The Witness

Volume 81 • Number 12 • December, 1998

Off-the-grid resistance: a reclaiming of soul

Post-Lambeth debate

PLEASE KEEP US INFORMED about the post-Lambeth debate, especially the reactionaries' focus on personal morality and avoidance of corporate responsibility — we do not want to be Wit-less!

Jared Jackson
Pittsburgh, PA

Jubilee 2000

PLEASE SEND A SAMPLE COPY of *The Witness* to Bob Johnson, a Lutheran pastor I met last week at the Jubilee 2000/USA National Conference, "Break the Chains of Debt." This was a stimulating and educational conference. About 140 people preregistered and attendees were from over 20 states and several foreign countries. As the Jubilee year approaches and this initiative gathers steam, [*Witness* contributing editor] Ched Myers gave a wonderful Bible study on the sabbatarian basis and history of Jubilee — truly outstanding and suggestive of a broader application than this question of international debt relief.

I very much like the way you develop a monthly topical focus. Some topics engage me immediately. Others don't, but given your extensive and varied coverage, they become interesting and compelling.

Joanne Droppers
Arlington, VA

Not renewing

IT'S OBVIOUS THAT YOU MEAN WELL, but it's hard to take the church-y jargon and the rather insistent self-congratulation in each issue. Devoting several pages to gee-gosh-how-wonderful-you-are letters is very off-putting. Wish you well in reaching the people who resonate with you.

Ann Landsberg and Tim Baehr
Jamaica Plain, MA

Endowment fund gift

The Episcopal Church Publishing Company, publisher of *The Witness*, is pleased to announce that it has received a very generous gift to its endowment fund from an anonymous donor who says she wants to affirm the work that *The Witness* is doing. Income from the fund is crucial to the ongoing life of *The Witness*. The staff and board are very grateful for — and humbled by — this expression of enthusiasm and strong support for our work.

Classifieds

Episcopal Peace Fellowship

"Will you strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being?" Our Baptismal Covenant calls us to do just that. Since 1939 the Episcopal Peace Fellowship has provided community, support and fellowship to Episcopalians committed to answering this call.
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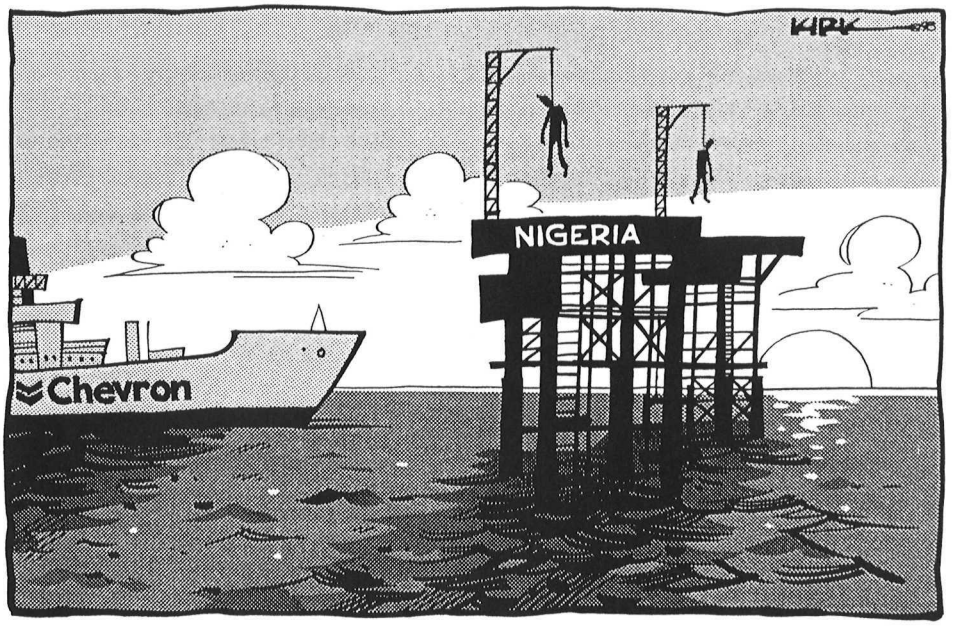
Witness classifieds cost 75 cents a word or $30 an inch, whichever is less. Copy is due the 15th of month, two months prior to publication. Contact Marianne Arbogast, <marianne@thewitness.org>.

On not giving up in Northern California



"Our church is going to be part of the Billy Graham Crusade," the Dean of the Cathedral announced.

As soon as these words hit my ears, alarm bells, buzzers, and whistles went off in my head. I was convinced that Graham — because he was a fundamentalist and because most of my family had been converted to fundamentalism through, in part, his television crusades — had played a big part in the loss of my family. Fundamentalism provided them with ammunition to wage a war of hatred against the evils of homosexuality. I received many tracts from various family members condemning homosexuality, and asking me to "repent of my sinful ways."

I accepted the fact that I could never be part of my family unless I changed. I had reconciled my feelings of hurt and loss — until the Dean's words hit my ears, causing memories to resurface once again.

I came to this parish thinking that my partner and I could participate in the community as open lesbian women, but now I felt threatened. Would the church be safe after joining the Crusade? Emotions of vulnerability joined with the old memories of hurt and loss. My first inclination was to leave. But something told me to think about my decision.

Gathering my thoughts, I tried to focus on what the Dean was saying: "Counselors from our church will be able to provide outreach to those who do not want to join conservative churches."

After the service I was approached by a couple of people suggesting that I become a counselor with the Crusade. They felt that by my becoming part of the counseling team I might reach out to gay and lesbian people. I knew this was an impossibility. I couldn't be open and be accepted as a counselor with the Billy Graham Crusade. But I realized that within my own church there was a need to address and advocate for gay and lesbian issues.

I decided to start a chapter of Integrity, the national organization of lesbian and gay Episcopalians and their friends. I approached the Dean with my idea. I was given permission to proceed. Since that time Integrity has become increasingly visible in this diocese through its presence at diocesan conventions, sponsorship of pro-gay programs, playing an active role in the life of the parish, and providing outreach to gays and lesbians. The parish which once supported the Billy Graham Crusade has offered its support to Integrity, and has become a strong advocate for gay and lesbian rights.

I felt Integrity was making many inroads in the battle for justice — until last summer's Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops and the bishops' condemnation of homosexuality. Once more I felt I was not welcome in a church which claims to welcome everybody. I was not only discouraged for myself, but for other gay and lesbians who need to hear that the church accepts them just as they are. I was ready to give up.

But then I heard that former Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning was coming to Sacramento to help our parish celebrate its anniversary. I had read his book *No Outcasts* and knew that he was a strong advocate for gay and lesbian justice issues. I guessed that his presence would provide a lot of moral support to gay and lesbian people who felt the church had turned its back on them. I invited him to stay an extra day so he could do something special for our Integrity chapter. Much to my delight he graciously accepted.

Bishop Browning talked about his perceptions on the Lambeth decision and the need for gay and lesbian justice. Because of the turnout and positive response I believe that his presentation will prove to be a pivotal point in raising awareness of gay and lesbian justice in our diocese, and may even open doors to dialogue about sexuality issues.

When I reflect on how negative situations, such as Billy Graham and Lambeth, can become positive, I am reminded of the assurance Christ gave to us when he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." I think it is this peace Christ promises that leads us all in our work for justice.

Barb Chandler, TSSF
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The Witness

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Cover: L'Adoration des Bergers *by Georges de La Tour, Louvre, Paris*

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.

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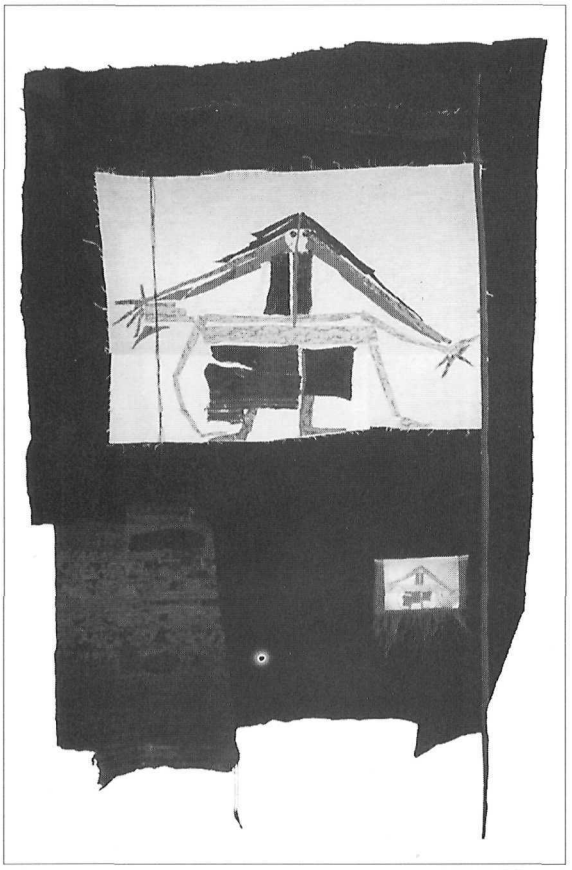
Off-the-grid resistance

by Julie A. Wortman

Lately I find myself wishing that I could spend my full-time energies homesteading. With the freezer full of our homegrown produce, the back porch littered with buckets of root vegetables, and five cords of wood stacked in readiness to fuel the wood stove, it sometimes seems possible. But our lives are still too thoroughly entwined with the economics of credit and debt — and we are still too woefully ignorant of what true homesteading would entail — to turn the wish into flesh-and-blood reality all at once. Still, my household is incrementally working toward a simpler life lived sustainably and green. And we are not the only ones attempting such a shift. In this process of acting very locally and very personally, people are learning to grasp the global connections more deeply, reinventing Left politics along the way. The success earlier this year of organic food producers and consumers in forcing the federal government to back off from its proposal to water down organic labeling regulations is a stunning recent example of the growing power of green-minded voters to challenge society's routine accommodation to the profit-at-all-costs agricorporations.

But let us be clear. We are talking here not primarily about a reclaiming of political will, but about a reclaiming of soul.

I've been thinking a lot about this lately as we here at *The Witness* have been living with the frightening reality of co-editor Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann's brain tumor. Having worked so closely with her over the past seven years and seen her overcome last-minute editorial disasters with breathtaking determination, it is unimaginable to me that she will not pull off a defy-all-odds recovery. Not that I haven't at times (all too characteristically) doubted her process, impatient for quick choices and fast positive results. But the politics of the medical world are not so easily or swiftly negotiated, especially for someone with Jeanie's strong sense of self-possession. She has proceeded in this matter trying to sort out the fact from the fiction, the life-giving from the life-denying, the self-affirming from the self-defeating.



Adelaide Winstead

Jeanie hasn't always gotten her way in life, but more than most people I know she is aware of the compromises she is forced to make and does her best to test and retest their validity. She knows who she is and to whom she belongs — and responds to life accordingly.

Without such self-possession, a person could end up sleepwalking her days away. In his own time, Henry David Thoreau believed such somnambulance afflicted most of the general populace. Worried that he himself might be infected, he packed himself off to Walden Pond in the hope that he might figure out how to live fully awake. His was a mystic's quest to which few of us consciously aspire. But living in a state of alert self-possession (which is not the same as self-centeredness) — that is, living as if we and our choices truly matter — is a sacred vocation to which we are all called.

The radical reordering of our individual and communal lives that such a way of living entails suggests why one mother's son I can think of was killed when he urged a disenfran-

continued on page 6

editor's note

Julie A. Wortman is co-editor/publisher of *The Witness*, <julie@thewitness.org>. Artist **Adelaide Winstead** lives in Tenants Harbor, Me.

chised populace to embrace it. We spend the Advent season admonishing one another to keep our eyes open to the unexpected possibilities that open up when we honor this man's counsel as gospel. This we do in the face of continuing, often daunting pressure from the powers that be to accept their smoke-and-mirrors version of what we long for most.

Thoreau took to the woods to cleanse his palate of the politics and social presumptions of the powers of his time and to simplify, simplify, simplify. Thirty years ago like-minded folk went back to the land and off the utility grid. These days, with so many former hippies living mainstream lives and with corporations poised to wrestle the renewable energy movement away from any association with alternative economics, it is difficult to imagine completely unplugging from the systems that dominate our way of life. But I believe the off-the-grid metaphor — and the hope it embodies — still holds.

A resistance of going off the grid still means a resistance of making choices that free us to see how corporations, the global economy and the various powers and principalities of this world seduce us into living according to the bottom-line value of financial profit — profit at the expense of justice, profit at the expense of environmental quality and profit at the expense of our own self-possession as God's own. It is a resistance through which we teach ourselves awareness of life as it is — and through which we learn where our true security lies and what faithfulness entails.

Living in a state of alert self-possession — that is, living as if we and our choices truly matter — is a sacred vocation to which we are all called.

These off-the-grid choices could be modest in the extreme, such as committing oneself weekly to a complete day of sabbath or going "green" in some area of regular consumption — or they might entail dramatic lifestyle shifts, such as cutting up all the credit cards or joining a co-housing project. The purpose is to destroy the artificial limits of profit-based possibility and open up experimentation in ways of operating that nurture life, community and the common good. The goal is to learn sustainability, the uncomplicated exchange of goods and services that sustainability implies, and a commitment to environmental quality and egalitarianism.

If we're lucky, in the process more and more of us will wake up to the truth: that no one need go without the basics of life — including the self-possession required for choosing life in the face of death. TW

BACK ISSUES WITH CONNECTIONS TO THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

The following back issues of* The Witness *contain articles which may relate directly to* Off-the-grid resistance, *or simply to the spirit of this month's topic.

- *Alternative ways of doing church (8-9/94)*
- *Economic justice (5/94)*
- *Fasting in Babylon (12/96)*
- *In defense of creation (6/93)*
- *Silence (1-2/96)*
- *Trickster spirit: a paradigm for social action? (7-8/98)*
- *What to do with what you don't believe (4/98)*
- *Women's spirituality (7/94)*

Other available back issues:

- *Africa: Come, spirit, come (6/95)*
- *American Faces of Islam (5/96)*
- *Body wisdom (5/95)*
- *Can Christians learn the earth's song? (10/98)*
- *The Christian Right (10/96)*
- *Christians and animal rights (10/93)*
- *The communion of saints (11/93)*
- *Disabilities (6/94)*
- *Economies of sin (3/95)*
- *Glamour (11/94)*
- *Godly sex (5/93)*
- *Holy matrimony (12/95)*
- *Hospitals: quality, access and spirit (6/96)*
- *In need of a labor movement (9/96)*
- *International youth in crisis (7-8/93)*
- *The Left (3/94)*
- *The New Party (11/95)*
- *Northern Ireland: winds of peace (11/97)*
- *Ordination: multi-cultural priesthood (5/92)*
- *Perspectives on Aging (1-2/93)*
- *The prison-industrial complex (11/98)*
- *Resisting sprawl (10-95)*
- *Resurrecting land (4/95)*
- *Staying in my denomination (10/94)*
- *Unmasking the death penalty (9/97)*
- *Welfare 'reform' and poverty in the 1990s (3/98)*
- *When the church engages rage (12/92)*
- *Who is mentoring today's young adults? (9/98)*

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Judgment Day

by Mary Thalia Pratt

When the angel with the flaming sword asks:
What have you done that is good?
What have you done that will last?
This is the answer I will give:

I walked long with my husband
on the wild uphill footpaths
remembering the names of flowers.

I gave thanks on a cold blue morning
while the new-raised sun
spread my shadow
along the unmarked snow.

I kept rosemary in a white pot
in my kitchen window.

I held my sister's hand ten days before she died
and we watched the sky turn orange on more time
and did not need to speak.

I played the piano for an old man in a nursing home:
"when the roll is called up yonder," and he sang.

I counted shooting-stars with my son
one summer midnight
and felt the skin of dew-covered grass
pulling us in safe.

The day before a February storm,
I took in a thin silver stray cat
with eyes the color of green olives.

I sat most of an afternoon in the sun
with my old dog, and later we rolled in leaves.

I trust that these will suffice.

Renewable energy on the eve of the millenium

by Rachel Brahinsky

Turning from the highway into a quiet northern California town, I followed a windy macadam strip as it turned to gravel and then dirt. Counting three hilltops to the turn, I headed down a quarter-mile lumpy driveway cluttered with a rusting trailer and old machine parts to reach a rose-colored stucco straw-bale home.

I turned off the motor and was suddenly immersed in silence. There was no endless roar of traffic; the neighbors — each situated on 40-acre plots of land — were inaudible. Inside, the steady hum that usually accompanies modern appliances was noticeably absent. The culprit: an array of solar cells, standing sentinel, catching the rays of the sun to be converted into one of the cleanest and purest forms of electricity.

Since they built their home here five years ago, a lot of things in Ron and Pamela Benning-Hale's lives have changed. To save power, they turn the refrigerator off at night. They don't use the computer and the television at the same time when the sunlight is at its lowest level. And there's the monthly electric bill — it never comes.

"We wanted something that was energy efficient," Ron Benning-Hale explained. And in order to be less dependent on the corporations that control the energy market, the Benning-Hales chose to build their house "off the grid," that is, independent of the standard electric utility grid. Their appliances and lights run on electricity generated by a set of shiny black solar panels that rest just below the house, angled to receive maximum sunshine. When the skies are too grey (as they were during last winter's El Niño storms), the Benning-Hales fire up their gasoline-powered generator so they can keep the lights on a little longer.

'You start noticing stars.'

With solar power the Benning-Hales supply themselves with all of their electric needs — they watch television, play CDs and cook — they even log on to the Internet. But they find that, since rejecting the utility grid that most Americans take for granted, they have become more conscious of the world around them.

"When you're off the grid, you start paying more attention to nature," Pamela Benning-Hale said. "You start noticing the stars."

Two hours north of San Francisco, the Benning-Hales are positioned at the southern end of the broad expanse of hills and open space that make up the landscape of northern California. While the couple owns the only solar panels in their town, they happen to live in a region that is a hotbed of solar off-grid homes. Partially because of the availability of land for remote homes, and partially because of the high concentration of environmentalists and alternative-lifestyle seekers that populate California, more people live in solar powered homes there than in any other part of the U.S. But renewable energy has also become more accessible, more mainstream. In the 1990s, with 160,000 households nationwide living in solar homes, an increasing number of off-grid families are reported to be middle class.

Turning on a light or a television set may seem like an extremely simple act, yet the flip of a switch hooks us into a complicated and often highly political process.

From the politically paranoid to environmentalists

Richard Perez has watched the solar landscape evolve since founding *Home Power* magazine in 1987. With a circulation of 66,000, *Home Power* is loaded with how-to stories about renewable energy projects. "In1987, when we started the magazine, there were less than 1,000 people living off the grid [using renewable energy] in the U.S.," he said. At the time, with 18,000 readers, Perez sought to make alternative energy more accessible to a broader range of people.

"Our readers run the gamut from politically paranoid to religious folks to ecologically bent folks," Perez said. After reading the magazine for several months, many pick up enough knowledge to go off the grid. "Our readers stay with us for a while. Once they have learned what they need to know, they move on."

This eclectic group is part of a growing trend in the U.S. While the number is still extremely small, more homes run on renewable energy today than ever before, using wind-, sun- and water-powered systems. Among these, solar power is by far the most popular. Only 12 to15 percent of new renewable systems are windpower based while 5 percent are microhydro, or water power.

Rachel Brahinsky lives in San Francisco, Calif., where she works for the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners.

Falling solar costs

While wind and water systems have always been relatively inexpensive, the cost of solar panels was once prohibitive for most families. But as the technology has improved, the price has fallen. In the 1950s when the technology was invented by Bell Laboratories, photovoltaic cells (PV cells) — the blue-black silicone chips that collect sunlight on a solar panel — ran several hundreds of dollars per watt. Before 1985, there were no solar off-grid homes in this country. But by the mid-1980s the cost was down to $10; today the price per watt hovers around $6.

As the premium goes down, the number of solar homes rises. Shipments of PV cells have been increasing for several years. If industry projections are correct, by 2005 solar power will be cheaper than coal, sending people off the grid in droves. Now, of 160,000 solar homes in the U.S., around 80-90 percent are entirely off the grid.

Take the Benning-Hales. When they built their home in the early 1990s they hired an electrician to set it up like a standard grid-connected, utility-powered home. When it came time to bring in the wires, Pamela Benning-Hale called the major west coast utility company, Pacific Gas & Electric. "We investigated PG&E. Initially, we didn't necessarily want to be entirely self-sufficient but PG&E would have cost $25,000 to bring in. We couldn't afford it," she said. The solar electric system they eventually chose cost just $12,000.

The couple's choice of solar power wasn't only practical. They also were concerned for the health of the planet. After a trip to a river where she saw salmon caught and killed in the metal workings of an electric power dam, Pamela Benning-Hale was emotionally shaken, but took solace in the fact that her own power needs were not causing the death of living things. She says that the experience of living peacefully with nature has changed her. "Do you want to bring modernization out here and force it to happen," she asks those who wonder at her choice. "Or, do you want to look out here and see what's going to make your life a fuller life?"

***Road in Maine, 1914* by Edward Hopper** Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Flip-a-switch politics

The electric grid is like a tremendous web. If one part fails, the damage can be widespread. Snaking across the landscape, mostly hidden underground, the grid is so well established that Americans rarely consider its implications. While the electricity in most buildings once came from a local power plant, today the grid enables utility companies to purchase power from sources hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles away. The city of Los Angeles, Calif., for example, taps into power which is generated by the Hoover Dam, situated in the middle of the Nevada desert. Until recently, the tiny town of Ashland, Ore., received electricity from a coal plant in Wyoming. When communities are detached from their power source, it is all too easy for them to ignore the environmental implications. Much of the northeast U.S. draws its electric power from Hydro Quebec, a series of dams in Canada's James Bay. Construction of the dams was highly controversial, and resulted in the flooding of hunting and fishing grounds of the indigenous people who still reside there, along with acres of wildlife habitat. Turning on a light or a television set may seem like an

The power of choice: the sun

by Linda Tatelbaum

By five years, we'd succeeded in our goal. A small, passive solar house kept us warm on one cord of wood. A large garden and root cellar kept us well fed. We carried water, lit with kerosene, and cooked with wood. We even had the luxury of an indoor composting toilet. But simplicity is complex. While I never believed that the simple life meant the easy life, what I didn't foresee was the strenuous personal quest that lay before us as we grew with these choices.

Alternative lifestyles provoke controversy. Even more than the lack of a flush toilet, living without electricity made us an object of curiosity. We had taken a stand, and, like it or not, we were often called upon to answer for it. In my case especially, the stand had a way of solidifying, for in my work as a writer I extolled this chosen life. But all my essays and poems about the simple life made me want to spend more time writing and less on "grunt labor." Now I faced the hidden challenge: how to alter my position without destroying what I value.

It was hard to admit to conventional desires. Wouldn't I love to hear the sound of ice cubes tinkling in a glass once again, or the click of an electric switch flooding my house with light? But, once confessed, the harder part was trying to mesh these desires with the unconventional principles that still held true. That pulsing power line 100 feet from our door offered us a fast conversion. We could ease up on all this labor with a freezer, a refrigerator, lights, water pump, and so on. We just had to call the power company and sign our name. And pay the bills, of course. But kerosene wasn't all that cheap anymore either, and the fumes in our tightly constructed house worried us. Hooking up to the grid would clearly be the easiest solution.

Did I value my principles so little that for cheap convenience I would turn my back on my beliefs? How could I write about change while my electric typewriter hummed with splitting atoms? But I also saw how hard I had tried to be consistent without ever questioning "consistency." Was it possible, or even desirable, that my actions never contradict my beliefs?

But easy scared me after so much hard. I saw how suddenly I might find myself living someone else's life, driving off to work each morning so I could pay the bills instead of walking down to the spring for my daily water. Five years of hauling water seemed long, but how would 30 years of "working out" be?

Then we learned that people right here in Maine were installing photovoltaics, or solar electric power. Though highly technological, photovoltaics made harmonious use of an infinite resource, the sun. Photovoltaics are costly and provide only limited power (no refrigeration, for example, without many "panels"), but they fit our desire to alter, not destroy, our small-scale, self-reliant life. We clearly wanted to electrify our life, and now it was a question of how: with cheaper unlimited "grid" power, or with costly limited photovoltaics?

Most residential photovoltaic system owners do not live within sight of a public power line, as we do. Up on a mountain or out on an island, one can reasonably expect to find solar "arrays" where gasoline generators are the only alternative. But, seeing that power line out of the corner of our eye, we were obviously not concerned with what was reasonable. From an economic point of view, central power would clearly cost us less. But everyone knows that power rates rise as fossil fuels diminish, and nuclear power is not exactly free. And what will nuclear waste disposal or possible contamination cost? Photovoltaics would cleanly and quietly produce electricity for life. Surely we could afford to pay for that peace of mind.

Such economic reasoning brought us finally to this paradox: Cheaper central power might end up costing more; costly photovoltaics might well be a bargain.

We came so close to choosing public power that we went down to Sears to price freezers, and then paid a visit to the Central Maine Power office. Get the house

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Linda Tatelbaum, author, publisher, and homesteader, also teaches English part-time at Colby College. She has lived "off the grid" since 1977 with her husband in Appleton, Me., where they raise their own food and generate solar electricity. This 1983 essay is from *Carrying Water as a Way of Life: A Homesteader's History* (About Time Press, 1997). Available in bookstores or from About Time Press, 1050 Guinea Ridge Rd., Appleton, Me. 04862, for $9.95 plus $2 postage.

wired, said the representative, and call us for the "power drop." We left the office in a daze, inexorably moving toward what we suspected we didn't really want. We found ourselves haunted by nostalgic regret. The quiet of the house and woods and garden kept whispering, Please, reconsider.

I saw that coming here had been a conscious choice. I had believed that living and writing about this life would be my contribution to change in the world. Did I value my principles so little that for cheap convenience I would turn my back on my beliefs? How could I write about change while my electric typewriter hummed with splitting atoms? But I also saw how hard I had tried to be consistent without ever questioning "consistency." Was it possible, or even desirable, that my actions never contradict my beliefs?

We did finally choose the hard way — photovoltaics — but we did not kid ourselves that it was morally consistent. That desire went out with the kerosene lamps and water jugs. We ended up with photovoltaics because we continued to value the pioneering spirit that brought us to the puckerbrush in the first place. Years of gardening had taught me that change is in the nature of things, yet I'd been resisting change in my own life, doggedly limiting myself to a worn-out definition of who I thought I was. "Getting power" gave me power, the power to accept my own changes along with those in the woods and fields around me.

I'm not living someone else's life now, any more than I was before. It's still my own life, even as I flick the switch. We live by power generated from our own choices, a personal resource that never runs out, and from the sun which lasts longer even than that. TW

extremely simple act, yet the flip of a switch hooks us into a complicated and often highly political process.

In the 30 years since activists organized the first Earth Day, environmentalists have struggled to educate the public about the impact of the production of electricity on the environment. Hydroelectric dams kill fish and destroy habitats, and the burnt fossil fuels used to create electric power produce ecologically debilitating greenhouse gasses. These gasses, particularly carbon dioxide, are widely believed to be the leading factor in global warming, the accelerated heating of the earth that may be causing problems, among them extreme temperatures (both hot and cold), dangerous weather patterns and deadly bacterial growth.

Motivated by climate change — and profit

In the past year industries that had previously denied the reality of global warming have begun jumping on the solar bandwagon. Just last year British Petroleum CEO John Browne told a Stanford University audience that the company believes global warming theorists may be correct. "We must now focus on what can and what should be done," he conceded cautiously, "not because we can be certain climate change is happening, but because the possibility can't be ignored." Of total carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere, he told the crowd, nearly half comes from petroleum, his bread-and-butter product. Browne admitted BP's role in influencing climate change and revealed the company's decision to develop its fledgling solar industry, a perhaps enlightened, albeit profit-minded, response.

The British Petroleum admission comes at a time when carbon dioxide emissions are rising at ever higher rates, particularly in the U.S. Emissions of fossil fuels have risen by more than 10 percent in the U.S. since 1990, 1.5 percent in 1997 alone. The *Earth Island Journal* reported recently that though the U.S. makes up only 5 percent of the world population, its citizens generate nearly a quarter of all greenhouse gasses. Last winter, at the Kyoto Climate Conference, the U.S. agreed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to below 1990 levels within the next10-15 years.

A million solar roofs?

The American strategy has been to promote its Million Solar Roofs Program, a project which calls for the installation of solar panels on one million buildings over several years. It's a nice proposal, but unlike a similar program in Japan where the government has spent more than $9 billion on solar installation, the U.S. has yet to commit any money to the program, which was first announced in June 1997. Richard Perez has his own spin: "Clinton recommends [pro-solar policies] but without support in Congress, no monies are appropriated, and hence nothing happens. The Million Solar Roofs Program is really a wind-power program — we've seen nothing from it other than hot air."

There was a time when the notion of funding solar programs was much more popular. In 1975, encouraged by generous federal and state tax credits, 3,000 new solar firms got off the ground. "Greenmarketers," like the Real Goods Trading Company in Hopland, Calif., tapped into the promising market for environmental products. Membership in the American Solar Energy Society (ASES) — founded 20 years earlier, just after the production of the first solar cell in 1954 — reached a peak of nearly 15,000 people. With Jimmy Carter in the White House, research into alternative energy was well-funded. Carter pushed for income tax rebates of up to $3,000 for individuals who installed solar water heat-

ing systems in their homes. For advocates of solar power, it seemed like their time had come.

Removing Carter's solar water heater

But during the Reagan and Bush administrations, funding dried up and support for alternative energy all but disappeared. As one of his first official acts, Ronald Reagan reportedly ordered that Carter's rooftop solar water heater be ripped out of the White House. During his presidency, funding for the federally run Solar Energy Research Institute was sliced in half — causing more than 500 layoffs within a few short months. Domestic shipments of U.S.-made solar water heating panels dropped by a staggering 91 percent between 1984 and 1986. At the same time, funding for fossil fuel skyrocketed. By 1989 there was $324 million in the Department of Energy's budget for fossil energy, $345 million for nuclear power, and just $35 million for PV cells. Federal spending on research, which fell by $600 million between 1980 and 1989, has risen, but remains at less than $300 million under Bill Clinton.

Without government support, the public seemed to lose interest for a time as well. The ASES lost thousands of members, hitting a low point of less than 3,000 in the mid-1980s. Both Arco and Mobil, companies that had made inroads into the solar market in the 1970s, sold their operations by 1993, claiming that the market for alternative power was not yet ready for mass production.

A solar revival

Five years later, just twelve months shy of the year 2000, solar energy is undergoing a revival — and this time it's big business. "Look at PV production," says Real Goods Renewables' Jeff Oldham. "In the next two to three years we'll see three times the PV production worldwide. We're finally seeing major corporations taking it seriously. The denial of global warming is coming to an end. People are aggressively going after the money, investing. The DOE expects 150,000 new jobs in the industry by the year 2005."

Because the surge of the 1970s was largely driven by federal monies, when the budgets were cut in the 1980s there was no large-scale grassroots citizens movement left behind to organize. The development of solar power remained in the hands of the scientists and corporations. Since making PV cells is an extremely high-tech, capital-intensive process, only well-heeled enterprises could take on the project of producing solar panels.

The inevitability of the eventual exhaustion of world oil reserves, too, has only encouraged multinationals such as BP and Royal Dutch/Shell to step up their interest in developing photovoltaics. "There is a limited amount of oil, so if you want to be a company that provides power in the future you have to look into these things," says ASES communications director Susan LeFever. "Financially, their interest is to take it seriously."

Playing catch-up

By taking alternative energy seriously in the U.S., corporations will also bring the country up to speed with the rest of the world where renewables, most notably wind power, have been established for years. "The European Community is doing quite a bit, increasing the renewable power mix faster than anywhere else in the world. There, they use mostly wind power," explains Jeff Oldham. One reason renewables have done well in the EC is that standard electricity in Europe costs three times what is does in the U.S. Unlike the price of energy in the U.S., which is highly subsidized by the government, Eu-

Exchanging candles for solar power

In the developing world, where the grid is either extremely unreliable or non-existent, solar power is ideal. Until recently the cost was still far too high for the average person to gain access. Now, several organizations are bringing alternative technologies to remote villages in Africa, southeast Asia and Latin America. The Solar Electric Light Fund, based in Washington D.C., installs 30,000-40,000 systems annually. In order to make solar panels affordable, the Fund bases its fees on each customer's previous energy costs. An individual's monthly bill for candles and kerosene, for example, would become their monthly payment for solar power.

Another key development worldwide is a system called net-metering. Net-metering links solar panels to the utility grid, with the electric meter rigged so that it runs in two directions. While the sun is at its peak, the meter runs down; when the needs of the household exceed the capacity of their solar array, the meter runs up. When the home produces more power than it purchases, the utility company pays for the extra watts. In the U.S., 26 states already have net-metering laws, though the technology is still extremely new. And so far, the electricity sold to the utilities is purchased at a much lower rate than the power purchased by the consumer, so it is not likely that a family will make money using the system. The one exception is the town of Ashland, Ore., where the public utility pays consumers 125 percent of the retail rate for wind- and solar-produced power. — *R.B.*

ropean energy costs reflect the estimated value of the side effects of power generation (including erosion, crop failure due to climate change, and air pollution).

The booming market excites solar advocates. But when there are no fossil fuels left and solar power is the standard, who will control the industry? Ironically, the independent-minded people who seek to escape unwanted influences in society must turn to large corporations for solar panels. The merging that has already begun among corporate PV producers will only continue if the market grows as predicted, giving control over the price, quality and availability of PV to a few wealthy corporate interests.

There is also the Year 2000 (Y2K) question. Everyone in the field is talking about it. "One of the major things driving the market is the Y2K bug," Richard Perez reported. "The bug has been a major source of conversation; one third of my e-mail recently is related to it." Similarly, most of Jeff Oldham's phone calls in recent months have been Y2K concerns. And, according to alternative energy legal consultant Bill Spratley, industry leaders are cashing in on the coincidence that the computer problem happens to fall on the date that some believe will bring the apocalypse. One manufacturer is reportedly marketing a PV array called the "Millennial Unit."

It's anyone's guess what will happen when the clock strikes midnight next year. "At best," predicted Perez, "we'll see minor outages — for days or weeks. The grid is a very delicate infrastructure. It can have a domino effect." In his most recent *Home Power* editorial, Perez writes, "Here's my advice for those of you concerned about Y2K — install a renewable energy system. That way, if society falls apart, then at least you will have electricity. If society doesn't fall apart, then at least you will have electricity." TW

Serious sleaze

"What connection, if any, exists between public and private morality?" Joan Chittister asks in a reflection on the Clinton/Lewinsky affair (*National Catholic Reporter*, 10/9/98). "History provides little help in arriving at the answer. Alexander the Great created an empire and died at an early age from the results of syphilis. Roosevelt saved the country from depression, all the while supporting a mistress. Richard Nixon was apparently a Puritan saint but came close to destroying the democratic process.

"Perhaps the even more difficult question is whether or not Kenneth Starr's own sins — specious evidence-gathering, information leaks and pornographic reporting — on behalf of public morality may not themselves be as egregious as Clinton's private flaws.

"Maybe the country's drift toward fascism in its desperate attempt to punish sin is every bit as much a violation of rights, an abandonment of care, as serious a problem as Clinton's personal moral pathologies. Maybe overlooking one problem in our fascination with the other will, in the long light of history, turn out to be the most serious sleaze of all."

Tooth Fairy Project

The Radiation and Public Health Project is collecting donated baby teeth from "nuclear" and "non-nuclear" counties around the U.S. "to determine if there is a connection between radiation contamination and our national cancer epidemic," *Nukewatch Pathfinder* reports (Fall, 1998).

"Other RPHP studies have found that women living within 100 miles of a reactor are at the greatest risk of dying from breast cancer and that children born in the peak bomb test years had a 20-fold increase in the level of dental strontium-90 (Sr-90). Teeth in the Tooth Fairy Project will be tested for Sr-90, 'one of the deadliest elements released by nuclear facilities.'

"RPHP needs at least 5,000 teeth from every area in the country, from 1980 to the present, but they will also test baby teeth from children born as far back as 1970 — when the U.S. stopped publishing Sr-90 levels in humans.

"RPHP has baby teeth donation forms, envelopes and 'Tooth Fairy' buttons for participants. Please help by sending RPHP your children's baby teeth. Toll Free: (800) 582-3716."

Sprawl report

Suburban sprawl is gaining prominence as a political issue, according to columnist Neal Peirce (*Liberal Opinion*, 10/12/98).

"Early in September the Sierra Club issued the first of what it promises will be annual nationwide sprawl reports. It labeled Atlanta America's most sprawl-threatened region — a citistate that each week plows under 500 acres of field or farm to build parking lots, shopping malls and subdivisions. Others on the Sierra Club's high sprawl list were St. Louis and Kansas City, Washington, D.C., Denver, Minneapolis-St. Paul and Chicago."

But Peirce quotes Greenbelt Alliance director Jim Sayer as saying that "after a 50-year infatuation with low density development, America is giving rise to a multifaceted anti-sprawl movement.

"Sayer cites serious bids for urban growth boundaries in Arizona, around San Diego and Denver. He praises Gov. Whitman's strong instructions to the New Jersey Cabinet to enforce state plan guidelines supporting geographically compact development and reinforcing existing cities. Florida, he notes, is allocating $300 million yearly for open space acquisition."

Peirce notes that the Environmental Protection Agency and the Urban Land Institute have also sponsored a new national Smart Growth Network.

Short takes

Localizing food systems

by Kenneth A. Dahlberg

Until recently, we have been blind to the importance of food in local and regional environments and economies, but the growing sustainability movement is starting to seek genuine, long-term, localized approaches to our food systems. With vision, we can do this in a way that will empower families and neighborhoods and make our communities healthier, more self-reliant and more equitable.

Current agriculture (nationally and internationally) needs restructuring. Not only does it impose extremely high health, social and environmental costs, but it is highly fossil-fuel dependent. In the U.S. it takes roughly 10 energy calories to deliver one food calorie on our plates. As fossil fuel prices rise, there will be a huge multiplier effect on food prices. We can either wait until things collapse or start building the necessary local and regional food systems now.

Most people are unaware of how dependent their cities are upon distant national and international systems for food or how vulnerable those systems are. Neither are they aware of the extent and complexity of their local food system, much less its potential; the annual value of produce from all U.S. gardens is roughly equal to that of the annual U.S. corn crop, about $18 billion a year. What's more, agricultural, horticultural and food-related activities constitute between 20 percent and 25 percent of a local economy.

Defining local systems

What then is a local food system? The local part starts at the household level and expands to neighborhood, municipal and regional levels. At each level there are different cycles, issues, problems and possibilities. The food part includes all the various social, symbolic, health, power, access and equity dimensions (imagine all the facets of personal and corporate efforts to provide the hungry and homeless with "real" Thanksgiving dinners). "Systems" include not just the production aspects of food but also issues of processing, distribution, access, use, food recycling and waste. Besides social, economic and environmental issues, each of these points also involves a number of ethical and value questions.

Localizing food systems and growing more food locally and regionally opens new opportunities for dealing with problems of hunger, joblessness, urban decay and environmental degradation.

Why localize? Sustainable agriculturalists have called for localization to increase environmental sustainability. Developing local markets reduces dependence upon distant (and often erratic) supply. Localizing food systems and growing more food locally and regionally also opens new opportunities for deal-

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Going green in the kitchen

The Green Kitchen Handbook by Annie Berthold-Bond and Mothers & Others for a Livable Planet (New York: Harper Collins, 1997) is a very practical and accessible guide to maintaining an ecologically sound kitchen. Covering basic nutrition information to methods of preserving food, the advice in the book follows the eight steps developed by Mothers & Others for a Livable Planet to support sustainable agriculture and healthful food choices.

The eight steps are:

1. Eat organic food.
2. Eat locally grown food.
3. Eat seasonal food.
4. Eat a variety of food.
5. Eat low on the food chain.
6. Eat whole foods.
7. Avoid processed food.
8. Reduce packaging.

The book also contains very specific information, including a guide to finding whole foods groceries and a listing of food product categories with information about best choices and things to avoid. Canadian maple syrup, for example, may have been processed with formaldehyde-based tablets and the "puffing" process that creates "puffed" cereals destroys some vitimins and minerals.

In addition to covering types of foods and where to find them, the last section of the book discusses cleaning, water in the kitchen, appliances and other equipment.

—Anne E. Cox

ing with problems of hunger, joblessness, urban decay and environmental degradation. Such a vision includes:

• providing both long-term food security and better health for all local residents by making a variety of safe and nutritious food available to all;

• creating a cushion of self-reliance against transport strikes, major storms and disasters and rising prices resulting from oligopolies and/or rising fossil fuel prices and their multiplier effects;

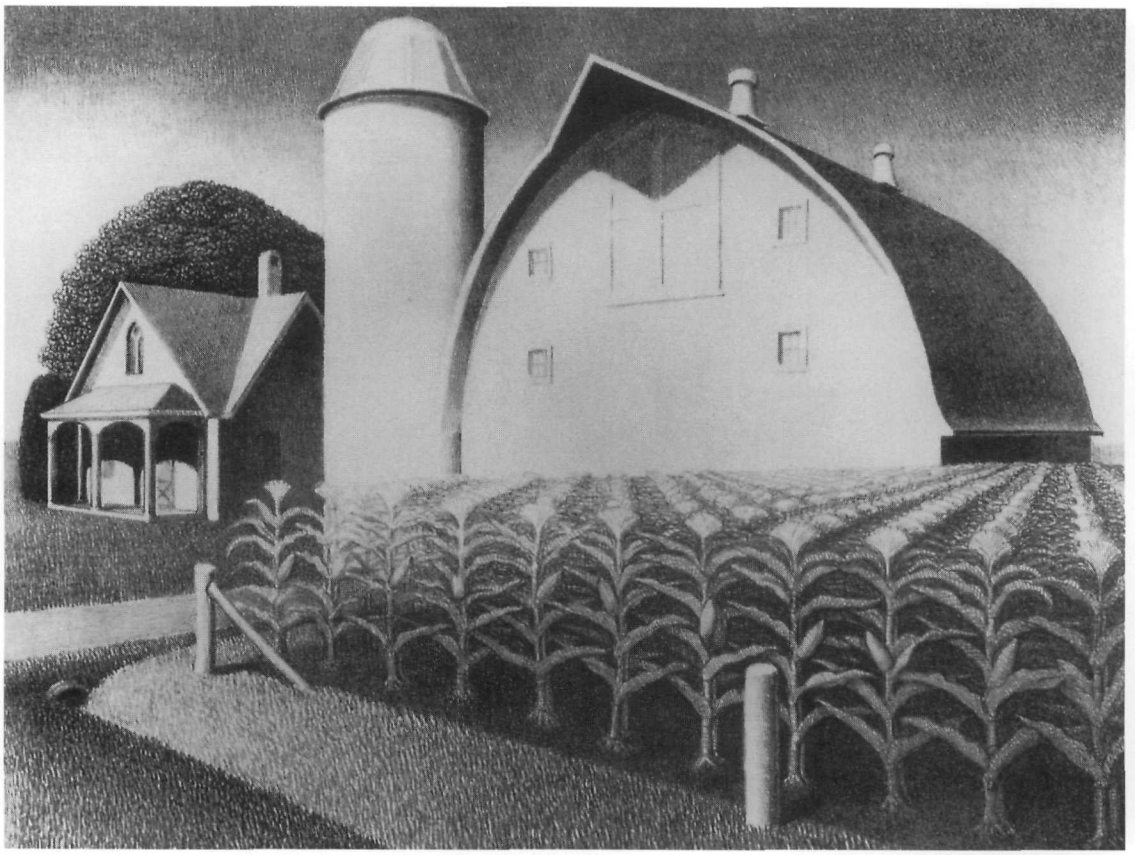
• providing continuing employment for local farmers, horticulturalists and food workers;

• making households and neighborhoods more self-reliant by making more land, work and employment available throughout the food system;

• freeing up more local dollars for local development by increasing the energy and resource efficiency of local food systems, especially by reducing energy costs and putting organic wastes into productive use rather than expensive landfills;

• creating a healthier, more diverse and more pleasant environment by cleaning up air, water and soil systems; creating more green spaces and more diverse rural landscapes; and reducing health costs and pollution clean-up costs; and

• reducing dependence on emergency hunger and feeding programs by moving toward hunger prevention programs.



***Fertility* by Grant Wood, 1939**

Food policy councils

How do we do this? At a personal level we can grow, process and preserve more of our own food. We can buy local food from farmers' markets and u-picks. We can join a community supported agriculture organization. As citizens, we can support innovative neighborhood and municipal programs and organizations. One example includes the growing popularity of food policy councils which form to address a given community's food system.

The issues addressed by these citizen advisory boards are critical and need to be investigated by local governments, nonprofits and the general population. They include:

• production: promoting household and community gardens; seeking to preserve local farmers and farmland; promoting community supported agriculture;

• processing: encouraging local food processing plants, as well as household and community canning programs;

• distribution and access: promoting co-ops, buying clubs and full use of available government programs; coordinating emergency feeding systems; ensuring availability of inner-city supermarkets; encouraging local farmers' markets;

• use: promoting safe food handling and nutritious diets;

• food recycling: promoting gleaning, food banks, pantries and soup kitchens; and

• waste stream: using creative approaches to waste reduction, recycling and composting in each stage of the system. TW

Coming next month!
The January/February 1999 issue of *The Witness* will address the politics of food.

Embracing a common share in God's mercy

by Peter Selby

At some point the crisis of debt will overwhelm us. In the international sphere we see its effects each day on our screens in the level of hunger and deprivation which the poorest nations of the world have to endure in order to service the debts which they have incurred during the last three decades. When we learn that in many cases the interest already paid on the debts has more than paid them back, we wonder what is stopping us simply writing them off.

When a country such as Jamaica that is by no means among the poorest has to spend more on servicing its debts than it can spend on health care we know we are dealing with an obscenity.

When the people of South Africa's new democracy find themselves still required to pay back debts which the apartheid regime incurred in order to buy the tanks and guns that killed those engaged in the struggle for liberation, we know we are dealing with a scandal.

When we learn that that same new democracy has itself voluntarily cancelled the debts which the Namibian people had inherited from the time when the apartheid regime occupied them, we should surely be ashamed.

Debt and 'forgiveness'

No wonder every province of the Anglican Communion prioritized international debt as the issue they wanted faced at the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops this past summer. No wonder the subsection on the topic which I convened found itself weighed down with the distress brought to us by bishops from the "indebted" countries. No wonder those of us who drafted our report and resolution were rebuked for our careless use of the language of "forgiveness": Who is it, after all, who needs forgiving for a situation which has proved so profitable to the lenders of money and so devastating for those whom they encouraged to borrow?

The real cost of imagining the release of the debts of the poorest nations is our fear.

We cannot claim ignorance about all of this. Susan George's books (*A Fate Worse than Debt, The Debt Boomerang, How the Other Half Dies*) tell a story which no amount of arguing about the detail (and there is very little argument about most of it) can let us avoid. The fact is that huge amounts of money that washed around the banking system following the oil price rises of the 1970s and 1980s were lent to poor economies for projects, some of which were well intentioned and some of which certainly were not. Subsequently, as the richest economies sought to solve their domestic economic difficulties by raising interest rates, the burden of that lending became intolerable.

Sometimes, of course, we can act very quickly. When a debt crisis hits an economy with which ours is closely aligned, as lately in southeast Asia, there seems to be no problem in finding the resources to ensure that our own banks and lending institutions are not engulfed in a whirlpool of non-payment. In fact, lending internationally is one of the safest things you can do: There's no chance that the borrowing country will go bankrupt, because there's no international bankruptcy system, and if all fails the government of the creditor country will bail the bank out.

But sometimes we simply look the other way. We are happy to take the results of the debt burden in raw material prices that are lowered by the competition debtor countries are forced into to secure exports and devalue their currencies in the search for ways to service their debts. We have been content that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) should require the restructuring of poor countries' economies in ways that suit the needs of the creditor economies, and which in the interests of our economic orthodoxy reduce spending on education and health.

The deeper costs of cancellation

I remember well the discomfort many of us bishops in the Lambeth subsection on debt felt as we contemplated all of this. Why should we be made to feel responsible for a situation we had not devised and where we had so little power to bring about release? What would it cost, we wanted to know, and what would debt cancellation do to the taxes of the people in our own countries? I also remember the intervention of the Japanese bishop, "We are a small church and we have sometimes resisted the government; but we are still responsible."

For the costs we need to bear are not so much financial ones: Many debts can be cancelled at no cost; much debt cancellation would simply be an accounting action, and if we were serious about it such cost as there is would be absorbed very quickly. No: The costs we are reluctant to face go

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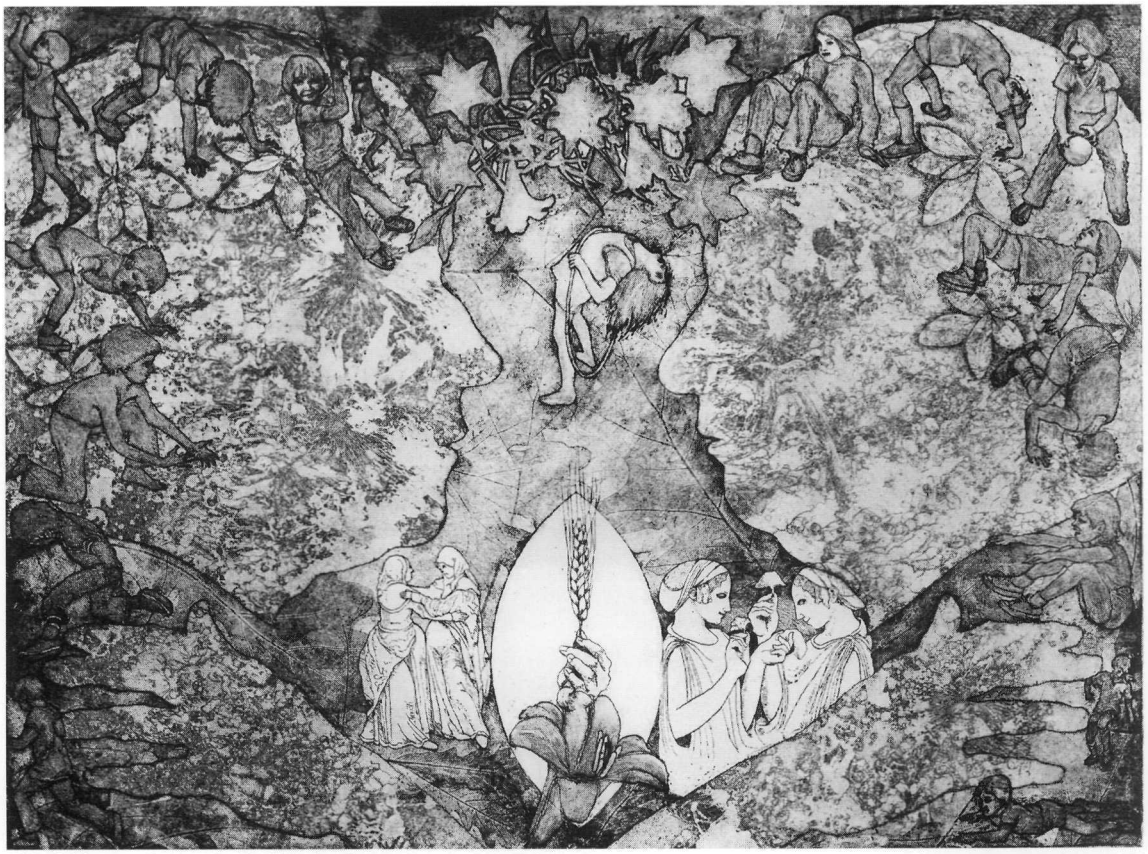
deeper, for they involve revising the attitudes we have taken as natural, attitudes on which debt thrives and by which mercy has no chance.



The fullness of time **by Judith Anderson**

Enslaving minds

My own exploration of the debt issue began with the search for the presence of Jesus Christ in the world today and took me via the issue of student loans — new for us in the U.K. though very well established in the U.S., of course — into the discovery of the debt burden as it affects many of the poorest communities set in the cities of wealthy countries. My knowledge of American money-lending institutions is slight, but in Britain it is not hard to find people paying annual interest rates well in excess of 100 percent to companies that are considered quite respectable, simply because that is the only source of credit they have accessible to them — and credit is the only way they can see of surviving.

But the exploration of debt took me to more places than the suffering of the poor. It took me into the progressive enslavement of our minds, our captivation by a myth of unlimited credit and the unrestrained practice of living on tomorrow's — and next year's, or next decade's — income today. It took me to the obsessive lending and borrowing which are a feature of our economy and some disturbing and fundamental questions of how the monetary systems of the world work. And it took me to further reflection on the freedom Christ offers, its roots in the economic system of his day and its profound connection with what Christians so centrally profess — salvation, redemption, justification by grace — and so seldom relate to the assumptions of our getting and spending.

For at the heart of our Christian story is something about gracious gift and owing nobody anything except to love one another (Romans 13.8). With that apprehension of ourselves as people released from seeing ourselves as burdened with obligations and (more seriously still) the belief that our standing is related to the number of people we have indebted to us and the weight of their obligations.

Fears and what-ifs?

The real cost of imagining the release of the debts of the poorest nations is our fear: fear that the whole system of relying on owing for survival might collapse into anarchy as people everywhere refuse to pay their debts; fear that we might have to trim our spending to what we have today; the fear that we might have to accept in our personal lives the logic of the Reaganomic solutions that have been so vigorously attempted in the sphere of national finance and taxation. It is the cost of believing that the beliefs we profess about God's providence, about the boundless generosity at the heart of things, about the mercy that we proclaim holds the world in life, that these beliefs should be allowed to impinge on the way we run our economy.

For mercy in all its arbitrariness ("I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy") and with all its dangerous willingness to stay committed to humanity despite everything is what we are offered and asked to offer to others. And as we contemplate it economically there rise up within us the "what if?" questions that are the names we give to our fear of mercy: What if every-

body stopped paying their debts? What if we all had to pay the debts of others through our taxes? What if the amount of interest you could charge on a loan were radically restricted? What if people who charged exorbitant interest were prevented from using the legal system to recover their debts?

Yet in one of the largest international demonstrations we have seen in this country last May there could be seen in the faces of those who formed a human chain around the G8 summit venue a different set of emotions and convictions. There were people of all ages and nationalities, many of whom had clearly never taken part in a demonstration of any kind before, a powerful picture of faith in a different kind of world, of the impact of the divine economy of freedom on a world economy chained by debt.

Why did this event engage the imaginations of congregations all over Britain? Many of them have little experience of being caught up in political activity, far less of reading economic statistics as part of their Christian life. But they do have an experience of worship, and here in the human chain their faces, their banners and their songs said that they had seen something of the gracious mercy that worship was about. In the variety of that gathering and its singleness of heart they had seen something of what ecumenism was about in all its global as well as ecclesial meaning.

Yet the questions still come up: What can we do? How can we change anything? What will it cost? How do we change the politics of all of this? How does mercy get a chance, and a different economy of freedom come to birth? What are the steps we need to take, urgent and committed and yet manageable?

First steps: receiving the truth

First of all we can be clear that before we can receive mercy we need to receive truth, and yet before we can receive truth we need to receive the assurance of mercy. We have some strong things to say to our leaders and our bankers, but those strong things are the truth of actual stories, not a succession of damning accusations. We are not about arraigning those who sold cheap money to the poor in the 1970s and 1980s or requiring those who work in banks now to take on themselves a burden of guilt or the requirement that they listen to endless attacks from the pulpit every time they go to worship. But naming this issue is the critical first step, and that includes listening to the stories that make us uncomfortable and acknowledging the facts as they are.

The most difficult thing to "do" about Jesus' assertion that you cannot be slave to both God and Mammon is quite simply to agree.

I have found a remarkable response to the naming of this matter in gatherings of Christians who have experienced the whole area of debt and the place of money in their lives as a forbidden zone. They have shared at some depth in study groups and prayer meetings but generally without acknowledging their own financial anxieties and their dependence on borrowed money.

I have heard members of churches tell of the economic crises through which they have lived, always without daring to mention it in the congregation or even to their spiritual director. And I have sensed the liberation from fear and the secrecy that comes when an issue is felt to be too frightening to face. Of course the question of what we can do has to be faced, but the intensely practical first step for those confronted with truth is to accept it as truth and face it as truth. The most difficult thing to "do" about Jesus' assertion that you cannot be slave to both God and Mammon is quite simply to agree.

Looking outward and inward

And the truth has then to be pursued where it leads, and it will lead both outwards and inwards. It will lead outwards into naming this issue before politicians and economists, into reading and enquiring about the nature of indebtedness. That means getting at the facts about the international economy (the Lambeth Conference report and resolutions about debt are no bad place to start) and then at the impact of credit and debt on the cities and communities in which you are located. *The Witness* has contained many articles about poverty: Behind those pictures and articles lie many lives blighted by the need to juggle debts from one weekend

Invested in the common good

The "great work" of these times, says Thomas Berry, is accomplishing the transition from humanity's current practice of "industrial plundering of the planet" to a "mutually enhancing" human presence upon the earth that could be called an "Ecozoic Era." He suggests anyone interested in some guidance on what the shift entails get their hands on Susan Meeker-Lowry's *Invested in the Common Good* (New Society Publishers, 1995). She describes the steps needed to adjust our current economy to an earth-centered system and offers numerous examples of where and how individuals and groups have begun the process. Socially conscious investing, local currencies, community supported agriculture and Indian economic development are among the off-the-grid topics she covers. The book also contains a helpful bibliography and listing of organizations.

to the next.

That is the journey outwards. But then there is the journey inwards, too: It means looking at lives rendered spiritually impoverished by the constant practice of playing the markets and going after the bottom line. It means looking at the lengths to which we go to avoid living on what we have and the silent anxieties we conceal about our financial future. It means facing the fact that much of our praying and preaching carefully keeps the world of economy well away from the searching light of gospel truth.

Resisting plastic?

Then of course there are the actions we can take: What would it involve for many of us to abandon the unthinking use of plastic credit? What would it mean — say for Lent — if what we gave up were something as basic as needless borrowing? What would it mean to contemplate — say for Advent — the evidence that our treatment of the planet as a credit card without credit limit or repayment date will surely bring its judgement, and, having contemplated that, to begin to take the steps we personally need to take to reduce our dependence on the income of tomorrow? What would it mean — say in Passiontide — to remember the cost of restoring the economy of grace and consider if there is not someone we need to let off something we have been holding them to? How about some of these things as ways of giving mercy a chance?

Those are personal actions in our own lives. They are, however, rehearsals in unlocking ourselves from the power of money and debt which need to lead to other actions: using our power as voters and consumers to press for terms of trade that are fair and release from burdens of debt that are unrepayable.

For us to give mercy a chance, however, is bound to lead us into the heartland of the life we live and the assumptions on which we base it. We shall need, that is to say, to look at the role money has come to play in our lives and the life of the world, and indeed at the fundamental character of money itself. For as you pursue the question of debt you become aware that it is not an isolated phenomenon, some accidental loss of control of an essentially benign activity called lending. What you notice is the way in which money itself, and the assumptions on which it rests, determines that there shall be debt and that it shall be without limit or restraint.

We have come to be dependent on the debt that money represents, especially in the last three decades with their explosion in the quantity and power of money.

This mystery which we call money is so pervasive that, as with the air, we are content to imagine that we understand it simply because we are familiar with it. Yet you only have to get out of your pocket a piece of paper money to find that what you are handling is nothing more nor less than a credit note, a government promise to pay. In fact, s when we came off the gold standard the right to claim the money was removed, so that, if it should ever happen that human beings corporately decided that they would no longer give worth to any of these pieces of paper, they would become worthless, because the supply of money is in effect the supply of debt.

No wonder then that there is resistance to the cancellation of debt. We have come to be dependent on the debt that money represents, especially in the last three decades with their explosion in the quantity and power of money. People have always sought riches, some to excess. But what we now see is a dependence created by the vast quantities of money there are, by the myth that anyone can have it, and by the "credit" it provides. We need urgent reform and regulation, an international matter ultimately and one which will meet fierce resistance. Meanwhile the value we ascribe to it and the way in which we allow it to be the mark of value in anything is a deeply spiritual issue about which honest reflection together is vital.

Credit-and-debt relationships

But if we decide personally, as communities and as nations to start to get out of the grip of debt, to contract into the freedom of Christ, it will have implications for many areas of life which concern other matters than money. For what we find is that all our attitudes to people are governed by the kind of credit-and-debt relationships which our present economic system sets up. A moment's look at those whom we marginalize and oppress makes clear that we are imposing on them the model of bankruptcy, the notion that they have nothing to offer and that we have everything to give — along with the right to regulate their lives and prescribe what God may or may not be doing in and through them.

In the frightening aftermath of the Lambeth Conference I found myself deeply concerned that in the publicity surrounding the nightmare of the way in which the issue of sexuality was handled all the work we put into coming to a common mind on the issue of debt would be wasted. That is still a fear I have; but what we actually saw was a way of behaving towards our gay brothers and sisters that precisely reflects the merciless treatment of others in the way the debt-and-credit economy sets up. It is those who are in thrall to creditor/debtor ways of thinking who then forget the common share we all have in the constant mercy of God and who fail to live out that mercy in their relations with one another. If we could begin the process of extricating ourselves from credit and debt and the power it gives to money we might give mercy — God's mercy — a chance in our life together. TW

Investing to profit community

by Beth McPherson

Maine is celebrated nationally for its idyllic vacation and retirement attractions, but most of us who live here are keenly aware of another landscape: the less-travelled streets and hamlets where intense poverty and hardship exist. The neediest in our communities are increasingly deprived of even basic necessities, with the most significant unmet need being warm, safe homes. People who cannot find an affordable place to live often retreat from the economically more vital areas in the southern part of the state to impoverished regions further north where rents are still cheap — but jobs are hard to come by.

In recent years government programs that once provided loans and subsidies for housing and other community projects have been drastically reduced. At the same time, the for-profit housing industry has lost the capacity to build profitably for the low end of the market. In Maine, community-based groups with imaginative ideas for making housing truly affordable have been stymied by lack of capital and technical skills, particularly in the early stages of their projects. This is the gap the Genesis Community Loan Fund has been helping to bridge since 1992.

What community loan funds do

Community loan funds like Genesis are unlikely financial institutions. They solicit low-interest loans or donations from churches, corporations, foundations and individuals, then reinvest the money at below-market rates of return in poor neighborhoods and underserved communities.

Beth McPherson is executive director of the Genesis Community Loan Fund based in Bristol, Me., <genesis@lincoln.midcoast.com>.

Some of the ventures financed would make a conventional lender queasy. Community sponsors of affordable housing often are start-up organizations that can offer only limited collateral. In most rural areas, deep-pocket developers and solid credit histories are rarities. Still, for the 49 such community funds on which there are industry data, defaults run at the enviable rate of 1.2 percent of total loans.

A faith-based fund

The Genesis Community Loan Fund was founded in 1991 in Wiscasset as a faith-based fund, with assistance from Coastal Enterprises, Inc., and the Lilly Endowment. The following year Genesis made its first loan: $50,000 to Coastal Housing, Inc., for development of Ward Brook in Wiscasset, a nine-unit rental complex for single-parent families with incomes below the poverty level. Most of the money for the project came from four midcoast congregations who were alarmed by the absence of safe, affordable housing for families such as these.

In 1996 the Maine Community Loan Fund, which had been founded at about the same time in Portland, transferred its assets and loan portfolio to Genesis, doubling its size. Today the unified Genesis Community Loan Fund has revolving loan capital of over $700,000. It has aided 43 projects throughout the state of Maine with $990,000 in below-market-rate loans and substantial technical assistance. These loans have helped leverage an additional $9.8 million from Maine banks and other institutions to create 212 units of affordable housing for Maine's most vulnerable populations, including:

- low-income working families (25 single family homes);
- single mothers and their children (16 rental units with supportive services);
- low-income frail elderly (44 assisted living units);
- chronically mentally ill and/or developmentally disabled adults and children (72 rental units with supportive services);
- Maine's first hospice residence for the terminally ill (6 units);
- transitional homes for families made homeless by domestic violence (6 single family homes);
- the homeless (35 shelter beds).

Community-based care for the elderly

Housing and caring for the state's rapidly aging population is a growing challenge. Today Maine has the 14th highest proportion of persons over 65 among the 50 states, but will move up to 5th in just two short decades, according to Census Bureau projections. Accordingly, Genesis has taken a special interest in developing an alternative model to serve the state's frail, low-income elders—typically living alone and, due to illness or increasing incapacity, suffering from loneliness and neglect, poor nutrition, over- or under- medication and threats to mobility and safety. These Medicaid-eligible elders need frequent assistance with their daily activities but they do not need to live in a skilled nursing facility.

Last year non-profit community-based organizations in Old Town and Darmariscotta set out to develop alterna-

ECPC invested in Genesis

At its October 1998 meeting the board of The Episcopal Church Publishing Company (ECPC), the publisher of *The Witness*, voted to make a low-interest investment of $25,000 in the Genesis Community Loan Fund. All of ECPC's investments are managed in a socially responsible way, with a portion being placed in faith-based, community-focused enterprises such as Genesis.

tive care options for their frail neighbors. Their shared vision: a model of quality extended care that allows elderly persons to remain within their own familiar community, and that is also far less disruptive of normal life and far less expensive than the usual institutional solutions. Genesis was asked to oversee the development of plans for the two assisted living projects. Not only did we lend acquisition and construction funds totaling $100,000, but we also succeeded in raising long-term financing for the projects from state and federal agencies. Together, the two new licensed homes that opened in April are providing housing and services to 32 frail elders with very limited resources.

An alternative space in a depressed neighborhood

The mission of Genesis to serve the needs of the disadvantaged encompasses other kinds of community service projects as well. For example, in September Genesis made a 10-year mortgage loan of $20,000 to Friends of the St. Lawrence Church, a Portland grassroots organization with a plan to transform the long-vacant Munjoy Hill church into a center to promote community involvement in educational, artistic and cultural activities. By paying off a burdensome short-term note, the Genesis loan frees up capital for building improvements essential to obtaining an occupancy permit.

The church is separated into two areas — a vaulted sanctuary seating 400-500 persons and a two-level parish hall. The Friends group expects the renovated building to provide an affordable home base for professional and amateur performing arts groups and also to serve as flexible programming space for nearby elementary and pre-schools, for public forums and for youth activities. Already several programs are up and running at the church. One is a pilot "school to work" program organized under the Maine Department of Labor that is putting neighborhood youth to work on demolition and refurbishing.

Two brothers explore the terrain around their family's new home in Bremen, Me. The faith-based Genesis Community Loan Fund has helped make new homes like this available to families whose income is no more than half the county median income .

The healing power of horses

Another Genesis project involves Riding to the Top (RTT), a nonprofit therapeutic horseback riding program founded in 1993 in the well-founded belief that horses are excellent healers. Over the past five years, RTT volunteers have worked with over 100 riders with physical, emotional and learning disabilities, ranging in age from 3 to 70.

The physical therapists who designed the program and are its volunteer directors say that the experience of riding a horse permits physically disabled persons the sensory-motor input of walking without extraordinary effort. Everything from the sensory feedback of touching a horse to the relationship developed when horse and rider communicate builds self-esteem, trust and confidence. Parents, teachers and therapists report on the tremendous positive change in troubled children's behavior when horses enter the picture.

After working out of other barns for five years, RTT decided last spring to buy its own 10-stall barn, riding ring and wooded trails in Windham. Genesis provided mortgage financing of $50,000 for 10 years to assist in acquisition of the property.

The need for credit

In Maine the need for credit in low-income neighborhoods and communities is far greater than our loan fund can currently meet. But as new loan capital and equity investments become available, Genesis will continue to link those resources to housing and community development projects to serve Maine people who have limited opportunity to better their own lives. TW

Silence killed Matthew Shepard

by Steve Charleston

[Because Matthew Shepard was an Episcopalian — and in light of the condemnation of homosexuals issued by the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops last summer — much has been said about his hate-motivated murder in Episcopal Church circles. This statement by Steve Charleston, Episcopal chaplain at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., was one of the more passionate issued by church leaders.]

Mourners filled New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine for a memorial service for Matthew Shepard.

ENS/Jim Solheim

I saw on the news today that Matthew Shepard died. He was the 22-year-old man from Wyoming who was beaten and tortured and left to die for no reason other than he was a homosexual. This tragic murder has raised a national debate again, the kind of periodic soul-searching our society goes through whenever a crime of hate startles us into awareness.

The burning of Black churches, the bombing of innocent people, the death of a shy young man from Wyoming — these events suddenly shake us out of complacency and remind us that fear, prejudice and rage are always the shadows just beyond the light of our reason. And so people suddenly start to speak out. There are voices of outrage and grief. Voices of sorrow and demands to know why such a thing could happen.

And predictably, there are also defensive voices: the governor of Wyoming trying to explain why his state has no laws to protect people from hate crimes and the leadership of what is called the "Christian right wing" trying to explain why their national ads against homosexuality don't influence people to commit such violence against gays and lesbians.

In the days to come, these many voices will fill our media and the cultural consciousness it imprints until we are once again lulled into the more familiar patterns of our lives, until the next tragedy rings the alarm of despair.

As the chaplain for our own community, I would like to invite us all to consider Matthew's death in another way. Not through the clamor or denials, not through the shouts or cries of anger: but rather, through the silence of his death, the silence of that young man hanging on his cross of pain, alone in the emptiness of a Wyoming night, the silence that ultimately killed him as surely as the beatings he endured.

Silence killed Matthew Shepard. The silence of Christians who know that the scriptures on homosexuality are few and murky in interpretation and far outweighed by the words of a savior whose only comment on human relationships was to call us to never judge but only to love. The silence of well-meaning educated people who pretend to have an enlightened view of homosexuality while quietly tolerating the abuse of gays and lesbians in their own communities. The silence of our elected officials who have the authority to make changes but prefer to count votes. The silence of the majority of "straight" Americans who shift uncomfortably when confronted by the thought that gays and lesbians may be no different from themselves, save for the fact that they are walking targets for bigotry, disrespect,

Vital Signs

Steve Charleston is the former Bishop of Alaska.

cheap humor and, apparently, of murder.

Crimes of hate may live in shouts of rage, but they are born in silence. Here at Trinity, I hope we will all listen to that silence. Before we jump to decry Matthew's senseless death or before we seek to rationalize it with loud disclaimers, I hope we will just hear the silence.

A young man's heart has ceased to beat. Hear the silence of that awful truth. It is the silence of death. It is the silence that descends on us like a shroud. At Trinity, as in Wyoming, we are men and women surrounded by the silence of our own fear. Our fear of those who are different. Our fear of being identified with the scapegoat. Our fear of taking an unpopular position for the sake of those who can not stand alone. Our fear of social and religious change. Our fear comes in many forms but it always comes silently: A whispered joke. A glance to look away from the truth. A quick shake of the head to deny any complicity in the pain of others.

These silent aspects of our own fear of homosexuality are acted out on this campus every day, just as they are acted out every day in Wyoming. Through silence, we give ourselves permission to practice what we pretend to abhor. With silence, we condemn scores of our neighbors to live in the shadows of hate. In silence we observe the suffering of any group of people who have been declared expendable by our society.

As a person of faith, I will listen, as we all will, to the many voices which will eulogize Matthew Shepard. I will carry that part of our national shame on my shoulders. But I will also listen to the silence which speaks much more eloquently still to the truth behind his death. I will listen and I will remember. And I will renew my resolve never to allow this silence to have the last word. Not for Matthew. Not for gay men or lesbian women. Not for any person in our society of any color or condition who has been singled out for persecution. Not in my church. Not in my nation. Not in Wyoming. And not at Trinity College.

California bishop urges deeper reflection on Lambeth homosexuality resolution

Following Matthew Shepard's death, William E. Swing, the Episcopal Bishop of California, proposed to the diocesan convention a process by which Episcopalians in California could deepen their theological approach to the issues which they face as a diocese, beginning with the Lambeth Conference resolution that rejects "homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture."

"Why do I suggest the Lambeth Resolution to be our first theological focus?" Swing asked. "Because I have a deep conviction that Lambeth erred in its understanding of Holy Scripture and of homosexual people. Thus it is important for the Anglican Communion to hear from us on this subject. To hear us at our deepest and best.

"The basic problem was that Lambeth thought that it could make a balanced statement. Homosexuals should be treated with compassion on the one hand and with the Bible on the other hand. This is similar to saying 'we must love the sinner but hate the sin.' The problem is that the hatred inspired in the literal acceptance of the Bible is vastly stronger than the compassion encouraged in the resolution. Biblical blood lust is stronger than mild resolutions about compassion.

"Matthew Shepard chose the Episcopal Church and was confirmed at 15. He was given last rites by an Episcopal priest in Fort Collins, Colo. When Matthew Shepard was pistol whipped and strapped to a deer fence in Wyoming by, allegedly, Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney, the Bible was blatantly clear in its judgement. An uninterpreted, unmistakable rendering of the Bible would find Matthew Shepard guilty of an abomination for being gay. Also, it would find Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney justified in their actions. Leviticus 20:13 — 'If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.'"

Swing said that although both he and the people of the diocese know such justifications are wrong, they need to determine how to state why they are wrong.

Swing said he did not believe "that an appeal to a few words of Leviticus should take precedence over the Bible's comprehensive, total wisdom. I do not believe that it is right for the church to side with the forces that dehumanize and demonize homosexuals and rob them of their God-given dignity. And I do believe that in the life, teaching, and Spirit of Jesus Christ, we will at last be led to wholeness in recognizing heterosexuals and homosexuals as full human beings, with no legislative, canonical, or quiet bias separating them from their rightful status as children of God."

California's diocesan convention endorsed Swing's proposal, asking the diocese's governing council to set up a task force of clergy and laity to explore the theological issue, "Homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture," which will report its findings to the convention next year.

— based on a report from Kathleen McAdams of Oasis/ California, the Gay and Lesbian Ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of California, <www.diocal.org/ oasis>.

Religion and ecology

by Libby Bassett

A a most unusual convergence of religion, science and public policy took place here recently and became a meeting of minds.

"Religion and Ecology: Discovering the Common Ground,"was held at two bastions of policymaking and science, the United Nations on October 21st and the American Museum of Natural History on the following day.

The gathering, which drew overflow crowds to the UN, was the culmination of a series of symposia held over more than two years at Harvard, each focusing on the environmental ethics of one of 10 major faith traditions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Indigenous, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Shinto).

Mary Evelyn Tucker, a professor of religion at Bucknell and co-director of the series with her husband John Grim, said they wanted to see whether the power and ethical teachings of the world's major religions could help solve the environmental crisis. "Could this viewpoint expand our vision so that we might finally begin to reverse the destruction of our planet?"

While several speakers, scientists and policy makers alike, detailed just how bleak the environmental picture is, Lawrence Sullivan, Director of the Harvard Center for Study of World Religions, said the religious view provided hope. All religions share certain moral and ethical principles, he said, like altruism and compassion, community-building, just distribution of resources, mobilization for action, self-criticism, ascetism and restraint, a long-term perspective, and legal and ethical traditions.

"To develop a sense of the sacred in a culture of ecological protection, we will need to redefine our development and consumption models." — L.M. Singhvi

"Religions can play an important role, though they haven't always, in providing the motivation to find a common strand that unites us all for survival," said Maurice Strong, who headed the first UN conference on the environment in 1972 and the second, the Rio Earth Summit, in 1992. But, he added, "We have yet to experience the moral and ethical evolution that will make it happen."

"Our problem," Vanderbilt University theology professor Sally McFague said, "can be laid to the western tradition of human dominion over nature," although she noted, "in Genesis I, God said seven times, after every bit of creation, 'it was good.'

"The Christian tradition has been imperialistic," this self-described "Boston Episcopalian" continued, "by saying there's only one way to God. Today, a lot of us are aware that ways to the divine are not similar and that we can learn from each other's traditions, particularly on the environment."

L.M. Singhvi, a Member of India's Parliament and author of the Jain Declaration on Nature, concurred: "To develop a sense of the sacred in a culture of ecological protection, it will be necessary to redefine our development and consumption models. A new public platform is required in each tradition."

"Consumerism has obliterated divine reality," said Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a teacher of Islamic studies at George Washington University. "We've shifted from a thirst for God to a thirst for things."

"Just doing what we do on a daily basis, we're making other people poor,"Professor McFague said. "The latest UN Development Report said that we in the North, 15% of the population, use 80% of the world's goods. We're living a lie, we're in denial."

But to Donald Swearer, a professor of religion at Swarthmore College, "There is no dichotomy between the good life and what's good for the environment. In Buddhism the lifestyle is one of restraint and frugality, and the first precept is not killing and to act compassionately."

"In Confucianism," said Tu Weiming, a professor of Chinese history and philosophy at Harvard, "heaven is everywhere, but it is not all powerful so we need to be collaborators, participants, stewards, co-creators."

"How can we go from talk to practice?" Swearer asked. "It must be on an individual level, yet we also need to form strategies and alliances that attempt to bring change not only to the environment but our individual lifestyle."

Efforts are underway to move the dialogue out of the ivory tower and into the public eye.

In the U.S., the National Religious Partnership for the Environment grew

Keeping Watch

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from international appeals in the early 1990s by scientists to religious leaders to join in saving planet earth. Since 1993, the partnership — a federation of the U.S. Catholic Conference, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, the National Council of Churches of Christ and the Evangelical Environmental Network — has reached tens of thousands of U.S. congregations, with each faith group implementing its own programs on behalf of a common ecological mission, <www.nrpe.org>.

An Earth Charter was supposed to be ready for signing at the 1992 UN Earth Summit, but it became a casualty of realpolitik. Now Steven Rockefeller, a professor of religion at Middlebury College, directs the attempt to find shared ethical values and practical guidelines to deal our with our world's linked social, economic and environmental problems. "Through the Earth Charter process of consultation, which is as important as the draft itself," Rockefeller said, "a consensus is beginning to emerge, and we are creating a document that gives expression to a worldwide ethic." A second draft of the Charter is due in January 1999, for launching on World Environment Day in the year 2000, with 21 principles for the 21st century. It then goes to the United Nations for governmental action, <www.earth charter.org>.

For Wangari Maathai, the founder of Kenya's Green Belt Movement, the Earth Charter is "a silver lining. It gives us hope to not be apathetic." She said the Green Belt Movement took the Earth Charter and used it as a vision. "One by one we addressed its 21 principles, holding seminars to try to translate them consciously and express them in our daily life. And we found we already are doing most of them."

Already, 60 people and institutions have affiliated with the new Forum on Religion and Ecology that's grown out of the Harvard conference process. The next step, said Harvard's Tu Weiming, "is a permanent network connected by e-mail and the web so we can quickly inform one another about critical issues anywhere. It's the emergence of a new coalition, one not in an ivory tower but in the mass media, government, social movements, religion, human rights and consumer movements."

"What can we do?"Oren Lyons, faith keeper of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy), asked the hundreds of participants at the museum. "It's up to you. It's got to move beyond the intellectual. If we fail, we fail everything. Go back and do something about it. We're approaching the point of no return." TW

The sword and the cross

On Sunday, Oct. 4, 1998, two priests and a religious writer entered the enclosure around the war memorial at St. Paul's Anglican Church on Bloor St. E. in Toronto and urgently invited all churches to renounce the "Just War" doctrine. St. Paul's officials called in the city police to remove the three men who were then arrested and charged with trespass. Those arrested were Don Heap, an Anglican priest and former Member of Parliament, Bob Holmes, a Catholic priest and director of the One World Program for youth, and Len Desroches, Catholic author and non-violence trainer. Desroches is a long-time friend of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), an initiative among Mennonite and Brethren congregations and Friends meetings to reduce violence around the world, and taught the sessions on non-violent direct action during CPT's regional training in Ontario in last spring.

CPT's Ontario Coordinator Doug Pritchard and his wife Jane led a group of supporters in prayers and songs on the sidewalk outside the war memorial which is called the Sword of Sacrifice and features a bronze sword set in the middle of a large stone cross.The witnesses in their press statement noted the huge cost of the current war economy: the number of lives lost every year and the diversion of money to weapons instead of basic human needs. They say the church is in denial about its own deep complicity in our permanent war culture.

They seek to engage all the mainline churches. But to start somewhere, they came to this particular war memorial on the grounds of St. Paul's Anglican Church, the Queen's Own Rifles' "garrison church." It may be the only such war memorial on a church's property, and it is one of the few times when Christians have questioned church leaders, instead of armies or governments, about their commitment to war.

The three men had met earlier this year with the rector and officials at St. Paul's and offered to replace the sword on the war memorial with a ploughshare as a public symbol of the church's renunciation of all war. The offer was declined.

As they entered the grounds around the monument, the men called on the church to break with its habit of turning to the state and its police to protect the sword. Despite the ensuing arrests, the three men have pledged to hold monthly public witnesses through to Good Friday, April 2, 1999.

— Doug Pritchard (Pritchard belongs to the Ontario, Canada, chapter of Christian Peacemaker Teams, <cpto@web.net>. For more information on the Toronto action contact Len Desroches at 407 Bleecker St., Toronto ON M4X 1W2 (phone: 416-975-4897). Contact CPT at P.O. Box 6508 Chicago, IL 60680 (phone: 312-455-1199), <CPT@igc.org>.)

Another turn of the crank

by Karl Meyer

***Another Turn of the Crank* by Wendell Berry, Counterpoint, 1995.**

In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis imagined Hell to be a non-place, a suburbia sprawling into the limitless expanse of space-time where no one had any need for anyone else. Increasingly, this existential fantasy has begun to take on earthly reality. As our landscape becomes denuded into a featureless Cartesian plane of pavement and Taco Bells, and as our relationship to one another becomes more and more obscured by the global non-economy, we are left, absurdly, to ponder stray nuggets of uncommon sense as if they were rocks from Mars.

Wendell Berry, a Kentucky farmer, poet, essayist and agrarian radical, argues in *Another Turn Of The Crank* that we can start making sense common once again by looking for it where it is hidden in plain view, both under our feet and on our kitchen tables. His is an argument that is at once as startlingly simple as it is utterly challenging, and at its heart is the word "community." But then there are other words: economy, affection, knowledge, care, stewardship, imagination. These words, rarely uttered in the same breath in the highly jargoned speech of social scientists and culture critics, are for Berry the crux of the matter.

Community, especially rural community, has come under the wholesale onslaught of a kind of colonial system of exploitation, an economy of limitless greed,vanity, and arrogance that views people and nature as mere inputs, or factors of production, to be milled for profits. The logic of this industrial system demands that one place be turned into desertified moonscape for the aggrandizement of another. Agribusiness replaces farmers with machines, while topsoil is treated as no more than a kind of sludge to be endlessly injected with toxic chemicals. This logic of expropriation also permeates the educational system: Children are taught to scorn their provincial upbringing, and their success is measured by how far they get from home and how little their hands are dirtied by real work.

The word these days is to get "connected"— to the Internet, to 500 satellite television channels, to world markets, to limitless desire and opportunity. But the unspoken agenda is one of profound disconnection.

The word these days is to get "connected"— to the Internet, to 500 satellite television channels, to world markets, to limitless desire and opportunity. But the unspoken agenda is one of profound disconnection. It would have us not know where our food comes from. It would have us give up our loyalty to family, neighborhood, and community. We are to aspire to be "professional," that is, to detach from the claims made upon us by any particular place. Knowledge is freed of its local context and becomes information and a commodity. Words are severed from their meanings and become bytes of sound and sales pitches. We are to think it normal to be estranged from our children and from our old people. We are taught to disconnect belief from everyday life, to see no connections between politics and economics or economics and religion. Our health has nothing to do with the food we eat, the air we breathe, or our alienation from others. Sex is unjoined from love and turned into a medical procedure to be performed to normative specifications. In this way, life itself is freed not only from pain and suffering, but also from the possibility of joy and satisfaction; in short, it becomes a sort of general anesthesia.

Love, according to Berry, is the enemy of abstraction, of disembodied thought, disconnected from place. The 1990s mantra "think globally, act locally" is symptomatic of why even people of political goodwill exacerbate the predicament. Thinking globally, like central planning or free trade, damages the earth, for abstraction and theory deny to the earth the care, knowing, and affection local communities provide. One does not love conceptually but through nearness, intimacy, and familiarity, by attending to the details— peculiarities that can only be rampaged by theory. Global thinking is precisely why the so-called rational efficiencies of the market produce such absurd outcomes for the world at large.

review

Karl Meyer is a musician who lives in Detroit, Mich.

Hope, for Berry, lies in recognizing that human intelligence and love are necessarily scaled by an ecological limit. It must be grounded in a place.

Unlike conservationists who believe that we should leave certain places untouched, Berry argues that places are best defended by the stewardship of communities that are in economy with their surroundings. If a community is not the colony of external economy, it will have every incentive to use with care, maintaining the fertility of its soil and the integrity of its forests. The human community of households will naturally come to recognize itself as a part of a larger community that includes the animals, plants, air, trees, and soil that also reside there. This identification explains why environmental destruction always rides in the wake of community destruction.

What can those of us in urban settings do? It all starts with food. We must shorten our supply lines wherever possible, building cooperative arrangements with local farmers. We must hold our food to standards of purity, demanding that they be free of toxic chemicals. We must see to it that our money circulates in our community for as long as possible before leaving. This involves shopping at small local businesses in preference to national chains, joining consumer co-ops and credit unions, supporting the work of local artisans, and choosing to invest one's money locally. Supporting local art and culture can do much to defend against the homogenizing influence of free-market culture. Perhaps most importantly, we must find ways to challenge the dominant paradigm of social mobility and provide ways in which our children can return home to their communities and do meaningful work.

When technology replaces the skills and care of human beings, it must be opposed, according to Berry. Such sentiments inevitably invoke the charge of "luddite," a word that trumps all discussion, much like the word "blasphemy" once did. Indeed it is heresy to challenge the universal faith in progress, our superstitious belief in the invisible hand of the market. Berry accepts that he is a luddite, not because he is against technology per se (he drives a car) but because he believes always in putting community above technology. He also calls himself a "Jeffersonian" in that he believes democracy can only be upheld by a vibrant class of small farmers "securely landed."

But finally and firstly, Berry is a Christian who finds much in biblical tradition to support his view that it is God's one fundamental wish that we be faithful stewards of creation. He writes, "I take literally the statement in the Gospel of John that God loves the world. I believe that the world was created and approved by love, and that, insofar as it is redeemable, it can be redeemed only by love. I believe that divine love, incarnate and indwelling in the world, summons the world always towards wholeness, which ultimately is reconciliation and atonement with God." TW

Transforming a web of relationships

by Marianne Arbogast

Chuck Matthei spends much of his time trying to get people to think differently about property. Property is best understood "not as a construct of law or a calculation of the marketplace but as a web of relationships," says the president of Equity Trust, a nonprofit organization which works with community development and conservation projects, with a focus on land tenure and land reform issues.

Matthei's own most valued possession is a hand-embroidered quilt, charged with a history that points to his own place in the web, as well as the potential for change. The quilt was made by Amanda Collins, whom Matthei met on a visit to relatives in Lousiana when he was 8 and she was 95.

"Amanda Collins was born a slave of my family," Matthei explains. "She was freed by the Emancipation Proclamation at a very early age, but she was my great grandmother's servant, and she cared for and wet-nursed my grandmother and her brothers and sisters. When she was in her 80s, she made a quilt for each of the children she had raised. This was my grandmother's quilt.

"So when I talk of property, for me these are very personal questions. It wasn't very many years ago that my ancestors considered Amanda Collins to be property. Property is not the static institution that most people imagine it to be. It is a dynamic and ever-changing institution that reflects our understanding of our relationships with one another and the earth."

Because we fail to question our assumptions about property, we are ill-equipped to make crucial moral choices about our involvement with the economic structures of our society, Matthei believes. "What gives rise to the claim of possession? How are the interests of one balanced against the interests of the other? Where does value come from? One of the great ironies of modern life is that we know less about our personal economic relationships and responsibilities than at any other time in human history."

Matthei credits the civil rights movement of the 1960s with radicalizing his worldview. "When I listened to Martin King talk about the day when the sons of former slaves and the sons of owners would sit down together, I stood there and thought, he's speaking to me."

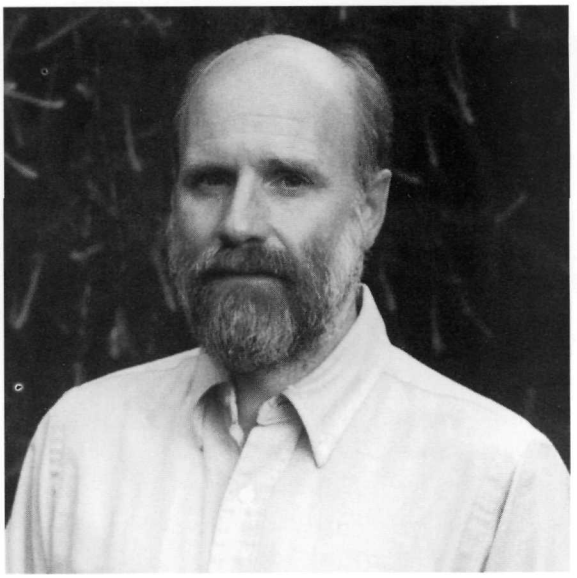
On the verge of his 18th birthday, after applying for military conscientious objector status, Matthei "hit the road on a Honda 50 going 30 miles an hour," with no clear goal but the pursuit of his ideals. When he learned that his application had been denied by the draft board, he burned his draft cards and wrote to say he was sorry he had registered.

Soon afterward, Matthei attended a program on nonviolence at the Catholic Worker farm in Tivoli, N.Y. "In the space of one week I met Wally and Juanita Nelson, Dorothy Day, Ernest and Marian Bromley, Maurice McCrackin ... I went from being almost completely alone in the world to having the most remarkable set of elders one could ever ask or hope for."

Matthei, who had been raised Presbyterian but attended synagogue during his teen years — drawn by the more active social conscience in the Jewish community — found a spiritual home in the Catholic Worker.

"The Catholic Worker movement has been the most instructive, challenging and nurturing religious environment in my life,"

"When I talk of property, for me these are very personal questions. It wasn't very many years ago that my ancestors considered Amanda Collins to be property."



Chuck Matthei

Witnesses, the quick and the dead

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness* <marianne@thewitness.org>.

he says. "It embodied the basic principles of faith more fully and more honestly than any other religious community I'd encountered."

In the years that followed, Matthei's energies were absorbed by the peace movement. In 1969, he was arrested for draft refusal, imprisoned for 40 days, then released by a judge who asked only that Matthei meet with him periodically to continue discussion of the moral and political issues he had raised in the courtroom.

Meanwhile, Matthei's economic analysis deepened.

"My home bases were always in Catholic Worker houses or communal households of peacemaker activists," Matthei says. "Our homes were in low-income communities, and whatever larger political issues we tried to address, we also tried to live as neighbors in the places where we were.

"If you were to do a careful analysis of the circumstances of low-income communities around the country, you would find that the most commonly shared characteristic is the prevalence of absentee ownership. The wealth that flows into the community or the wealth that's generated within that community flows right back out. Poverty has a lot less to do with income than with structures of ownership."

When the war ended, Matthei turned his attention to these problems, working with some early community land trust experiments, then serving as the director of the Institute for Community Economics (ICE) for 12 years. During this time, he created a revolving loan fund for community development projects. When he approached churches to ask for investments, he realized the extent of the need for education.

"They thought it wouldn't work because they thought the poor had no resources," he says. "But as they began to understand the structure of ownership that drained resources right out of low-income neighborhoods, they began to realize that it is possible to form meaningful economic relationships with poor people."

Under Matthei's leadership, ICE also began to work with others to create regional loan funds throughout the country.

In 1991, Matthei moved on to help found Equity Trust. The work of the Trust includes assistance to community and conservation land trusts, an initiative on the stewardship and disposal of church-owned land, and work with community supported agriculture projects. Financial assistance is available through the Equity Trust Fund, which Matthei describes as "a program that combines socially and environmentally responsible investment opportunities with a voluntary land reform initiative."

"One of the great ironies of modern life is that we know less about our personal economic relationships and responsibilities than at any other time in human history."

While welcoming loans from socially concerned investors, Equity Trust also appeals to property owners to sign an "Equity Pledge." The pledge is based on a recognition of "social appreciation," Matthei explains.

"If you buy a property you create value by your investment in that property. If you improve the property by adding labor or capital to it, you increase its value. But in many ways, the community and society also add value to that property. Public investment in infrastructure, transportation and services affect property value profoundly. If neighbors organize to institute a crime watch or clean up vacant lots, that affects property value. Since value comes both from the individual and the community, we need to craft property relationships that appropriately allocate that equity."

The Equity Pledge commits property owners to pledge a designated percentage of the social appreciation of their property (the amount over and above their personal investment) to the Equity Trust Fund, if and when the property is sold.

"We use those monies to create access and opportunity for people who would be excluded from or disadvantaged in the escalating market that gave you a windfall profit," Matthei explains.

The pledge offers people an opportunity "to become personal participants in a process of land reform," he says. "But long before any money changes hands, we're using the example of your commitment to highlight a set of values and principles and to provoke public reflection."

The internal structure of Equity Trust is also an attempt to model just economic relationships. Core staff live and work on a 60-acre tract of land in Connecticut which includes several houses, office space and a conference facility they share with community groups. They receive housing, food, transportation and medical care as needs arise, along with a $200 monthly stipend. Additional funds are allocated for personal obligations such as child support or school debts.

"The idea was that compensation would be based on personal need, not on education, role or other factors," Matthei explains. "It is an effort in personal and practical economic terms to give expression to the respect that we have for each person as an equal and valuable child of God. We're accustomed to saying all are equal in the eyes of God, and then to treating people very differently." TW

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ARTISTS

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