it is real, laughter is the voice of faith. It is the expression not only of our ironic confidence and our strange joy, but also of our recognition that there is no "factual" basis for either. Perhaps that is

When the rules subvert

The Witness asked Quest users if they knew of times when the rules had been used to thwart the rule-makers.

Payment every two weeks!

Larry and I were Junior Engineers in the gas plant, which means that we were clerks. Anything that could be classified as paperwork came to the flat double desk across which we faced each other. The Main Office downtown sent us a bewildering array of orders and rules that were to be put into effect.

Junior Engineers were beneath the notice of everyone except the Mexican laborers at the plant. To them we were the visible form of a distant, unknowable paymaster. We were *Señor Payroll*.

Those Mexicans were great workmen; the aristocrats among them were the stokers, big men who worked Herculean eight-hour shifts in the fierce heat of the retorts. They scooped coal with huge shovels and hurled it with uncanny aim at tiny doors. The coal streamed out from the shovels like black water from a high-pressure nozzle, and never missed the narrow opening. The stokers worked stripped to the waist, and there was pride and dignity in them. Few men could do such work, and they were the few.

The Company paid its men only twice a month, on the 5th and on the 20th. To a Mexican, this was absurd. What man with money will make it last 15 days? If he hoarded money beyond the spending of three days, he was a miser — and when, *Señor*, did the blood of Spain flow in the veins of misers? Hence, it was the custom for our stokers to appear every

third or fourth day to draw the money due to them.

There was a certain elasticity in the Company rules, and Larry and I sent the necessary forms to the Main Office and received an “advance” against a man’s paycheck. Then, one day, Downtown favored us with a memorandum: “There have been too many abuses of the advance-against-wages privilege. Hereafter, no advance against wages will be made to any employee except in a case of genuine emergency.”

We had no sooner posted the notice when in came stoker Juan Garcia. He asked for an advance. I pointed to the notice. He spelled it through slowly, then said, “What does this mean, this ‘genuine emergency?’” I explained to him patiently that the Company was kind and sympathetic, but that it was a great nuisance to have to pay wages every few days. If someone was ill or if money was urgently needed for some other good reason, then the Company would make an exception to the rule.

Juan Garcia turned his hat over and over slowly in his big hands. “I do not get my money?”

“Next payday, Juan. On the 20th.”

He went out silently and I felt a little ashamed of myself. I looked across the desk at Larry. He avoided my eyes.

In the next hour two other stokers came in, looked at the notice, had it explained and walked solemnly out; then no more came. What we did not know was that Juan Garcia, Pete Mendoza, and Francisco Gonzalez had spread the word, and that every Mexican in the plant was explaining the order to every other Mexican. “To get money now, the wife must be sick. There must be medicine for the baby.”

The next morning Juan Garcia’s wife was practically dying, Pete Mendoza’s mother would hardly last the day, there was a veritable epidemic among children, and, just for variety, there was one sick father. Nobody paid Larry and me to examine private lives, so we made out our forms with an added line describing the “genuine emergency.” Our people got paid.

That went on for a week. Then came a new order, curt and to the point: “Hereafter, employees will be paid **ONLY** on the 5th and the 20th of the month. No exceptions made except in the cases of employees leaving the service of the Company.”

The notice went up on the board, and we explained its significance gravely.

“No, Juan Garcia, we cannot advance your wages. It is too bad about your wife and your cousins and your aunts, but there is a new rule.”

Juan Garcia went out and thought it over. He thought out loud with Mendoza and Gonzales and Ayala, then, in the morning he was back. “I am quitting this company for different job. You pay me now?”

We argued that it was a good company and that it loved its employees like children, but in the end we paid off, because Juan Garcia quit. And so did Gonzalez, Mendoza, Obregon, Ayala and Ortez, the best stokers, men who could not be replaced.

Larry and I looked at each other; we knew what was coming in about three days. One of our duties was to sit on the hiring line early each morning, engaging transient workers for the handy gangs. Any man was accepted who could walk up and ask for a job without falling down. Never before had we been called upon to hire such skilled virtuosos as stokers for handy-gang work, but we were called upon to hire them now.

The day foreman was wringing his hands and asking the Almighty if he was

Artist **Woodleigh Marx Hubbard** lives in Brainbridge Island, Wash.

personally supposed to shovel this condemned coal, while there in a stolid, patient line were skilled men — Garcia, Mendoza, and others-waiting to be hired. We hired them, of course. There was nothing else to do.

Every day we had a line of resigning stokers, and another line of stokers seeking work. Our paperwork became very complicated. At the Main Office they were jumping up and down. The procession of forms showing Juan Garcia's resigning and being hired over and over again was too much for them. Sometimes Downtown had Garcia on the payroll twice at the same time when someone down there was slow in entering a resignation. Our phone rang early and often. Tolerantly and patiently we explained: "There's nothing we can do if a man wants to quit, and if there are stokers available when the plant needs stokers, we hire them."

Out of chaos, Downtown issued another order. I read it and whistled. Larry looked at it and said, "It is going to be very quiet around here."

The order read: "Hereafter, no employee who resigns may be rehired within a period of 30 days."

Juan Garcia was due for another resignation, and when he came in we showed him the order and explained that standing in line the next day would do him no good if he resigned today. "Thirty days is a long time, Juan."

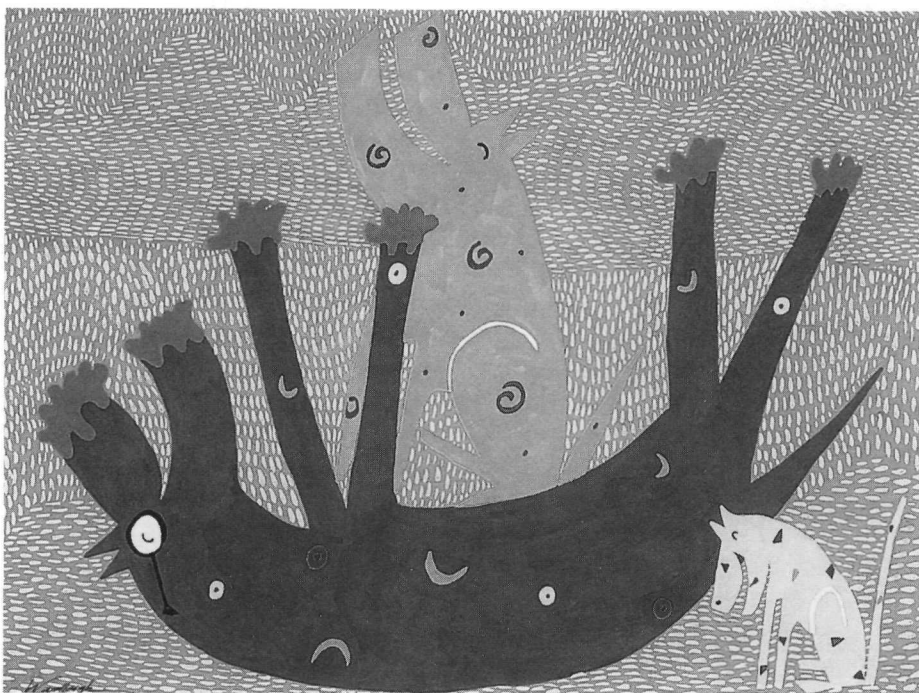
It was a grave matter and he took time to reflect on it. So did Gonzalez, Mendoza, Ayala and Orteza. Ultimately, however, they were all back — and all resigned.

We did our best to dissuade them and we were sad about the parting. This time it was for keeps and they shook hands with us solemnly. It was very nice knowing us. Larry and I looked at each other when they were gone and we both knew that neither of us had been pulling for Downtown to win this duel. It was a blue

day.

In the morning, however, they were all back in line. With the utmost gravity, Juan Garcia informed me that he was a stoker looking for a job.

"No dice, Juan," I said. "Come back in 30 days. I warned you."



Giggly by Woodleigh Marx Hubbard

His eyes looked straight into mine without a flicker. "There is some mistake, *Señor*," he said. "I am Manuel Hernandez. I work as the stoker in Pueblo, in Santa Fe, in many places."

I stared back at him, remembering the sick wife and the babies without medicines, the mother-in-law in the hospital, the many resignations and the rehiring. I knew that there was a gas plant in Pueblo, and that there wasn't any in Santa Fe; but who was I to argue with a man about his own name? A stoker is a stoker.

So I hired him. I hired Gonzalez, too, who swore that his name was Carrera, and Ayala, who had shamelessly become Smith.

Three days later the resigning started.

Within a week our payroll read like a history of Latin America. Everyone was on it: Lopez and Obregon, Villa, Diaz, Batista, Gomez, and even San Martin and Bolivar. Finally Larry and I, growing weary of staring at familiar faces and writing unfamiliar names, went to the

Superintendent and told him the whole story. He tried not to grin, and said, "Damned nonsense!"

The next day the orders were taken down. We called our most prominent stokers into the office and pointed to the board. No rules any more.

"The next time we hire you *hombres*," Larry said grimly, "come in under the names you like best, because that's the way you are going to stay on the books."

They looked at us and they looked at the board; then for the first time in the long duel, their teeth flashed white. "*Si, Señores*," they said.

And so it was.

— William E. Barrett, via Mary Parsons, editor of *Alaskan Epiphany*

Detailing them to death

Did it myself actually. Worked in a welfare office as a social work supervisor, and they wanted all of us to write exact time studies for a few days. I included the time writing up the time studies. Also time in the bathroom, and time for travel to and from it. I explained that if it wasn't exact like that, people were just making it up. The time study ceased very quickly and was never heard from again. But then I was always a bureaucratic trouble maker. I could tell the head guy in my office his memo was castrating and why, and he would revise it. I also told the Missouri Director of Welfare in a staff meeting for the city of St. Louis Welfare Office that I didn't know whether his action was stupid or cynical but probably both. After the meeting the city director of welfare thanked me for being so polite!

*Bob Rea
San Francisco, CA*

Years ago, a parishioner who spent most of his career working for the federal government told me about a tactic people in the bureaucracy used to humiliate unreasonable supervisors. They called it "malicious compliance." Apparently, it is one of the few effective weapons available to low status employees in an oppressive system.

*James R. Adams, President
Center for Progressive Christianity*

Teaching speech

I bought my first parrot, Polly Esther, as a six-week-old chick: a domestically hatched African gray. "An African gray?" a pet-shop owner said. "They're the Rolls-Royce of parrots! The best talking parrots there are."

I was thrilled. I couldn't wait.

Every evening after supper I put her on my hand and took her into a quiet room.

"Hello, hello, hello," I'd repeat. My entire vocabulary was an endless string of hollow hellos.

Polly Esther would cock her head and give me a bewildered look. Out would come a sweet little "peep!"

She would not talk. There wasn't a "hello" to be heard, beyond mine. This went on day after day, week after week.

About this time I was having some renovations done on my home. A local carpenter came every day, working alone on an upstairs bedroom while I was at work. One day he went downstairs to use the bathroom. Quiet, and quite alone, he thought.

Suddenly, he heard a voice!

"Shut the door!" came a loud, clear command. He bolted to the bathroom door and slammed it shut.

After a moment he ducked his head out. "Hello?" he said cautiously.

"Shut the door!" came the response.

Peering into the other room, he saw ... Polly Esther. "Shut the door!" the parrot insisted. Her first words.

That was several years ago, and Polly Esther's vocabulary has grown considerably: "Stand back, I'm an eagle!" for example, and "What's for supper?" She calls the dog when I go to let her in, and she finally did learn to say "hello" — but only when the phone rings.

She also learned to imitate the hair-raising, high-pitched shriek of a smoke detector when its battery needs replacing.

*John Edward Young
Christian Science Monitor*

Ministers in a patriarchal system

Many of the women in our support group were facing big question marks about their future ministries. One was relinquishing a position she'd held for many years, sure that this was right but not having any clear idea of what would come next. Others were in the process of deciding whether or when to leave. After

a morning of sharing the doubts and concerns, one woman said, "I wonder where we'll each be in six months." The response of another became the group's refrain: MAKING MISCHIEF!

*Elizabeth Morris Downie
Fenton, MI*

"Pie the polluting lolly"

"I'm part of a gang of bad hellions that has declared a pie war on all the unpleasant celebrities in every kind of domain," Noel Godin told Hugues Henry last February in an interview for "The Netly News," a daily Web zine, just after Godin's group pied Microsoft chairperson Bill Gates in Belgium.

"We began by targeting 'empty' celebrities from the artistic world who appeared to think that they were the cat's meow. Then we attacked the French TV news business, and soon we began to pie political figures as well."

Bill Gates was selected, Godin said, "because in a way he is the master of the world. Bill Gates was at the top of our list because he could have been a utopian but he prefers being the lackey of the establishment. Our war cry was explicit: 'Let's pie! Let's pie the polluting lolly.'"

Godin explained that they have meetings in his home where they select targets and then they study the individuals' habits. In the case of Gates, a couple of French accomplices followed Gates around Paris the day before and learned that he is escorted by armed body guards. Sometimes, as in this case, people within an organization will tip off the pie crew.

"We are comical terrorists. The pie is symbolic. The victim is injured only in his self-esteem. We take a lot of care that the pies can't hurt physically. The pastry is soft and full of cream.

"We have sympathizers everywhere. We also have many enemies. But we are like Laurel and Hardy, Bugs Bunny, the Marx Brothers, the Yippies of May 1968."

'Roll the cameras no matter what I say': an interview with Michael Moore

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Michael Moore, creator of the widely viewed documentary *Roger & Me*, is someone from the margins who uses unpredictability, bravado and humor to upset our understanding of power arrangements. In *Roger & Me*, he juxtaposes images of opulent GM parties (where people are actually hired to pose as mannequins!) with laid-off GM workers.

Life in Michigan was more lively when Moore was producing the *Flint Voice*, which later became the *Michigan Voice*. It was a tremendous loss when *Mother Jones* hired Moore away to become editor of the premiere Left magazine. Moore's friends were horrified when *Mother Jones* fired him just after he moved to the West Coast. Apparently, among other possible reasons, Moore's style and the fact that he didn't have a college education were disturbing to senior staff members.

Moore landed on his feet. After working with Ralph Nader in D.C., he decided to make *Roger & Me* (for only \$200,000!) and was startled to see it glide off the charts in popularity. Moore funneled money into Flint social programs and into his production company, Dog Eat Dog Films. Moore turned his attention to his TV *Nation* series (Fox, summers of 1994 and 1995) and production of his new film, *The Big One* (Miramax Films — half of the profits go to Flint), which tracks Moore's book tour for his best-selling *Downsize This! Random Threats from an Unarmed American* (HarperPerennial, 1996).

In *The Big One*, Moore interviews workers who are laid off by corporations that are

more profitable than ever, but eager to move to Mexico. Finally, Phil Knight, CEO of Nike, invites Moore for an interview. On the way, Moore picks up two plane tickets to Indonesia. When Knight concedes he has never been to Indonesia where 14-year-old girls make Nike shoes, Moore presents the tickets, saying "Let's go."



Michael Moore

Knight quickly declines — not this Sunday, not ever.

Moore, married to and working with Kathleen Glynn, was educated in Roman Catholic schools. If asked, Moore would say he's put the church behind him. But when I remarked that part of me believes we're all supposed to end up on the cross, he responded, "Actually the way that story ended the rock got rolled back and he came out and partied for another 40 days. Look at the 40 days from the resurrection to the ascension — he wasn't healing lepers or tearing down temples. He was just hanging out with his friends. If he'd stayed up there on the cross, they would never have gone on to do anything."

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann: You've characterized yourself as a working class person who somehow got under the radar and into the public view. Can you say a little about how the media keep views like yours out of the mainstream?

Michael Moore: I was interviewed recently on NBC's *Today Show*, where they acted like the economy has never been so good. But afterwards the production crew spoke up, "Hey Mike, I'm a temp and I've been here for years." "Hey Mike, this list on the wall is for our co-worker, our insurance won't cover his illness." At NBC!

I believe that "views like mine" represent the majority viewpoint in this country. The media present a distortion of what people really care, think and feel about things politically. No less a source than the Gallup poll backs me up on this — if you ask a sampling of the American public what their feelings are on various political issues, you'll find the majority are very liberal, very progressive on virtually all the social and political issues. The majority of Americans are pro-labor, pro-environment, pro-women's rights. People are very liberal on the issues. They just don't like liberals — or liberal leaders — which is understandable.

J. W-K.: *The Nation* summarized your views as saying that if people on the Left want to have any impact, they need to stop talking to each other, listen to country music, learn to line dance, and go to stock car races.

M.M.: I've modified my feelings.

J. W-K.: You've modified your feelings? The Left shouldn't bother?

M.M.: No. I'm just saying for those people who come from the working class and remember those things, instead of denying it — like so many of the people from the working class especially after they go to college — they should try to rediscover that bit of how they were raised and notice that there are a lot of genuine and good things about it.

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is co-editor/publisher of *The Witness*, <jeanie@thewitness.org>. Dog Eat Dog's web site can be accessed at <<http://www.dogeatdogfilms.com>>.

For people who come from the upper class and who are liberals, I really don't wabars or our bowling alleys, because you're going to be uncomfortable, you're going to look and feel foolish. You would do better spending your time working with or against the other upper-class people.

I spoke at Brown University a few months ago and this student comes up to me afterwards and says, "I want to make a documentary film about people living in the inner city here in Providence, but I come from wealthy parents and I just don't know what to do so that they'll relate to me." I said to her, "You know what? Don't ask them to relate to you. They don't, they can't and they aren't going to. It would be helpful to all of us — if you share the same kind of political beliefs that we have — if you could make a documentary about the rich! You grew up in the country clubs. Go after them. We would like you to explain to us how they feel or what they do. It really has more to do with class than Left or Right."

J. W-K.: If it really has to do with class, then say a little more about what you think people who are born into privilege can do. It's fair that they shouldn't be the vanguard — even though that's generally how they see themselves, leading the revolution — but are they useful?

M.M.: They're not useful to us. Jeanie, you know me, I made this really bad mistake. I had a millionaire Leftie from San Francisco come to me and say "Stop what you're doing in Flint, and come out here to San Francisco and you can do it nationwide [as editor of *Mother Jones*]." And I took the bait. (Or as my Irish grandparents would say about those who switch from being Catholic to Protestant, "They took the soup!")

It became clear to me within weeks that while we may all have had similar politics, they had a very different worldview. Their worldview was seen around the silver spoon sticking out of

their mouths. Any time I have tried to be part of something where I thought, "I can leave my own class and do that," I've been knocked up one side and down the other. It's best to stick to what I know.

Now, if people want to attack me, they say, "Look at Mr. Working Class making all this money!" But they don't understand that the basic premise of class has to do with what you come from and what you take with you for the rest of your life. At various points of my life I'm going to make money and at other times I'm not. At the beginning of this decade I was on unemployment and while in Michigan I never made more than \$12,000 a year.

J. W-K.: At this point somebody could call you a millionaire Leftie, right?

M.M.: Except I'm not a millionaire. But you could definitely say that I'm doing a hell of a lot better than I've ever done before financially.

J. W-K.: Say a little bit about where some of your money goes.

M.M.: I give a good third of it away and then the rest goes into the next film, TV show, book. And I don't invest in the stockmarket.

J. W-K.: How many folks work at Dog Eat Dog?

M.M.: Four full-time people.

J. W-K.: Are any of them working class?

M.M.: I have an affirmative action program. We're going to start staffing for the next TV show and we're going to end up hiring 50 people. I told the producer that we are to aggressively look for people who come from the working class, for people who have not been to college, and that in turn will give us a number of African Americans, Hispanics, women, and all the others that we should have to make sure that we have a diverse staff.

J. W-K.: There must be a lot of kids born into privilege who would love to work at Dog Eat Dog.

M.M.: Are you kidding? They call and write every day. At the end of *The Big*

One, the names of the interns come up and at one of the screenings somebody shouted, "How much do you pay your interns?" And it was really weird, 'cause I'd never really thought about it. Of course my first answer was, "Not a God-damned cent!" But then I said, "You know why? Because they already have money. A real working class person could never be an intern, 'cause you have to have a job to pay the bills."

After that I thought, "I'm going to get rid of the intern program and start some kind of development program where we bring people in and *pay* them." Jeanie, what if this was 10 years ago, and I was back in Flint, how the fuck would I ever get my foot in the door? It's all about the right connections and the right universities.

J. W-K.: You talk about getting under the radar — it seems like a lot of it rides on your sense of humor. Can you say a little bit about the usefulness of humor or the limits of humor?

M.M.: Humor is an incredible means of communication and it's a powerful political tool. Certain critics tend to think that if you use humor, you're trivializing "a very serious subject." I think the Left has lost its sense of humor by and large and that's very sad.

J. W-K.: Are there limits to what you can do with humor?

M.M.: Well, I could give you personal lines that you don't cross.

J. W-K.: Say something about that. When somebody offers you hospitality and you're in their environment, does the fact that they're being nice ever stop you from doing what you feel like you need to do?

M.M.: No, but I'm usually nice to them. You can see that even when I'm debating somebody in the corporate lobby, I'm respectful to them as a human being. And it's how I genuinely feel. Because most of the time I'm dealing with "good Germans" who are sent forward to do their job.

I always believe — and this is prob-

ably the part of me that's still in the seminary — that conversion is possible. I really believe people at their core are good. If there were some way to penetrate that and to touch that sense of fairness ...

Talking to Phil Knight [of Nike] — I don't know whether it came across in the movie — but I wasn't in there just goofing around. I truly was trying to penetrate this man's conscience. I believe that he has a conscience and that at his core he is a good person and would do the right thing. Hang on just one second ... [*The Witness* gets put on hold.] I just got some good news from Miramax! I'm trying to get them to put *The Big One* in the \$2 houses around the country because a lot of people that I would want to see this film can't afford \$7 or \$8 to go to a movie. It isn't just \$7 or \$8. It's two people plus the babysitter, you know what I'm saying? They're going to do it!

J. W-K.: Terrific! Michael, I believe you see potential for good in people, but do you ever feel sorry for the people you've trapped? In a *TV Nation* episode you asked CEOs to meet the challenge of doing the work. And the CEO from Ford came, he changed the oil, he looked proud of himself.

Then you just blew him away by looking at that poster on the wall that said, "At Ford Quality is Job Number One," and ...

M.M.: I said, "What's job two?"

J. W-K.: It's priceless — there was no good answer to that question.

MM: That's just the Irish in me though. Something like that just pops in my head — we live in this world of advertising slogans and all this hype.

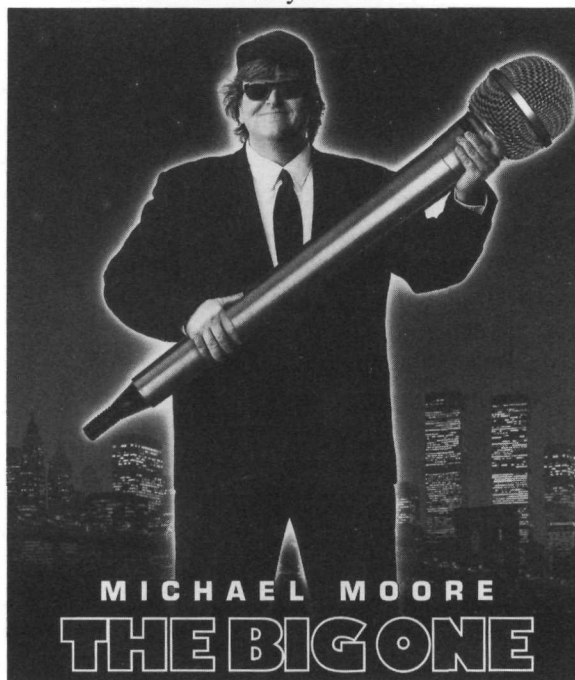
But don't feel sorry for him. He felt really good about the whole thing. He didn't feel that I had sandbagged him. Ford ran that tape on the assembly lines.

J. W-K.: There are ways in which you remind me of Oriana Fallaci. Kissinger once said that the stupidest thing he'd

ever done was give her an interview. He did it because she was interviewing all these heads of state, was smart and had a point of view — it was seductive.

M.M.: That is the reason people talk to me, or Mike Wallace, or anyone else. There is something seductive about that little red light on the camera.

J. W-K.: Well it's that, but it's also trying to match wits with you.



M.M.: With Phil Knight — in interviews — I've heard him say that he'd seen *Roger & Me*. He felt like he knew how to handle me. In his mind he was going to show Smith how to do it.

J. W-K.: Well, if he had built the Nike factory in Flint, maybe he would have.

M.M.: I'm telling you, it would have been a fucking smart thing for him to do! In a way I was probably hoping it wouldn't happen, simply because I would be used then to mask all of the other evil things that they're doing.

J. W-K.: Then you could have brought the young Indonesian workers over to see the plant in Flint. You'd have come up with something!

Tell me about lying, cheating, stealing for a story. I love the fact that you tell your camera crew, "Keep the camera rolling no matter what I say." Then you oblige the officials by saying, "Turn it off, turn it off now." They don't, of course.

M.M.: I've always hoped somebody would catch what I'm trying to do with that. I'm trying to show how people in authority, whether it's the head of security or a PR person, see me as the authority over my crew. They believe that if the person in authority says something, you do it. I never put a piece of black tape over the red light on the camera. The red light's always on. They just assume that the guy has turned the camera off, simply because the man in charge said to! I LIKE that.

But there are other questions. Through *TV Nation*, I learned that I don't like lying.

J. W-K.: So you don't?

M.M.: At the beginning we did. Then we decided no more hidden cameras, no more misrepresenting who we are in the name of the story. I'm not saying that I wouldn't ever do it again. If it was Nazi Germany and you had to misrepresent yourself as a

Nazi to report on what was going on, the ends justify the means.

J. W-K.: What don't you like about it?

M.M.: You don't feel good. Plus any of us who have a conscience, we can't lie that well.

J. W-K.: I love what you do with the juxtapositions. I think of the Bosnian Embassy story with a pizza. I'm sitting in my living room thinking "No, they can't — they can't possibly — describe the green pepper as the Serbs ...

M.M.: There's an instance where we were very up front. To me that made it even more funny and more damning. That they would say, "Give me the knife! I want my slice of Slovenia!" Whoa!

We're not writing the script!

J. W-K.: And I love the fact that you took the head of the Michigan Militia on the ferris wheel! How did you get the idea?

M.M.: We were driving around Petoskey and the Knights of Columbus carnival was going on. I said let's just pull over. It made the Knights of Columbus very upset when they saw the militia.

J. W-K.: [laughter] A culture war! You quote the head of the militia as saying that people in the sixties were actually right about a lot of things and he asks, "Where are you guys now when we could use you?"

M.M.: A lot of conservatives have realized that they have been lied to over the years by the government. Unfortunately it took seeing their American dream go up in smoke. All those guys we talked to are former auto workers. Norm went to my wife's high school and his wife went to a high school next to mine. A number were from the Flint area.

What happened was that the Right was there to interpret for them — the immigrants are the problem, the welfare mothers are the problem. And the Left has never been there for those people. I truly believe that had they been presented with another road, they would have gone down that road.

J. W-K.: I don't want to get fixated on this, but if Left folks, who have tons of education, don't go to your bars and don't cross culture lines, they're not going to have a lot to say that's useful. Don't they need to step across the threshold?

M.M.: I'm not opposed to that, but they should go in asking the working class what the working class can do to lead them, not what they can do to help the poor stupid workers.

J. W-K.: That's the same thing that you would hope would happen if people cross race and class lines in the city.

M.M.: That's what I do by listening to rap music. I don't like rap, but I want to hear those voices.

J. W-K.: In your interviews, if reporters call you an activist, you say, "No, I'm a citizen and democracy takes work."

M.M.: Yeah, I don't want to be separated from the mainstream.

We were sitting here yesterday trying to think of new ideas for the new version of *TV Nation* — we're thinking of calling it "The Awful Truth." We were trying to think of a way I could interview someone famous and then take an interview that they've already done with somebody else and cut me into it. But we couldn't think of who to interview. There's Gingrich, but he has like a 10 percent approval rating. It's not very risky to go after Newt Gingrich at this point. But who do we go after? People in Congress don't get our juices going because they're not really the power. That's why people don't vote. And, of course, you can't vote for your corporate chairman who really does have an impact on your daily life. So then people cop this sort of dog-eat-dog attitude — "Okay, where I need to spend my time is on my 401K plan and my mutual funds. I'd better protect myself as much as I can so when the shit hits the fan, I'll have some money."

J. W-K.: So what about the hope?

M.M.: The hope is that human beings throughout history have the tendency to rise up against intolerance. The more people they downsize, the more people are going to turn into citizen activists.

J. W-K.: It's gotta be true that if they're willing to downsize so many people, even with the risk that they're going to turn everybody into activists, they must feel pretty insulated from anything that people can do in response.

M.M.: They are convinced that people will not respond. They are sure of it. That's why they are going about this with such reckless disregard for the potential of people to rise up against it.

But we all have to run for precinct delegate; we have to go in and take over

the local party apparatus. It's there for the taking. Once we elect enough people, they can declare eminent domain for the good of the people! It's constitutional. Congress could say, "No, G.M., you can't move that factory from Hamtramck to Mexico. That's an asset of the U.S. That's an asset of the working people of Detroit, so you will not do that."

J. W-K.: We'll get through the hard times?

M.M.: If I didn't think that I'd stop doing what I'm doing. Seriously, I would much rather just come back to Flint and be with my friends and family and put out the paper. It's only because I know that in an instant I could go back, do that and be an extremely happy person, that they'll never have me. Whether it's the movie company or the TV studio, I can always tell them to fuck off! When they tell me, "You can't put a chapter in the book called 'Why doesn't General Motors sell crack?'" I can say, "Well, fuck off! Then I'm not putting out the book."

Fox wasn't going to let me run an episode on *TV Nation* with Newt Gingrich because the news corporation which owns Fox also owns Harper Collins and they'd just done a book contract with Gingrich for \$4 million. I'd gone down to Cobb County to ask, "Why is Cobb County one of the top counties in the country in terms of receiving federal aid, and yet you hate the federal government so much and you want to cut federal spending, why don't we start here in your county?"

J. W-K.: And he said?

M.M.: "Start elsewhere! We need it." I said, "That's what everybody says." And he responded, "Yeah, but we're telling the truth." So I asked, "Why do you need all this money for the Coast Guard? Your county is land-locked." He gave me this like evil eye, walked away from me and called the police.

I called Fox when they refused to run the episode and said, "I quit." I didn't show up for three days. They ran it. **TW**

Unpacking anti-racism

by Joe Summers

In graduate school I volunteered to help lead an anti-racism retreat for the students in our college. I discovered that the retreat was supposed to begin with minority students gathering to talk about the ways they had been victimized by racism and white students gathering to talk about the ways they had profited from racism. Intuitively, this seemed wrong. Instead, I encouraged all the students to talk about how racism had hurt them. The white students' initial response was denial, "I've never been victimized by racism," or superficial, "The black students always eat together in the cafeteria," but slowly the discussion deepened. What began to emerge was a discussion of how, as young people growing up mostly in the suburbs of Detroit, their lives had been bound by invisible spheres of terror and how much that terror had defined their lives. The fact that their terror seemed so much greater than mine, even though I had experienced interracial violence and they had not, struck me profoundly.

The unimaginable possibilities that emerge when one encourages people to talk freely about their experiences was reflected at the retreat in the experience of one young Asian-American woman who insisted she was white. In the course of the first evening she was suddenly able to realize the connection between her race and the time in junior high when a group of students had tried to set her clothes on fire and the fact that she had never had a date in high school. These were experiences she had always seen as rooted in some kind of personal defi-

ciency. She emerged from the retreat freed from the need to be white. So, too, the African-American students, whose prejudices against Asian-Americans only seemed confirmed by her insistence on not being in the minority group, came out of the retreat with a new empathy for Asian-Americans in this society. While white students emerged from the retreat with a powerful understanding of why daily life can be such a struggle for black students, black students came out of the weekend with their assumption that whiteness equals power shaken by the kinds of powerlessness described by most of the white students. The way students emerged from this retreat — with a concrete understanding of how racial domination is reproduced in our society and their unified, energized commitment to interrupt these processes — remains for me a vision of what is possible when there is authentic dialogue between peoples of different races.

It unfortunately also stands in contrast to most of my subsequent experiences in anti-racism workshops. As a white community activist, who is boiling with frustration at our failure to build a successful anti-racist coalition to challenge those who are reinforcing racial domination in this country, I'm trying to unpack why and how many of the efforts done in the name of anti-racism are in practice doing exactly the opposite of what they are meant to do in theory, i.e. mobilize white people to fight racism.

If one attends almost any of the anti-racism forums to be encountered in mainstream Protestant and Catholic churches, one will hear racism defined as systemic

prejudice, the coming together of individual and institutional discrimination. It is a useful definition, particularly in a nation that is continually tempted to see everything in individualistic terms.

But if one claims that actions can only be racist when they are connected with institutional discrimination, then one makes the actions and attitudes of whites in essence different from those of blacks. It means that we are unlikely to find our way towards any common ground as a basis for common understanding and common action. For example, if one holds to this definition, those who lack institutional power can be bigoted, but they can't be racist. Thus my minister in high school insisted that African-Americans in this society could not be racists because they lacked systemic power. Around this period I began to experience the horror of race riots and of being targeted because I was white and living in the inner city. There are few more powerful experiences than the experience of having your whole humanity and individuality denied because of the color of your

skin. White people could work with this experience by imagining what it is to have that ex-

perience multiplied exponentially.

Instead, under the current definition, an attack can only be considered racist if it is directed by a person/people from a dominant group towards a person/people of an oppressed group. This does two things. It disconnects people from experiences which should naturally help them make personal connections to the struggle against racism. Second, it puts whites and blacks into different moral categories. While it is true that racist blacks have been able to do less harm than racist whites because they have less economic and political power, this does not make their actions less harmful by nature.



Challenging paradigms

Joe Summers is co-pastor of the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Pittsfield Township, Mich.

Certainly a significant part of the problem is the way this definition has been appropriated. A definition meant to force people's attention onto systemic racism has instead been re-translated into individualistic terms with even more deadly results. Thus it is now individual whites who are responsible for creating and maintaining systemic racism as opposed to understanding that these structures and processes were promoted by particular elite groups of whites to maintain domination and exploitation. This again puts whites and blacks in opposite categories as blacks are not viewed as willing racism into being. Such workshops rarely focus on how blacks *do* cooperate with, give consent to, or internalize these structures of domination. Since the majority of whites may give consent to such structures, but have neither created nor chosen them, they are asked to bear the guilt for something they have never done. This distorted idea of the role of white people in the perpetuation of racism can be found in a number of the popular conceptions promoted in anti-racism workshops.

Racism as the original sin of whites

While this metaphor is useful in highlighting the degree to which racist attitudes and practices are something you are born into and thus can only overcome by actively resisting, it has the disadvantage of de-historicizing racism and making all whites born racists. It is a mark you bear no matter what your attitudes or the degree of your anti-racist commitments.

The recovering racist

In many contexts this is the highest level whites can aspire to. This language, taken from Alcoholics Anonymous (where people often begin their sharing with the phrase "I'm a recovering alcoholic"), has the advantage of recognizing that racism is like a disease you did not choose but with which you are always going to have to struggle. It also has the distinct disadvantage of making racism

into something which, like a disease, is rooted in individuals and is beyond our control. It does not allow whites to honor themselves for their role in the battle against racism.

Whiteness as over-privilege

Understanding white privilege is useful in helping whites understand the many realities they take for granted which blacks in this society cannot. And it challenges them to use their privilege to create a more just society. However, such a conception fundamentally fails to recognize that whiteness also represents a form of cultural conquest of *European-Americans* which must be addressed if whites are going to do battle with racism.

Unfortunately, I've found whites are not challenged, or given permission, to talk about their own experiences and are instead guided to focus on their guilt. I believe it is the attempt to control the discussion of the experience of whites that leaves whites unable really to engage the broader question of systemic racism and their relationship to it. Having an idea of how you should think or feel imposed on you is always paralyzing. This might explain why such workshops rarely lead to any common agenda that includes tackling structural or systemic problems. Worse, while sensitizing whites to the experience of blacks within this society, they simultaneously perpetuate a stereotyped understanding of whites that makes it difficult to build authentic relationships between participants.

Such approaches to racism have meant that whites are not helped to understand, or forced to confront, the degree to which political and economic elites have fostered racism as a vital part of the cultural domination and economic exploitation of working class European-Americans.

This is not to cover over the degree to which many whites at the grassroots level have been racist and promoted racism, but it is to recognize the complexity of

the relationship of whites to racism.

Covering over issues of class — and the ways the definition of whiteness has continually changed (Italian-Americans weren't considered white in many parts of the country until the 1960s) — has helped perpetuate the myth of whiteness. In their most twisted form, anti-racism workshops have encouraged a kind of self-hatred, or self-loathing, among whites and anti-racism work has become a form of exorcising the invisible demon of whiteness.

Understanding racism as basically a problem whites have has also meant that many of the lessons learned in the struggle against racism have been rendered inoperative for African-Americans. The claim that African-Americans cannot be racist has helped to perpetuate a variety of abuses, such as the failure to confront black political machines when they have used racist thinking to distract people from their own conservatism or corruption or when they have perpetuated discrimination against others. (Cornel West and others have also pointed out how the rhetoric of black nationalism was used to hide the growing class differentiation in the black community.) Perhaps we should reserve the term racists for those who identify themselves as believing in racial superiority and instead focus on racist practices and beliefs. Over the last year, I've been struck by how progressive leaders like Jesse Jackson have begun to talk about the ways they have to struggle against internalizing racist beliefs or attitudes, such as the media-propagated fear of black people as criminals. If we understand racism as something that *all* people need to struggle against, then we're back on common ground.

Anti-racism work is so frequently carried out in a way that leaves whites feeling guilty (we have been further educated to the devastating consequences of racism and we have come to understand that

we are the enemy), powerless (racism has an insidious power to control us no matter what we do so probably the best we can do is support minority people in their struggle against racism), and without vision (anti-racism is about acting against my self-interest and encouraging other whites to do likewise). This is undoubtedly an oversimplification, but it bears reflecting on.

I cannot speak for where such workshops leave African-Americans, but I've certainly heard the frustration and anger that things never seem to move in any concrete direction. We can continue to do such workshops, condemning those who are unwilling to participate in them, or we can ask, is this really helping us to accomplish what we need to do?

Given the kind of passion so many whites feel about overthrowing racism, why hasn't a strong anti-racist movement emerged in this country? Why is it that whites and blacks and other people of color continue to have such a hard time working together as partners in such a coalition? Does it help to ask those from the oppressed group *only* to speak and lead and the dominant group *only* to listen and follow? Is inverting the paradigm working? Is it time to move on to another stage in the struggle?

I believe it is long past time to move on. If we are going to move on we need to do a number of things. These include:

1) Recognizing that while racism cannot be reduced to any other form of oppression we must at the same time understand the links between racism and other forms of systemic oppression like classism and sexism and more specifically the ways in which racial and sexual subjugation and cultural domination and economic exploitation have reinforced each other. Without tracking these different narratives in their relationship to each other we will

not understand where we are today or how we got here.

2) Emphasizing the centrality of our concern with structural/institutionalized racism while at the same time helping people understand the connections between any kind of prejudice and structural domination.

3) Making a clear distinction between having racist attitudes or saying racist



Les fetiches by Loïs Mailou Jones Smithsonian

things, which is part of our common legacy in this society, and being a racist — one committed to racial domination. If people struggling against racism have to fear being called racist, a term which for good reason in American life has become the moral equivalent of being a Nazi, they are simply not going to be open to taking the risks required to move forward.

4) Challenging racist modes of thinking (you are defined by your race) and visceral politics. A critical area now is to struggle against the way the bodies of black men have been criminalized. So too, we need to struggle against the way white bodies have had power and privilege projected onto them in such a way as to make invisible the realities of class. This view leaves anti-racist whites often

caught up in a Promethean struggle of continually striving to prove they aren't racists. This can translate into being critical of other whites who are "less evolved." This does not advance the cause of anti-racism.

5) Allowing whites and blacks to become equal partners in the conversation about race and racism. This is not to say that, in general, blacks don't understand more about racism. It's also not a call for blacks to be wiped out by the ignorance of whites. It's simply a recognition that putting blacks in the position of teachers and whites in the position of students, as permanent positions, perpetuates paternalistic relationships and the instrumentalist mentality that often keeps whites from becoming empowered and acting on the basis of their experience.

6) Expanding our dialogue around race so that it grows beyond the dichotomy of black versus white not simply in terms of developing a more complex understanding of who whites and blacks are, but also so that it includes other peoples of color, their experiences, and their narratives.

Today we stand in an era similar to the post-reconstruction era at the end of the last century. That era saw the re-assertion of the racial and gender hierarchies that an earlier period had challenged. Struggles like the current battle around affirmative action mean everything in terms of whether we have any hope of standing our ground against the perpetuation of systemic racism. My hope is that this article will not insult those who have been doing the important work of anti-racist education, but will challenge them/us, to understand what we need to do to be more effective.

Unless we can change our practices I fear that white people will continue to battle windmills, whether in the form of self-condemnation or of throwing stones at small groups of the KKK, while the dragon destroys the little progress we have made. **TW**

No hairshirts in the kingdom of God's grace

by William O'Brien

"I tell you solemnly, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not be repaid a hundred times over, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land — not without persecution — now in this present time, and in the world to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

Every Thursday at our apartment a small circle of friends gathers for morning prayer followed by breakfast. Our conversation this week was particularly animated. One friend is starting a new Catholic Worker community. Another had just returned from Iraq as part of a delegation that delivered medical supplies in defiance of international sanctions.

We were reflecting on the idea that people of faith ought to undertake a voluntary "fast from oil" as a response to the suffering of the Iraqi people. After all, the war and the subsequent violence of sanctions were rooted in U.S. demand for oil so as to maintain our "way of life." Culpability for the suffering was not limited to corrupt politicians — it fell on all of us who share in that "way of life."

As the conversation unfolded, we began to dissect how our privileged U.S.

lifestyle is the linchpin of so much injustice and oppression; how our excess consumption and devouring of resources result in the suffering of countless people throughout the globe.

For me, the conversation was a painfully familiar one, now entering its third decade. As we talked, I glanced over at our refrigerator. There, on that large appliance which sucks up electricity 24 hours a day to store excess food, we have taped a poster of the prophetic citation of Isaiah 58, with its call for a fast acceptable to the Lord. We have also taped a sheet of paper with statistics on the global village, reminding us of the threads of consumption and injustice.

I poignantly recalled the fervor of my early years of Christian radicalism. The arguments for alternative lifestyles were overwhelmingly persuasive: Material possessions are a hindrance to our relationship with God. Excessive Western lifestyles are destroying the environment. Global justice demands that we counter the hideous inequities of resources.

Equally clear, it seemed, was the gospel mandate: Jesus came in poverty. He lived in community with the poor and outcast. The way of the Gospel, the life of Christian discipleship, meant entering into solidarity with those who are suffering.

In my zeal, along with other kindred spirits, I undertook the starkly clear response to corrupt U.S. lifestyle: downward mobility, economic resistance, voluntary poverty.

But we encountered some problems along the way to economic integrity.

Simple living, as has been said, was hardly simple. It was onerous enough to wrestle ourselves free of the seemingly endless tangles of complicity in oppression: Practically all options for food, energy, lodging, transportation, or health care were tainted with corruption.

Far worse, our efforts to live faithfully were not infrequently poisoned in a vortex of legalism, judgmentalism, guilt, and stress: Were we living simply enough? Was it wrong to own a stereo? Can we ever use a car? Is it a sin to take a vacation?

Meanwhile, our choice to live in voluntary poverty was itself a luxury that distanced us from those non-voluntarily poor folks with whom we sought solidarity.

Several years ago, I heard anew the familiar words: "Take no thought for what you will eat or drink ..." (Matt. 5:25).

Looking at the strains and stresses of my experiments in voluntary poverty, it suddenly struck me: I

was taking a lot of thought about what I was eating, drinking, wearing, own-

ing.

Spending energy and anxiety on decisions about downward mobility and minimal possessions seemed as much a violation of Jesus' teaching as spending energy and anxiety on amassing wealth.

Obsessing about little money was no different from obsessing about much money.

Somehow, my struggle with simple living was at odds with what I began to understand was Jesus' invitation to a radical freedom of trusting God.

More recently, my understanding of biblical justice has been deepened by the notion of the Jubilee. The covenant outlined a communal practice of respecting God's creation and accepting God's providence. The covenantal community was to



Challenging paradigms

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balance work and rest, refrain from hoarding or exploiting, release all from bondage, and correct inequities so that everyone could share in the fruit of God's shalom.

Through the lens of the Jubilee, I even began to see Jesus' radicalism on money and possessions differently. He did call his disciples to break from the corrupt order and practice a new economy of sharing and mutual aid (Mark 10:17-27, Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-35). But, like the covenant and prophets before him, he did so in light of God's promise and God's bounty. After all, he promised an economic windfall for the discipleship community: more land and houses and kin than they would ever know what to do with (Mark 10:29-30).

Jesus' teaching on money — in fact, the entire biblical witness on economics — is not a call to dire austerity but an invitation to the life-giving abundance of God.

The mistake of much of the simple-living movement was the assumption that discipleship demanded deprivation. For the sake of justice, we donned hairshirts in the economy of grace. We mistook voluntary poverty for the richness of the reign of God.

Granted, some are called to genuine voluntary poverty, just as some are called to celibacy. These are particular vocations that stand as radical social and spiritual witnesses; they play a role in the reign of God. But they are neither central nor superior expressions of the biblical witness.

I tread with utmost caution here. U.S. culture is fiendishly seductive (I do not use these words lightly). We hear the siren calls of comfort, possessions, and leisure. It's just easier to drive the car, go out to eat, use the credit card. Of course we need a bigger house, another appliance, a nicer school for our kids.

We cannot allow our theologies to function as rationalizations for accommodating to materialism and privilege. The gospel

choice brooks no compromise — God or Mammon. That choice is especially stark for us today: Money is the arch-idol of U.S. society.



Africa: Spirit Mother by Betty LaDuke

We still face harsh and radical choices about our complicity in global injustice. The children of Iraq suffer as we drive our cars to the rally against sanctions.

But for me, the goal isn't austerity or deprivation. The goal is God's jubilee — for all people. The task is one of tough but creative choices about our economic lives that aspire to the joyful abundance while challenging injustice and oppression.

Those choices are not necessarily any easier than in the days of my youthful zeal, but I undertake them in a new spirit: responding to Jesus' invitation to participate in God's gracious bounty. The struggle for justice is a joyful one.

So there we were at the breakfast table, grappling with issues of discipleship and lifestyle. We enjoyed tea purchased from the local co-op, sipped out of mugs made

by a local monk potter. We ate homemade muffins while out the window we could look on our friendly, economically marginalized, working-class African-American neighborhood. We could see our plot in the community garden, where we grow the bulk of our produce. In a little while, I would ride my bike to work at a program where I opt for a salary based on need rather than seniority or hierarchy.

I realize painfully how much I am still complicit in a corrupt and inhumane economic system. I am still in the clutches of insurance, credit, and banking systems (though with some creative alternatives). I still struggle with questions of money and possessions, though I do so with a sense of God's grace and mercy.

But with my community of friends and with much grace, we are colonizing a little liberated zone for the reign of God. There is abundance on the way to justice. We'll keep trying to spread it far and wide. **TW**

BACK ISSUES

The following back issues of The Witness contain articles which may relate directly to Trickster: social action in the 90s, or simply to the spirit of this month's topic.

- What to do with what you don't believe (4/98)
- Is it ever okay to lie? (4/96)
- Glamour (11/94)
- Fasting in Babylon (12/96)
- Dialogue (4/94)
- Be Ye Perfect (3/93)

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When peacemaking grows tame

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

What would happen if we re-worked our sense of obligation “to do good” into a passion for making mischief? Listening to a sermon on Christian calling and sacrifice recently, I got a perverse take: If getting into heaven depends on caring for the sick, homeless, naked and imprisoned, then we Christians end up having a stake in people continuing to be in pain so that we can help them. There’s a peculiar way in which our Christian activity can be utterly self-centered and even dishonest.

This is particularly true if we don’t examine the causes we embrace in an effort to locate our self-interest. This is a lesson fully embraced and taught by liberation and feminist theologians: We are grounded in what we’ve come through. We need to know our context.

As the powers become more monolithic, Christians really need to stop acting by rote, no matter how good the patterns may seem to be. Those of us with a long history of getting mailings out, trekking to church basements for lectures, writing letters to the editor, vigiling and sometimes crossing the trespass line, must think hard about what we’re choosing to do. These methods, chosen in a different era, may be the best ones we still have, but some may no longer serve us.

What if we got off the white horse, entered our homes and pried up the floor boards of our psyches to learn what our own passions are truly for? What if we got really honest with ourselves and with each other about how we see life, laying

all virtuous pretense to the side? What might the Holy Spirit be able to do with us then? It’s ironic to think that in response to a threatened war in the Gulf, we might all be at the local Federal Buildings while the Spirit is trying to prompt us to something altogether different.

Could we closely guard our freedom, act unpredictably while also grounding ourselves in community, in the arts and in faith?

My thinking about this follows on some 15 years experience in nonviolent direct action. The Detroit Peace Community observed liturgical seasons by making public and prayerful witness at sites where weapons were built, policy was made or injustice acted out. These services would often result in arrests followed by a prayerful sequence of court appearances and jail visits.

I learned a lot. I had to lay down my attachment to being a “good citizen” and my dependence on a clean arrest record. I had to forego some professional opportunities (I interviewed for a reporting job at *The Detroit News* in 1981 on the same day my name appeared in the paper for an arrest — my first — protesting a development project). I’ve had a chance to test whether I could cope in a jail cell, whether I could identify at all with the regular prison population and whether I could make a dent in the hostility of the guards. (In the latter case, I couldn’t and that was humbling.) I learned what it is like to pray and to read the Bible when you have nothing and no control over your life. I became familiar with the one-sided condescending attitude of most prison chaplains — they nearly always

assumed we’d done something wrong, didn’t listen and offered weak theology.

For those reasons I would recommend that people cross the line for their beliefs; it clarifies a lot.

However, if the goal is to really create change — to thwart the powers that value profit over creation and humanity — I believe these times call for a different way. Those of us in the peace movement are perhaps too predictable. Our actions can be anticipated and we can be outmaneuvered.

I dread hearing that folks are locked away for 18 years for participating in highly symbolic plowshare actions, in which they hammer missile silos or aircraft and bathe them in their own blood. This became clearest to me when I was most desperate about living in Detroit. When we had three crack houses on our (former) block and gangs were assaulting our neighbors’ homes with shotguns and Molotov cocktails, I was inwardly screaming, “Forget sacrificing your freedom at

military installations — come deal with the death right here! Come live outside the prison

walls and feel every inch captive.”

In the April issue I intimated some of these thoughts during my interview with Walter Brueggemann, who agreed that maybe the times are not right for direct confrontation and a reader responded in June: “I love Brueggemann — and I am using the part about the complaining Psalms in liturgy Sunday. However the other part of the interview had me thinking that Bill Stringfellow would be chiding. The saints will lose. We’re to be fools for Christ. It’s still about doing quality work of advocacy and resistance — efforts so good that they should change the world — and sometimes winning, but most times seeming the fool.”

She’s right. I don’t question her bot-



Challenging paradigms

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tom line, but I do increasingly question the tools we resort to and our abbreviated thought processes. Isn't there possibly a wider range of options? And isn't it possible that some activities that may seem mundane may be entirely radical? When news of the recent Oregon shootings swept through, I found myself praying in thanksgiving for monastic communities. I feel a desperate need for people to hold the center, to live an understanding of the sacred. Clara Brower, in her spiritual direction thesis, reports that feminist scholars are increasingly advocating that women "hold open a space for the Spirit to enter our living." She adds, "The women have stopped looking to male authorities to tell them about truth. Instead, they are learning to trust the sacred within."

The times are different now. They've been shifting gradually. At *The Witness* we've taken Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung's description of "ant and spider resistance" seriously. She says resistance happens locally in small, persistent ways and yet is linked (by spiders) to local activities all over the world. Yet, whenever we're out in public, it's easy to get tongue-tied as some people say, "Yeah, but tell us what to do!" It feels pale to say, "form a circle, enter a conversation and wait to see what evolves. Keep your heart open and honest. Watch for the movement of the spirit." When I attempted to say exactly this at a gathering in Utah, one

man nearly walked out, clearly feeling his times was wasted. It was a relief when another said that the most hopeful and perhaps radical thing he was doing was meeting monthly with a group of men of varying ages, not all people of faith. At their last meeting he said they had talked about houses they had lived in. Their agenda was not

For instance, one man, an electrician, totally rewired an older woman's home, saying he couldn't sleep knowing her house could go up in flames.

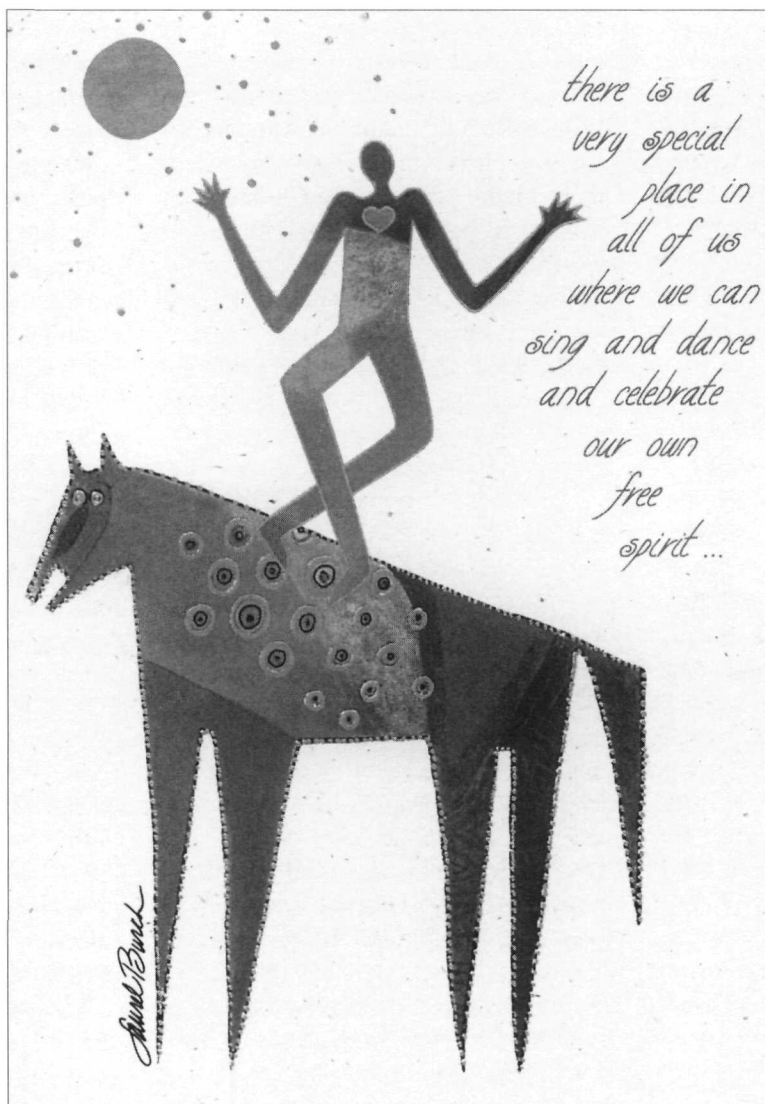
So what's radical? Is it dashing off to meetings? Is it repeating activities that perhaps used to work?

The work done in the sixties was tremendously important and provides a critical foundation — we need the analysis. But the most important work we can do now may be entering into reflection and digging deep. The next wave of resistance may not involve mass marches on Washington. We may not be carrying the flag for charismatic leaders. We probably won't be hurtling ourselves at the blades of the state to make a symbolic point that the media won't report.

We need to reclaim our sense of self both individually and as faith communities. We need to shield ourselves from the media (like the few in George Orwell's *1984* who tried to turn off the two-way TVs and step out of range of the ubiquitous listening microphones). We need quiet. We need to replace the jingles and seductions of advertising with a quiet rehearsal of our own stories — what is our personal history, what do we cherish, when have we felt God's presence, what is sac-

cred? We need to rehearse these stories for ourselves, teach them to children and help them write their own.

"If you look at the exilic Psalms,"



Free Spirit Dancing by Laurel Burch

limited to forming fast strategies for social change. Yet, in the course of things, organically, people in the circle stepped up to things that needed doing.

Walter Brueggemann said in the April issue of *The Witness*, “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 they engaged in a lot of truth-telling.”

Somehow this sounds pedestrian compared to extreme needs and dramatic protest actions, but I think it’s

fundamental. We are a people with no sense of history who are subject to tremendously sophisticated conditioning — most of us are exposed to 3,000 ads a day (*TW* 9/95). If we imagine that our sense of self is so strong as to be uninfluenced, we are deceiving ourselves. Resisting the suggestions that we are inadequate, unless we buy certain products, requires discipline and

silence. Our own voice, our song and our ability to hear the earth’s song as a people is nearly extinguished. (Watch for *TW* 10/98.) We need to recover it. We need to find circles in which to tell our stories truthfully — no bullshit. We need to discern the story of our bioregion: Where is the earth crying out for help? What does humanity need? What do our own spirits need? In December, *The Witness* will examine ways that people are finding to “go off the grid” — to get freer of the superstructures.

In that spirit, we look to the trickster.

When the powers are overarching and seemingly unchangeable, trickster is our best ally. Trickster can take rules and bend them back against the system. Trickster can persuade the ruling gods to step outside with those apples of immortality and then steal them for the earth-bound creatures. Or trickster can drag fire down from the gods for humanity. Wily, unpredictable, elusive, funny and often silly, trickster upsets both the gods’ and our own expectations, breaking open the hegemony so that we can see another way of living.

In *Trickster Makes This World* (p. 29), Lewis Hyde says, trickster moves in “uncanny territory. It is a space ruled by the disarming charm of the very young child. It is a traveler’s space where everything is on the road, cut loose from any clear locale. Here the citizens walk their livestock backward and speak a weird reversing language.”

At a recent Klan rally in Ann Arbor, Mich., citizens tried to present themselves as a buffer between the Klan, whose speech they reluctantly wanted to protect, and young demonstrators who believed the Klan should be smashed before a neo-Nazi spirit overwhelms the nation. My partner Bill participated in the work of the Chris-

Strategems of the powers

Corporate America and the government’s ability to defuse protest is no accident. For several decades, academics have been issued grants by the justice department to investigate the “prototypes” of criminal activity and of “collective disorder.”

In 1973 such a study resulted in guidelines that recommended that police intelligence units collect the names of activist organizations and their leaders. “Know their faces, addresses, cars, telephone numbers. Know the goals, strategy, and tactics of their organizations, the number of members, the level of their funding, and the sources of their funding.”

In 1981, researchers at the University of Michigan agreed to produce another report for the Justice Department (though they didn’t tell respondents for whom they were doing the study). This one would study “collective disorders.” Targeted were fast food workers trying to organize a union, May Day demonstrators, Chrysler workers who vandalized the line when they learned they were being laid off and Iranian demonstrators. Those contacted were told the University wanted to examine “the effectiveness of specific actions in the expression of issues and grievances.”

Members of the 100 activist organi-

zations contacted were assured confidentiality but their ages, occupations, marital status, number of children, sex and race were carefully recorded.

At the time, University of Michigan sociology professor William Gamson, who sat on the study’s advisory panel, conceded that “There’s no way we can really monitor the project. I’d feel more comfortable if it were not sponsored by an agency whose mission is social control.”

We can’t be reminded too often of COINTELPRO and the methods the U.S. government used to decimate activist groups in the 1960s and 1970s. Whether the groups’ activities were something we’d want to support is secondary. The first is whether it is legitimate for our government to lie, cheat, steal, threaten and kill to inhibit them.

This year, *The Wall Street Journal* ran an article that included a cryptic paragraph indicating that many in the Pentagon believe the next war will be on U.S. soil - it didn’t say whether the enemy would be intruders or citizens. Shortly thereafter the government authorized \$7 billion for investigation of “terrorist” activities, which is to say any activity which the government can argue might result in “disorder.” If you find that reassuring, think again.

— J.W-K.

tian Peace Team, which put its bodies between the Klan and the rock-hurling protesters. When he got home, Bill said it had been a confusing day. The peace team was fronting for the cops so it was hard to make it clear that he didn't like the Klan and also understood that cops could be abusive. Perhaps the best moment, he said, came when a group of high school students crashed into the scene with dragon puppets, drums and a wizard pinata — yelling “Yippee! Have a nice day!” and “The wizard is full of candy” as they threw candy to the crowd. It was also a nice touch that a sign above the Klan rally touted the dollar amount pledged to diversity work for every minute the Klan rally lasted — they raised over \$20,000.

Perhaps as important as telling our stories is taking time to notice the creation, to appreciate fire, water, air and earth. To fight with a sense of humor

and cagey wit requires rest.

Trickster is clever, but also lazy, indolent, pleasure-seeking. Following the trickster model allows us to relax the grip of necessity and guilt which can make it hard to enjoy a meal or an afternoon by a river. Trickster is not rigid, moralistic or stoic. Trickster is not co-dependent. Trickster is not always nice. Neither is Jesus — “glutton and wine bibber” as he's accused of being.

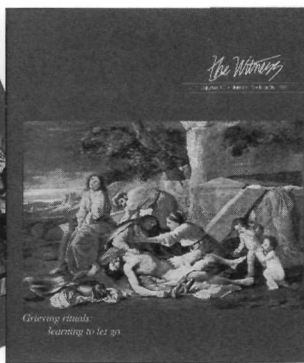
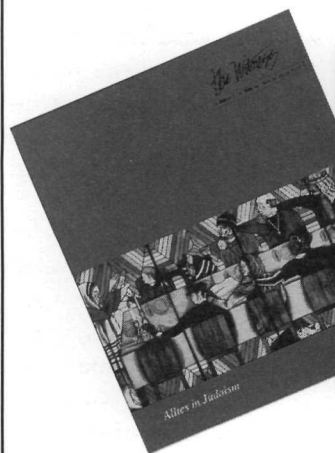
Rosanna Kazanjian, one of the women at the Greenfire community in Maine, dreamed that she was crucified between two women. After a while one woman said, “You know you can get down whenever you want.” It seemed too far to get down safely, but she did. Then she walked into a sanctuary and slipped on a beautiful colored sari and danced and danced and danced.

What I would like for us is the freedom

to honor God by reveling in the creation while actively remembering our identity and vocation, free always to act unexpectedly in resurrection hope. As Wendell Berry puts it in part of the *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer's Liberation Front*:

*Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?
Go with your love to the fields.
Lie easy in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.*

TW



**WINNER OF 13 AWARDS FOR
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The Witness

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Can we talk?

A conversation on inclusion, exclusion and orthodoxy

[Douglas LeBlanc is the editor of United Voice, the newspaper published by Episcopalians United (EU). EU promotes what it understands as orthodox Christian faith. Although The Witness could be characterized as articulating an opposing Christian Left perspective, Witness co-editor Julie Wortman and LeBlanc have become friends over the years in the course of covering many Episcopal Church events and gatherings. Following publication of the May 1998 issue of The Witness on the "The Episcopal Church in conflict," Wortman received a personal note from LeBlanc that developed into an e-mail conversation. We thought Witness readers might find that conversation of interest as they contemplate their own responses to the church-in-conflict topic.]

Douglas LeBlanc: I appreciated both halves of your interview with Verna Dozier on ambiguity (see TW 4/98 and 5/98). But I am troubled by the wording of your final question: "If you accord someone's exclusivist position dignity, it is hard to know how to proceed because the terms for inclusion involve someone else's exclusion."

It seems to me that to speak of "according dignity" to someone's position is to speak the language of exclusion: i.e., "I decide if your ideas are worthy of dignity." I know you're responding to what Verna said earlier in the interview and I may be

misreading you. And I'll say flat out that some beliefs, such as Nazism, are so inherently evil that they deserve no respect. I am hard pressed, however, to find many people on the Right who happily own the label of "exclusivist." Do you really believe that many of us on the Right

Do you really believe that many of us on the Right are concerned primarily with excluding people? If so, you're not understanding our convictions very clearly.

— Douglas LeBlanc

are concerned primarily with excluding people? If so, I think you're not understanding our convictions very clearly. By all means we're called to holiness, humility, justice, mercy, grace, peace, love. All of these are summarized well in the phrase, "imitation of Christ." (Let me acknowledge here that I have used such terms as "revisionist" and "liberationist" in the past. I am now deeply skeptical about the worth of most words ending in "ist," unless people choose those words for themselves.)

My usual experience with "inclusivity" is receiving letters and e-mail in which people announce their own fierce commitment to inclusivity, only to tell me how much I am driven by fear, hatred, "literalism," lust for power or some other motive they cannot possibly discern from a distance of hundreds of miles. I don't think it takes a theologian to recognize this as a moral and theological blind spot.

Julie Wortman: When I speak of according someone's position dignity, I guess I make a distinction between people and positions. Every person's dignity must be respected. That is, every person has

standing.

D.L.: I join you in making that distinction.

J.W.: But let's take a situation in which, say, the church has decided that women cannot be denied access to ordination on account of their sex, but some folks say that the only way they can continue to be members is if they are allowed to exclude women from the ordination process or from exercising an ordained role. I think according that exclusivist position dignity or standing is problematic. I can appreciate that a person might not believe women can or should be ordained. I can appreciate that this person will avoid the ministry of women clergy. But I cannot support this person's insistence on blocking women from access to ordination or denying women the possibility of serving in an ordained capacity as proof that the rest of us respect and include them.

Think of the bishops at Lambeth who will not accept having their picture taken with the other bishops of the Anglican communion if the women bishops are to be in the picture! I would prefer everyone be in the frame despite the ambiguities. If the bishops who do not accept women bishops wish to take themselves out of the frame, fine. If the powers that be accommodate to these bishops I'll be irate.

D.L.: I'd like everyone to be in the frame despite the ambiguities, too. As to accommodating the bishops who do not accept women bishops, I guess it depends on what qualifies as accommodation. I don't think anything will stop the group picture from being taken, or all meetings from proceeding as planned.

J.W.: I can see that few people might want to think of their position as "exclusivist," although we are routinely exclusivist in the church about who can or cannot do various things, who is or is not qualified for various assignments. I don't think most people see themselves as looking for people to exclude, but I do think that many of the convictions of those on the Right are, when lived out, decidedly exclusionary in a way that seems largely biased in favor of straight white men. (The Bible is largely patriarchal, too. Whether

Co-editor/publisher **Julie A. Wortman**, <julie@thewitness.org>, edits the Vital Signs section. She received an award of excellence for her issue on "Immigration: the flight into America" [12/97] from Episcopal Communicators.



one sees that as of God or of humanity is a big question. I'm guessing we'd disagree?) When these convictions are proclaimed "orthodox," discussion seems to have been nipped in the bud.

D.L.: I would have to say the Left is also exclusionary — but based on *ideology* (or on *theology*), not on sex, race or sexual orientation. Sometimes that means excluding straight white men. Sometimes that means excluding conservatives who happen to be Caribbeans.

You're safe in guessing that we disagree on whether the Bible is patriarchal. Just because the Bible describes polygamy in Old Testament times, for instance, does not mean it endorses polygamy. (The Bible describes human sin honestly, in all its ugliness.)

The Gospels certainly describe Jesus as inclusive, although I would say inclusivity was not the primary point of his life on earth. Redeeming human beings in body and soul was the primary point — that included physical healings, dining with outcasts, announcing the Kingdom of God, clearly proclaiming himself as the Messiah, dying on the cross and rising from the grave.

As for the word "orthodox," I find this definition from James Davison Hunter to be accurate and fair: "Orthodoxy: the commitment on the part of adherents to an external, definable and transcendent authority."

We once chatted about a rubber stamp that says "Orthopraxis, not orthodoxy." As I suggested then, I think that rubber stamp offers a false choice. The two depend on each other: Orthopraxis without orthodoxy is a social gospel, which may not transform human souls. Orthodoxy without orthopraxis is the faith of the Pharisees, and we know what Jesus had to say about the Pharisees.

J.W.: It is difficult to be pluralistic when among those gathered around the table are persons whose belief systems appear to reject ambiguity. The definition you offer for "orthodox" pertains to this. Generally, I think of orthodoxy as "right thinking" or "right belief." But who defines this external, transcendent authority you

commit yourself to? In what way is the transcendent an authority? Is "transcendent" the only nature of this authority?

My guess is that you have answers for these questions that you regard as the correct answers. If I reject your answers, what then?

When you say that "orthopraxis without orthodoxy is a social gospel, which may not transform human souls," I find myself wondering why you presume that the

*Who defines this external,
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what then?*

— Julie Wortman

souls of those who engage in social justice and other forms of orthopraxis are not transformed? Do you have a standard for the soul's transformation — a way we know that the soul has been properly transformed? Acknowledging that "doing the right thing" may often lack integrity, plenty of people on the Left these days are advocating that social action must be grounded in personal, spiritual transformation.

D.L.: I have no problem accepting orthodoxy as "right thinking" or "right belief." And, yes, I do have some answers to your questions. God, through the Holy Spirit, defines the external, transcendent authority to whom I commit myself. God (the transcendent) is an authority by virtue of creating the world and redeeming it. We are responsible to use Scripture, reason and tradition to understand God's revelation clearly. The way that we know that the soul has been properly transformed is if a soul that had not heard the Good News of Jesus now knows Jesus as Savior and Lord. I know that's

the language of an evangelical, but it is also the language of the Baptismal Covenant we hear so much about.

And despite our differences, so long as we are friends, or both Anglicans, I hope we remain in conversation. We both give our passion and activism to what we believe in, and we both try to be faithful to God as we understand God. In the spirit of Gamaliel, I suggest we leave the truth of our respective beliefs to God and to eternity. (If, for instance, inclusivity is more important to the Gospel than I recognize, I pray that will become clearer to me.)

J.W.: I'm wondering what it means to "know Jesus as Savior and Lord" and how you believe that shows up in someone's life? So often I find this sort of language code for something that never is made explicit.

D.L.: Well, I loathe code language and jargon. I do believe that "Savior and Lord" language expresses theology of the Atonement, which is a part of our Anglican heritage.

Let me express it in personal terms. Until I was about 13, I lived in a "works righteousness" universe. I knew I did bad things, and I hoped that my good deeds would somehow balance off those bad things. When I finally understood that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, I embraced him as my Savior. Ever since, I've been learning to make him my Lord as well — to welcome his discipline, to listen when the Holy Spirit warns me to flee temptation, to repent when I have mistreated somebody.

J.W.: What, exactly, is Jesus' discipline?

D.L.: When I speak of Jesus' discipline I mean that Jesus does not simply allow me to remain who I would be of my own volition. On my own power, I am inclined to be profane, to overeat, to be lazy, to be sarcastic, to jump to harsh conclusions about people — just a few examples. Jesus calls me out of self-indulgence and into a life of sacrifice. I would describe it as my daily struggle against sin. Can we agree that "sin" is still a word with some fairly clear meanings, rather than code for something more? If not, please see the Ten Commandments and the Seven

Deadly Sins to know what I mean.

J.W.: I reject atonement theology, Anglican heritage or no Anglican heritage. For me, what Jesus' life, death and resurrection point to is that death is not ultimate, that a person can — is called to, in fact — choose life without fear of death. I don't get a picture that Jesus thought that people were basically sinful, though he certainly pointed to the oppressions and death-dealing choices he encountered.

D.L.: We can agree that death is not ultimate. But I believe death would have been ultimate without the resurrection of Jesus. What are the theological essentials of being a Christian? I ask because I'm hearing so much about what you reject. I don't think Atonement theology — which is spelled out rather clearly in the liturgy of the Episcopal Church — is something we can reject as glibly, say, as somebody's musical tastes.

J.W.: What is essential for you and for me will be different. But I do embrace a hermeneutic of suspicion about the institutional church and Scripture and the human fashioning of both — something I find missing from much of what you and others on the Right say about God, authority and Jesus.

D.L.: You find the hermeneutic of suspicion missing from my view of the Bible because I do not believe Holy Scripture is at the mercy of my subjective judgments. God, through Scripture, holds my life against God's standards of holiness. Scripture judges me — not the other way round. I worship God, not Scripture. But I do take Scripture at face value when Scripture describes itself as God's self-revelation through human authors.

If your hermeneutic of suspicion leads you to believe, say, that Jesus does not present marriage as God's design for human sexual relations (as I believe it does), what do you believe he *does* present as God's design for sexual relations? Do you base this belief on any specific texts, scriptural or otherwise? Is marriage an entirely worthless concept?

J.W.: The last thing I take at face value is

Scripture! With respect to your question, I'd have to say I don't believe that Jesus presented us with some clear picture of God's design for sexual relations except in the sense of suggesting that we are not to trifle with one another. I know that many believe that Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees over divorce is a place where he says God intends men and women — and only men and women — to marry

What are the theological essentials of being a Christian? I ask because I'm hearing so much about what you reject. — LeBlanc

(without the possibility of divorce), but this passage seems to me to highlight a moment when Jesus plays the trickster in using the Pharisees' own game of invoking Scripture to confound their attempt to trip him up. In the marriage service in the prayer book the best we can do is to say we believe Jesus "adorned" married life because Jesus was among the guests at the wedding at Cana and performed his first miracle at the wedding feast. To my mind, Jesus here is not offering a very clear picture of God's intention for sexual relations. Still, I think marriage is valuable — I believe that it is so worthwhile (presuming we are speaking of a non-patriarchal version of marriage) that everyone should be able to partner in that way, with the support of the church and of the community.

I should also make clear that I don't reject Scripture as an authority, I just consider it a set of texts to be engaged. Every Sunday evening and every Monday morning my community engages Scripture as we listen for the spirit's call in our individual and collective lives. We have all been shaped by the stories — and the interpretations of the stories — contained in the Bible, but we do not regard what has been handed down as sacrosanct and impervious to honest questioning.

D.L.: I wouldn't say you reject Scripture as an authority. Clearly our understanding of its authority differs. I think the phrase "sacrosanct and impervious to honest questioning" is a misunderstanding of the scriptural authority I embrace. I certainly believe God expects us to use our reason in understanding Scripture. Both Scripture and God can withstand "honest questioning." Does honest questioning require a hermeneutic of suspicion? No.

J.W.: We on the Left and Right really don't accord one another dignity very much, do we? Not as if all our lives depended on it. There are so many ways we are all up against the wall and, I think, could be allies.

D.L.: I fully agree. I think we can all be better allies if we find a way to articulate, and understand, what we *do* hold in common as Episcopalians. I suggest the basic theological affirmations of the Nicene Creed and the baptismal covenant as a sensible starting point, but I doubt that enough progressives would agree.

J.W.: That might be true, especially as we talk about what those affirmations mean. I don't know if the church will survive these debates, but this bothers me less and less. I no longer expect the Episcopal Church to be an ally in knowing life and God and working for salvation because so often the institution denies the "dream of God" it carries. If we expect the institutional church, whatever the denomination, to be the only vehicle for knowing life and God and working for salvation, we'll be frustrated as often as we are helped — perhaps more often. The church is a principality like any other, fallen and in need of being recalled to its vocation to praise God and serve life.

D.L.: Perhaps this is a miracle: I agree with every word in your final two sentences! But I cannot say that I have given up on the Episcopal Church as an ally in knowing life and God and working for salvation. My *parish* is a strong ally, but at the diocesan, provincial and national levels the Episcopal Church can be as much of a burden as a help.

Arkansas dissidents test boundaries of diocesan authority

A mission congregation within the boundaries of the Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas is seeking to remain in the Anglican Communion, but not as a congregation of Arkansas — or even of the U.S. Episcopal Church. The situation tests the boundaries of diocesan authority and will likely end up on the agenda of this summer's Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops. According to Larry Maze, Arkansas' bishop, the congregation was started by a group "that had become disenchanted with the general direction of the Episcopal Church." As the congregation first began to form, Maze said he made it clear that "new congregations in our tradition do not spring up over disagreements" and he urged the group to "stay within the ranks of the larger church in order to be a voice for the changes" they were seeking.

The congregation has turned a deaf ear to such pleas, receiving guidance and help from the North American Missionary Society (NAMS), an independent organization within the Episcopal Church urging creation of a new theologically conservative Anglican province (see TW 5/98).

NAMS spokesperson Jon Shuler said that the majority of members of the congregation had "gradually ceased to worship in the Cathedral parish because of consistent, sustained and public support of the bishop's action [in signing the Koinonia Statement in 1994], which they believe to be an abandonment of the apostles teaching." The statement, written by John Spong of bishop of Newark,

said that sexual orientation is morally neutral and that it is possible to honor same-sex relationships.

Under protest from the diocese the congregation called Thomas Johnston of South Carolina as rector. "To our utter amazement on April 13 we learned that the bishop of South Carolina had earlier received a request to transfer Mr. Johnston to the Diocese of Shyira, Rwanda, Africa, and on April 6 had complied with the request," Maze said. This action effectively removes Johnston from "accountability to the American church. In effect, what had been a national dispute involving the integrity of diocesan boundaries is now an issue transplanted to the larger Anglican Communion," Maze said.

At the 1988 Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops, Maze pointed out, a resolution "reaffirms its unity in the historical position of respect for diocesan boundaries and the authority of bishops within those boundaries." The resolutions said that it would be "inappropriate behavior for any bishop or priest of this Communion to exercise episcopal or pastoral ministry within another diocese without first obtaining the permission and invitation of the ecclesial authority thereof."

Maze dismissed attempts by those who would reduce the disagreement "to a struggle between a 'liberal' bishop and a 'conservative' congregation." He stressed that mission strategy is "an intentional, collaborative effort on the part of the department of mission, the bishop, the executive council, the standing committee, and the annual convention"

To our utter amazement we learned that the bishop of South Carolina had received a request to transfer Mr. Johnston to the Diocese of Shyira, Rwanda, Africa, and had complied with the request.

— Larry Maze

and that precludes forming any "special interest congregation."

Maze expects the issue of diocesan boundaries to be on the agenda of this summer's Lambeth Conference. In the meantime, he will consult with the bishop in Rwanda and "review this situation as it impacts the larger church."

— based on a report by James Solheim, Episcopal News Service

Call for music celebrating gifts of women

The Women's Sacred Music Project, Inc., in conjunction with the Episcopal Church's Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, is seeking submissions for a supplement to the church's hymnal aimed at celebrating the gifts and diversity of women in scripture, women saints, and churchwomen. Simple congregational music is needed. Accompaniments should be varied and flexible, adaptable for use in small groups and parishes, reflective of the cultural diversity of the church and appropriate for use by both men and women.

This supplement is intended to encourage women poets and composers to write for the church. The deadline for submission of texts (without musical settings) is Sept. 17, 1998.

Musical settings of existing texts are also needed, specifically settings of supplemental liturgical texts contained in *Enriching Our Worship*, available from Church Publishing, Inc., in New York (can be ordered by calling 1-800-242-1918). Settings of the eucharistic liturgy and the offices will be included. Settings of texts from the New Zealand Prayer Book are also welcome. Deadline for submission of music with text is Jan. 19, 1999.

Please send submissions to: The Women's Sacred Music Project, Inc. c/o the Cathedral Church of the Saviour, 3723 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104. For more information, call Lisa Neufeld Thomas, 215-557-8172.

Ireland's peace process

by David Stevens

Yes I said Yes I will Yes.

(James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*)

The Agreement on Good Friday between the British and Irish governments and most of the political parties in Northern Ireland aims to end almost 30 years of bitter civil and sectarian conflict and lay the foundations of peaceful coexistence between the two communities in Northern Ireland, and between the North and the South.

Running to well over 10,000 words, the agreement seeks to address relationships within Northern Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and between the two jurisdictions on this island and England, Scotland and Wales. It also contains measures on human and civil rights, policing, prisoners and other issues that have been sources of conflict in Northern Ireland.

The people of Ireland were asked in separate referenda, North and South, on May 2 whether this agreement offered an acceptable way forward.

People in the South voted overwhelmingly to accept the Agreement, seeing it as offering a chance of peace.

Nationalists in Northern Ireland also overwhelmingly said Yes, seeing the Agreement as an opportunity to make

political progress. The Unionist community in Northern Ireland gave a much more reluctant Yes. It was an agonizing decision for many. Opinion polls showed large numbers of undecided Unionists only days before the Referendum vote. In the event around 45 percent said No.

The proposed accelerated release of terrorist prisoners was a sticking point for many. Decommissioning of terrorist weapons was also a significant issue.

Paradoxically, two of the groups which

Violence may continue for some time.

helped to make the Agreement possible — the Ulster Democratic Party and the Progressive Unionist Party — had close links with loyalist terrorist organizations. Many of their leaders were former prisoners who had learned something in prison — that violence was not the answer. They played a significant and constructive role in Northern Ireland politics following the loyalist ceasefire in the autumn of 1994. (The IRA called their ceasefire at the end of August 1994). For these parties it was a “good enough” Agreement. The Union with Britain was safe.

Sinn Fein — which has close links with the Provisional IRA — eventually voted to accept the Agreement. This acceptance meant that many of the sacred principles of Republicanism have had to be compromised. The leadership of Sinn Fein has been extremely skilled in bringing the Republican movement in from the political cold, while keeping so many supporters on board. The “normalization” of Sinn Fein as a conventional political party is not yet complete — there is

still the link with the IRA. And some are still attracted to a militant Republican agenda. However, for most Republicans, too, it was a “good enough” Agreement. It could be sold as a transitional stage to a united Ireland.

The Agreement is not peace — it is simply an opportunity to make and build peace. Nor is the Agreement reconciliation between the communities in Northern Ireland. As the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, said in the British House of Commons: “It will take a long time to repair the physical and emotional damage of the past and bring about a real sense of reconciliation and partnership.” The Agreement is a political accommodation which may in time lead to reconciliation among the people of Northern Ireland.

The political action now moves to the selection of candidates and the campaigning for the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly to be held in June. The leader of the main Unionist Party, David Trimble, took an enormous risk when he accepted the Good Friday Agreement. He scored a significant victory in the Referendum; he has not, however, conclusively defeated his opponents within unionism (including those within his Party). There is still a lot to play for. The Unionist rejectionists are hoping to wreck the Assembly. There are many difficult issues to face: the decommissioning of terrorist weapons, the setting up of a powersharing executive in which Sinn Fein are likely to be entitled to have members, the reform of policing. Violence may continue for some time — dissident republican paramilitaries oppose the Agreement and there could be violence from some loyalist sources. The (Protestant) Orange Order marching season is getting underway, which will inevitably raise community tension. Nevertheless, in the words of a Belfast Protestant, “It’s a bit of a start.” **TW**

David Stevens is a Corrymeela Community member and General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches.

Keeping Watch

Trickster makes this world

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Trickster Makes This World by Lewis Hyde (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).

The role of the trickster, according to Lewis Hyde in his best-selling *Trickster Makes This World*, is to discredit what appear to be rigid social structures through creativity, inconsistency, lies, theft, and appetite. Trickster is at once clever and stupid, brilliantly creative and flagrantly vulgar. Trickster is a god of the crossroads, a god on the move with very little baggage, a god free of the shame inflicted by the rules of a locality.

When negotiating between mortals and gods, Trickster is an unreliable ally for both parties. He may steal the fire and give it to the mortals, but he is equally likely to betray mortals' expectations. He breaks down the rigidity in human commerce with the all-perfect gods. Trickster's gift is that his conduct disappoints our expectations and forces us to look at situations in a new way. If the rules of the prevailing order are not sacrosanct, what then?

In the common dualities, trickster finds another way. Hyde points out that when the predator throws in a fishing line to catch the fish, trickster enjoys approaching the hook under water, removing and eating the bait. He confounds the predator and feeds himself even though he may not feel any great love for the fish.

In modern context, Hyde compares the trickster to the con man who passes through town, stealing women's hearts, breaking the rules and feeling no shame. These rebels, he argues, are essential in maintain-

ing the flexibility of our cultures.

"I want to argue a paradox that the myth asserts: That the origins, liveliness, and durability of cultures require that there be space for figures whose function is to uncover and disrupt the very things that cultures are based on," Hyde writes in the introduction. "I hope to give some sense of how this can be, how social life can depend on treating antisocial characters as part of the sacred."

Hyde notes in a concluding chapter

It's a great glimpse into a kind of activism that confounds middle class morality, but may set middle class persons free of the rules that weave a cloth intended to adorn the very rich.

that, at least within current scholarship, trickster tends to be male. He acknowledges that females sometimes act as tricksters, but they do not apparently sustain the level of deception, lust and mobility typical of tricksters. Hyde explores a variety of reasons for this, noting that perhaps a challenge to patriarchy from a male has a particular mythic meaning in its deconstruction. But Hyde acknowledges that the scholarly research may yet find such tales.

Trickster's voice, his/her version of events — laced perhaps with lies that may reveal the truth — always comes from the margins, Hyde says. The first lie or theft is one accomplished in order to gain standing. For instance, Hermes, who is the illegitimate and unacknowledged

son of Zeus, steals Apollo's sacred cattle. Through this theft he obligates his brother to enter into conflict with him, to acknowledge him. Eventually through his unabashed responses and his singing (which may allow him to rewrite history) he is able to lure Apollo into concessions which give him distinct and important roles in the pantheon.

"Our ideas about property and theft depend on a set of assumptions about how the world is divided up. Trickster's lies and thefts challenge those premises and in so doing reveal their artifice and suggest alternatives," Hyde writes.

In a fascinating chapter, Hyde examines the life and work of Frederick Douglass as essentially trickster. Douglass, he says, stole his education as soon as he overheard a slave owner saying that teaching literacy could end slavery. With his education, Douglass began to write, often with irony, about the prevailing order, raising questions about its presumed morality. Hyde acknowledges that Douglass spoke with integrity and earnestness. He did not embody the amoral foolery of the trickster, but he did cast confusion and break open the conversation. He did this in part by stealing back the force of his concealed patrimony by learning European scholarship and logic.

The book is wonderful. It is lively and well-written. It is rich in ideas. The author's politics are compatible with those of *The Witness*. It's a great glimpse into a kind of activism that confounds middle class morality, but may set middle class persons free of the rules that weave a cloth intended to adorn the very rich. **TW**

review

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

Coyote is not the type of person usually selected for the *Witness* profile. Not only is he a purely mythological figure, he is often a singularly disedifying one. But it is entirely in keeping with this trickster's style that he should pop up disconcertingly in this space.

Coyote occupies a central role in the mythology of native tribes of Western North America. His character, developed over centuries of oral tradition, is so complex and multi-faceted that some anthropologists have posited more than one Coyote. Others, like folklore scholar Margaret K. Brady, insist that Coyote, by nature, is an "ambiguous anomaly" and "the exponent of all possibilities" (*Some Kind of Power: Navaho Children's Skinwalker Narratives*, U. of Utah, 1984).

After skimming several collections of Coyote narratives, I can attest that I might have been happier not to have heard of some of these possibilities. The uncensored adult versions depict Coyote as insatiably greedy and lustful (incest is among the least imaginative of his sexual

"Coyote's identity expresses an ambiguity and paradox that confuses all customary categories and erases the boundary between order and chaos, human and animal, good and evil," Margaret Brady explains.



Coyote

Tom Lumpkin

Coyote by Marianne Arbogast

exploits). Not infrequently, the stories involve some form of bodily dismemberment. Some of this, no doubt, is linked to his role in the creation of the world, but it is still unsettling.

At times, Coyote performs useful services for human beings: teaching them how to fish and how to procreate, and stealing fire for their use. More often, his boundless avarice seems to land him in hot water himself, enabling others to outwit him and sometimes leading to his own death. But here, too, he violates boundaries, springing back to life again and again.

In Navajo myth, Coyote occupies a position near the door of the assembly of the Holy People, aligning himself neither with the good on the south side nor the evil on the north.

"Coyote's identity expresses an ambiguity and paradox that confuses all cus-

tomary categories and erases the boundary between order and chaos, human and animal, good and evil," Margaret Brady explains. "In this coexistence of opposites that real power to energize the social system lies, for such paradoxical opposition expresses in a dynamic way the ultimate possibilities of that system."

The following stories offer a relatively gentle introduction to this disquieting character.

Coyote's swallowing match with Grizzly Bear (Molala)

Coyote was going up toward Mt. Hood. He met Grizzly Bear. Grizzly Bear said, "Where are you going, Coyote?"

Coyote said, "I am going up country."

"Why are you going there?" asked Grizzly Bear.

Coyote said, "I am making the world."

Then Grizzly Bear said, "We must fight."

*Witness,
the quick and the dead
(and the mythic)*

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*, <marianne@thewitness.org>. Her issue on Ireland [10/97] was one of three that earned *The Witness* an award of overall excellence from the Episcopal Communicators. Artist Tom Lumpkin is a Catholic priest living at the Catholic Worker House in Detroit. [The Coyote stories are reprinted with permission from Coyote Was Going There: Indian Literature of the Oregon Country, compiled and edited by Jarold Ramsey, ©1997, University of Washington Press.]

Coyote said, "No, we must have a swallowing match."

Grizzly said, "No! We must fight a duel."

Coyote said, "We will swallow stones."

Grizzly said, "Go ahead, we will swallow them."

Coyote said, "We must have them very hot."

"How many hot rocks?" said Grizzly.

Coyote said, "You swallow first, then I will."

Then the Grizzly Bear swallowed a hot stone, "Now it's your turn," he said.

Then Coyote said, "Yes," and began to swallow strawberries, not rocks! He fooled Grizzly, he swallowed five strawberries. Then Coyote told Grizzly, "Now you must swallow five hot stones."

"All right," said Grizzly. Then he commenced swallowing hot rocks, they burst his heart, and he died.

Now Coyote sat down and studied. "Now I must go, I am going on forever. He is gone now, the world is going to last so long!"

He skinned Grizzly, then began cutting him up; he scattered his body in little pieces all over. Then to the Molala country he threw the heart. He said, "Now the Molala will be good hunters; they will all be good, thinking and studying about hunting deer. They will think all the time they are on a hunt."

Indeed they know how to dodge out, those Molala.

Coyote builds Willamette Falls and the magic fish trap (Clackamas Chinook)

Coyote came to that place [around Oregon City] and found the people there very hungry. The river was full of salmon, but they had no way to spear them in the deep water. Coyote decided that he would build a big waterfall, so that the salmon would come to the surface for spearing. Then he would build a fish trap there too.

First he tried at the mouth of Pudding

River, but it was no good, and all he made was the gravel-bar there. So he went on down the river to Rock Island, and it was better, but after making the rapids there he gave up again and went farther down still. Where the Willamette Falls are now he found just the right place, and he made the Falls high and wide. All the Indians came and began to fish.

Coyote became angry and said to the trap, "What, can't you wait with your fish-catching until I've built a fire?" The trap was very offended by Coyote's impatience, and stopped working right then. So after that the people had to spear their salmon as best they could.

Now Coyote made his magic fish trap. He made it so it would speak, and say *Noseepsk!* when it was full. Because he was pretty hungry, Coyote decided to try it first himself. He set the trap by the Falls, and then ran back up the shore to prepare to make a cooking-fire. But he had only begun when the trap called out, "*Noseepsk!*" He hurried back; indeed the trap was full of salmon. Running back with them, he started his fire again, but again the fish trap cried "*Noseepsk! Noseepsk!*" He went again and found the trap full of salmon. Again he ran to the shore with them; again he had hardly gotten to his fire when the trap called out, "*Noseepsk! Noseepsk!*" It happened again, and again; the fifth time Coyote became angry and said to the trap, "What, can't you wait with your fish-catching until I've built a fire?" The trap was very offended by Coyote's impatience, and

stopped working right then. So after that the people had to spear their salmon as best they could.

Tsagigla'lal (Wishram)

A woman had a house where the village of Nixlu'idix was later built [presentday Wishram, or Spedis]. She was chief of all who lived in this region. That was long ago, before Coyote came up the river and changed things, and people were not yet real people.

After a time Coyote in his travels came to this place and asked the inhabitants if they were living well or ill. They sent him to their chief, who lived up in the rocks, where she could look down on the village and know all that was going on.

Coyote climbed up to her home and asked: "What kind of living do you give these people? Do you treat them well, or are you one of those evil women?"

"I am teaching them how to live well and to build good houses," she said.

"Soon the world is going to change," he told her, "and women will no longer be chiefs. You will be stopped from being a chief."

Then he changed her into a rock, with the command, "You shall stay here and watch over the people who live at this place, which shall be called Nixlu'idix."

All the people know that *Tsagigla'lal* sees all things, for whenever they are looking up at her those large eyes are watching them. **TW**

Coming in September Who is mentoring the next generation?

Focussing on young adults 18-25, our next issue will explore the sorts of commitments this generation is developing and why. Let us know if there is someone (a potential subscriber?) to whom we should send this issue. Call 313-841-1967 or e-mail us <office@thewitness.org>.

Letters,
continued from page 3

and resurrection much more literally than I do, and that is okay.

I came of age when the liberal winds were blowing through most of the Protestant churches in the sixties, and we found our place to be in the secular world, welcoming the scholarship that made the Bible come alive, the truth to be found through all the arts, and the scientific findings that expanded our image of God and made us aware of our kinship with all of God's creatures, and with earth itself.

There were plenty of devils to be conquered: consumerism, discrimination, and war, to name a few, and young people willing to take the risk of challenging them all. However, you cannot change society without changing people, and you cannot change people by ignoring or refuting God's truth in the world outside the church with archaic sociological and theological language and symbols that have no meaning for those who have not grown up in the church. Action has to be undergirded by a theology that is in tune with what we observe as God's work in the world outside the Bible. Worship, theology and action — emotions, intellect and will, have to mesh.

Ruth M. Kratz
Newark, DE

LET ME START OUT BY SAYING that I do believe in dinosaurs, or, more precisely, that I believe the theory of dinosaurs to be a fairly plausible interpretation of certain facts. It remains only that. We cannot know what they looked like, how they lived or even which head might belong to which body with any certainty. I also do not know what it is like to live the life of a tree. Nor, truly, what it is like to live the life of my lover, how she feels, or what she thinks, except what she can tell me through the very imprecise medium of words. How much the more so are we unable to know and understand God, who is beyond all thought and form. The list of things that I do not know goes on, and that is one of the most religious statements that I can make.

All of our words about God, or the world around us, are dim metaphors, the finger pointing at the moon, so to speak, and not the moon itself. To forget this is to be tempted to recreate God through our own intellect, or even to begin to believe that we are God. The emperor really has no clothes. God is immensely more than we can know, and so is our world. Dinosaurs, trees and lovers remind us of the great faith that is required for our every action and of the vast mystery of the world around us.

Kim Conwell
Detroit, MI

Witness praise

AS A LAPSED AND VERY CONFLICTED Catholic your magazine gives a sense of hope

— you speak such common love, sound sense, encompassing caring that you effectively take care of all of us.

Thank you.

Jan Torgerson
Pettibone, ND

IT TAKES A HORRENDOUS AMOUNT of "stuff" to keep me from reading you cover-to-cover on the day you arrive! The only time I've read an issue again is when I was looking for a missing issue—BUT I've never thrown one out, or even put it on the library's "put & take" shelf! AND I still intend to have a "subscribe to *The Witness*" table at St. Andrew's! (I have all the back-issues, etc. — just a matter of coordinating my time with the church calendar.)

Elisabeth Rees
Ann Arbor, MI

Renewals

I DON'T WANT TO LOSE YOU EITHER!

Having just moved, I can't find even one of the earlier notices I should have sent back, so here is what I hope is the right amount of money to renew — and my new address and postal code.

Please keep *Witness* coming. I find it a really reliable resource for many of the concerns I share with you.

J.R.H. Dempster
Vancouver, B.C. Canada

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