



VOLUME 83

NUMBER 5

MAY 2000

● DISCIPLESHIP

*What does it mean to be faithful?*

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Since 1917, *The Witness* has been examining church and society in light of faith and conscience — advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those who, in theologian William Stringfellow's words, have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." With deep roots in the Episcopal Church, we are a journal of spiritual questing and theology in practice, always ready to hold our own cherished beliefs and convictions up to scrutiny.

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**Website:** [www.thewitness.org](http://www.thewitness.org)**From an anarchist**

I wanted to thank you for sending me the December issue of *The Witness* (Recovering from human evil). I have to admit, as much contempt as I have for religionists, your publication manages to isolate the positive in religion and stick to issues that are important now, here, today, in this world. As an "anarchist," I feel that religion is often used as an excuse not to think or act, even morally, or lose standing with your peers. But you have helped me to understand religionists a little better, and I use your magazine here to interest the others in today's challenges. I hope you will keep me on the mailing list.

Jon Shepherd #77134

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**Simon Chiwanga**

Thanks for the interview with Bishop Simon E. Chiwanga in the March 2000 issue. I'd like permission to reprint it for use in an upcoming diocesan meeting. Great model of leadership and community!

Lynne Wilson

Ministries Development Coordinator

Diocese of Wyoming

**A clarification**

I enjoyed the March 2000 issue and am glad to have been included as part of it. However, I notice that in the editing process you made two errors. First, my reference to Steve Kelsey was incorrectly changed to Jim Kelsey [see correction below]. Second, you edited my text to read, "It is not uncommon to hear seminary-trained clergy, for example, question this new order's influence in diocesan decision-making ..." My suggestion would have been: "It is not uncommon to hear seminary-trained clergy, for example, question the influence of Canon 9 clergy in diocesan decision-making ..."

I was very careful not to treat this development as a "new order." I believe that Canon 9 priests are every bit as much

priests as those who are seminary-trained. There is a danger in thinking the priesthood of these individuals is somehow different, and perhaps deficient. The real change, I believe, is the change in the ownership of the priesthood by the congregation and the revaluing of all other ministries. This happens through the training, on the local level, of several people together for various ministries — including priesthood and diaconate. This latter point is well made in the final sentence of the article. I suspect you understand this. I am just concerned how people will read "new order."

*The Witness* is a fine magazine and a very important voice in the church. Thanks for your leadership.

William Kondrath

Cambridge, MA

[Ed. note: We made an editing error in William Kondrath's sidebar, "Creating a ministering community," in the March 2000 issue when we "corrected" Kondrath's reference to Steve Kelsey by changing it to Jim Kelsey. We didn't realize that Jim Kelsey, the Bishop of Northern Michigan, has a twin brother named Steve who also is an advocate for mutual ministry. Steve Kelsey is missionary with the Middlesex Area Cluster Ministry and convener of Leaveners (a cooperative of ministry developers from the Northeastern U.S.). We apologize to Steve, Jim and William.]

**Entangled authority**

I wanted to compliment you and Bill Countryman for his excellent article, "Anglicanism's Entangled Sense of Authority" (March 2000). I plan to use this article for a Bible study class that will be starting soon at my parish.

Janet Fischer

&lt;jlfisch@pacbell.net&gt;

**Nuclearism and gene-spliced foods**

We have long appreciated your fine magazine. I was particularly grateful for the



October 1999 (Nuclearism Today) and the November 1999 (Harvest feast?) issues, educating us about the very real nuclear threat and genetically engineered or modified foods.

It is no accident that Europeans are rejecting genetically modified foods. Popular magazines alerted their readers about the subject over a dozen years ago. Here, however, giant corporations, be they defense contractors or agro-giants, can operate mostly behind the scenes since our corporate-owned media makes sure the public remains uninformed. Is it any wonder then that the public — as Monsanto says — “has accepted gene-spliced foods” and it has accepted the myth that the nuclear threat ended with the end of the Cold War?

Thank you, *Witness*, for throwing some much needed light on these two vitally important subjects.

Sigrid Dale  
Warren, MI

P.S. Representatives David Bonior and Dennis Cucinich of Michigan have introduced legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives that calls for genetically engineered foods to be labeled.

## Time and freedom

Thanks for a first-rate issue of *The Witness* on Time and freedom. I was delighted by the combination of articles and moved by Bishop DeWitt's insights into his wife's medical situation. Great going!

Mary E. Hunt  
Silver Spring, MD

## A fair share of the wealth

I'm impressed with the depth and breadth of social concern in the January/February 2000 issue on Time and freedom. If I had time to read any more magazines than already come to our house, I would subscribe! I was very moved, also, by the more

personal article, “Three Hands Bridge an Abyss,” by Robert DeWitt. My sister and I helped care for our mother, who also had Alzheimer's. I will send a copy of the article to her and will share it with a friend here who is presently caring for his wife who has the disease.

The idea that every person has a right to a fair share of income from our common heritage of wealth is a profound idea. We try to envision ways in which this idea might be embodied, but we are humble about such efforts. What we feel is most needed at this time is to introduce the idea to those who yearn for economic justice, knowing that it will need the efforts of many knowledgeable thinkers and doers to bring about its eventual realization.

Dorothy N. Andersen  
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By Whose Authority? March 2000

Time and Freedom, January/February 2000

Recovering from Human Evil, December 1999

Harvest Feast? November 1999

Nuclearism Today, October 1999

Living in Debt, September 1999

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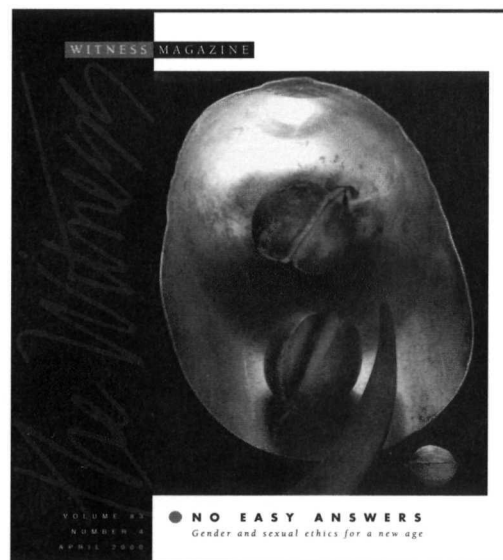
Who is Mentoring Today's Young Adults? September 1998

Trickster Spirit: A Paradigm for Social Action, July/August 1998

### Selected issues

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APRIL 2000



# Sorting out discipleship

By Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

I WAS EDGY IN MY PEW, filled with Kellermanns, all of us except for Gary Kellermann, my partner Bill's Dad — who had died nine months earlier. This was the annual Methodist memorial service and the preacher was a white-haired woman in her sixties, whom Bill whispered was a great family favorite. The homily was essentially about how our ministerial families understood discipleship, largely in terms of suffering. Beyond that, it seemed to me lacking any real substance about what discipleship might mean.

Lying on my desk now — a couple years later — are several items: a letter to Rosemary Radford Ruether accepting her article; a fax from Anne Cox saying she'd be happy to hunt for poems for this issue; an e-mail from Herb Gunn about a consecration sermon; and a press release from the *National Catholic Reporter*. There are other things in the pile: five pages of online movie listings (remember, we here in Detroit are five years into a newspaper labor dispute); a letter to Bill from his friend, Jeanne, part of a group with whom he once lived in community (it came apart painfully, but now they are attempting a reunion); a short e-letter for Bill regarding his current urban work; a couple of our recent updates about my health and *Witness* work. It goes on. I stare at it all and wonder what the connections are to discipleship. Bill looks over my shoulder and wonders, too.

Perhaps the press statement from the NCR, the independent newsweekly based in Kansas City, helps make it clearest. It's about a competition they recently initiated for an artistic image of Jesus suited to the new millennium. According to editor Mike Farrell, there "was an extraordinary response" — 1,678 entries from 1,004 artists in 19 countries on six continents. The submissions were in oil, acrylic, mixed media, cloth, sculpture, drawings, com-

puter creations and such esoteric variations as burnt toast. The prize-winner, "Jesus of the People" by Janet McKenzie, is remarkably feminine. This Jesus was, in fact, modeled on a dark, gypsy-like woman. (I notice a trend in the U.S. toward people, even men, dying their hair blond. When we were in Hungary last fall for medical treatment, our doctor who was careful to be respectful of the Jews, spoke contemptuously of the dark, numerous, and untrustworthy gypsies!) The NCR release commented on the many tensions (particularly in the Roman Church) that such an image of Jesus, truly embraced, might help resolve — even, perhaps, ordination.

"I STARE AT IT ALL AND  
WONDER WHAT THE  
CONNECTIONS ARE TO  
DISCIPLESHIP. BILL LOOKS  
OVER MY SHOULDER AND  
WONDERS, TOO."

What exactly does it mean to walk and risk with such a Jesus? What does it mean that's more than suffering?

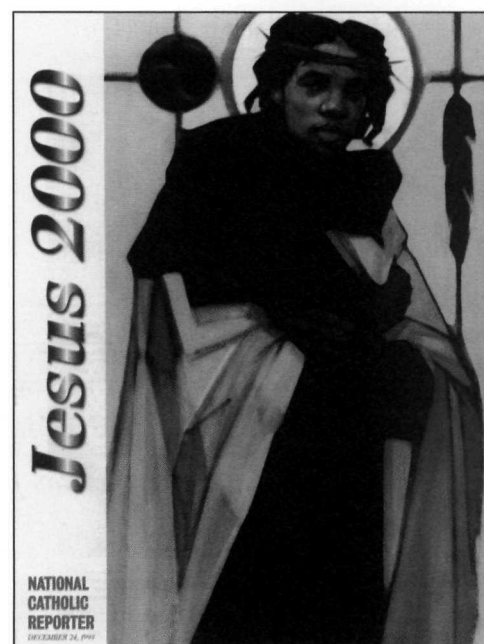
In this issue we share a sermon by Kelly Brown Douglas (see her conversation with Carter Heyward in TW 3/2000) which takes its title from a Tina Turner Motown song. What it's got to do with is radical discipleship and a "manger kind of love." She preached it last February in Detroit at the consecration of Wendell Gibbs as bishop coadjutor.

We review Carter Heyward's recent book on Jesus which argues for a relational Christology where discipleship is not a matter of following a Lord, but walking with a brother.

Anna Hernandez meets up with discipleship in the pastoral side of "customer service" at the Episcopal Church Center's bookstore in Manhattan and at a piano in Hell's Kitchen. Ken Sehested bumps into it on a football field in college and notices how it makes him odd. Rosemary Ruether finds it in a collection of women caring for the earth. And author James Carse gets at it from the inside, by attempting to write a new gospel — in the voice of a Samaritan woman.

So what is the connection between these wonderful and diverse experiences of discipleship? I've got to think that sometimes it hurts, but it's more about life than about death. ●

*Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann, co-editor of The Witness, has been living with brain cancer since September 1998, <jeanie@thewitness.org>. Her husband Bill worked with her on this editorial.*



# Mechtild of Magdeburg

I cannot dance, O Lord,  
Unless You lead me.  
If You wish me to leap joyfully,  
Let me see You dance and sing

Then I will leap into Love  
And from Love into Knowledge,  
And from Knowledge into the Harvest,  
That sweetest Fruit beyond human sense.

There I will stay with You, whirling.

## The madness of love

*by Hadewijch of Antwerp  
(trans. by Oliver Davies)*

The madness of love  
Is a blessed fate;  
and if we understood this  
We would seek no other:  
It brings into unity  
What was divided,  
And this is the truth:  
Bitterness it makes sweet,  
It makes the stranger a neighbor,  
And what was lowly it raises on high.

*From Women in Praise of the Sacred: 43 Centuries  
of Spiritual Poetry by Women by Jane Hirshfield, editor.  
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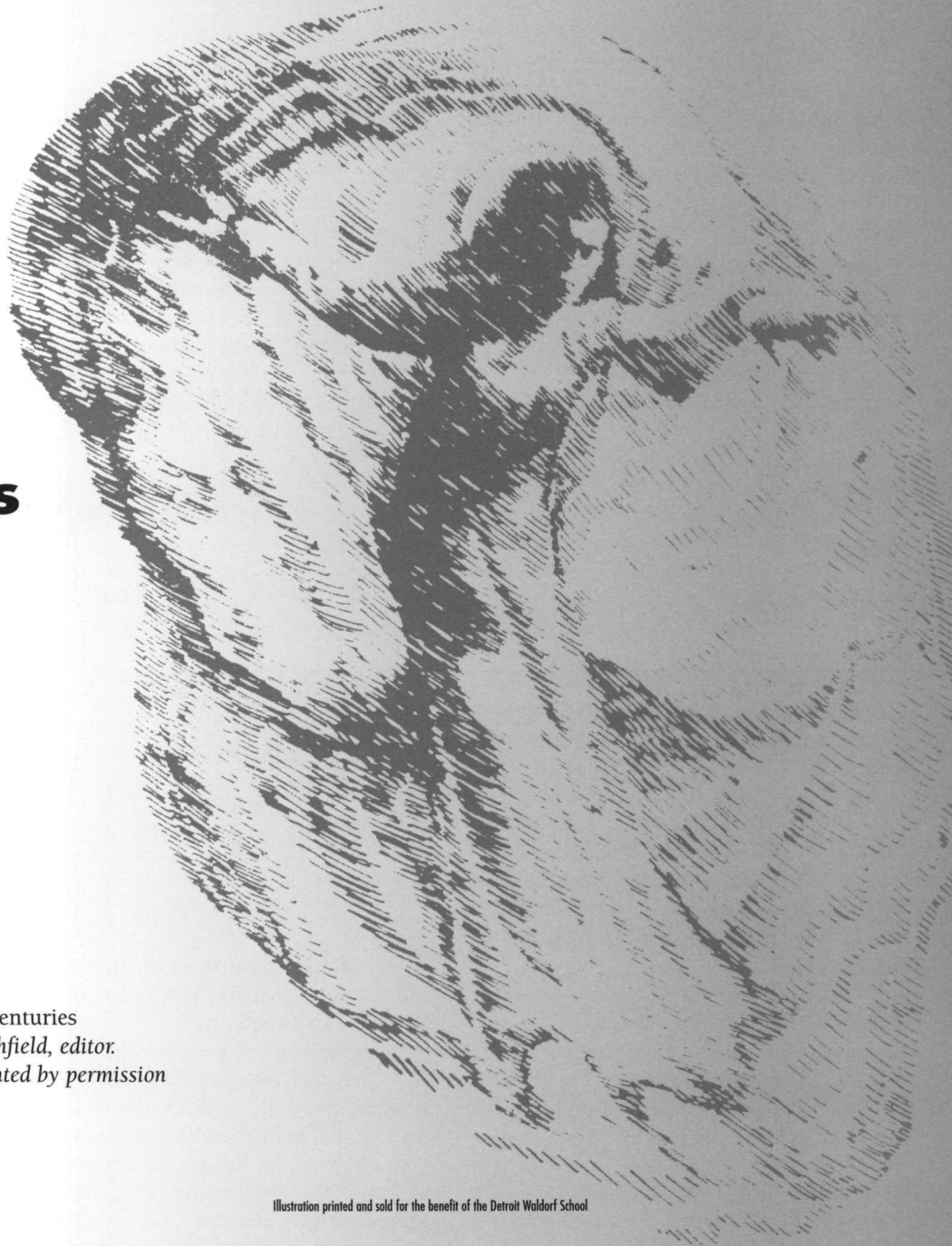


Illustration printed and sold for the benefit of the Detroit Waldorf School

# BASHRA DIARY

One definition of evil is that which harms children.  
If so, I have seen evil today.

By Jeff Nelson

**I**N DECEMBER OF LAST YEAR I travelled with 12 other activists from Michigan to Iraq to challenge the economic sanctions and to witness their devastating effects on the people, particularly the children of Iraq. Following are excerpts from my journal of one day in Bashra.

**8:30 a.m.:** The sun came out and the clouds cleared up for the first time since we arrived in Iraq. I said to Hussein, our Iraqi Red Crescent guide, that it looks to be a beautiful day. He replies, "When the clouds clear up we prepare for the bombs." Not even the simple joy of a sunny day is untouched by this war.

**9:10 a.m.:** Everywhere in Bashra you see the effects of war. Bombed-out buildings still line the streets of a once beautiful city. Called the "city of smiles," its people have little to smile about. It's now sacked with 80 percent unemployment. The smell of raw sewage hangs in the air. Piles of garbage and rusted cars fill the vacant lots. Over 30 percent of the water is undrinkable. Sanctions leave Bashra with no resources to put life back together.

**10:20 a.m.:** Flies swarm the face of little Alia. Sanctions prohibit pesticides — so a single fly strip is all that protects her from the Black Fever these insects carry. What would a humanitarian 'no-fly' zone look like? Alia's nine month-old body weighs only eight pounds — half of what it should. Her mother rushes to brush away flies as the doctor explains there are only antibiotics for

three of the 20 children who need it. He asks if we would like to choose who will get the medicine today.

**10:45 a.m.:** Seven-year-old Ali, lips blue and eyes glazed. His chest heaves as he gasps for air, hanging on to what remains of his life. His mother, eyes bloodshot with tears, holds the oxygen tubes to his nose. Sanctions make it impossible to get even the most basic medical supplies — no oxygen masks or tents here. Tubing is held to the tank with surgical tape. I want to pick Ali up and breathe for him. The mother cries out to us, "Why does America want to kill our children?"

**11:25 a.m.:** Six-year-old Muslin's family lived in an area heavily bombed during the war. Now, like so many others, he is dying from leukemia. Doctor Al-Karem explains that the depleted uranium weapons used by the U.S. during the Gulf War have left Iraqi children with radioactive air to breathe and poisoned water to drink. I look at Muslin, losing his hair and gone blind in his left eye. I can barely hold the tears as I give him a balloon. He is too sick to smile, another casualty of a war supposedly over before he was born.

**2:45 p.m.:** Seven-year-old Hassan holds the jagged, twisted piece of metal removed from his leg. Rolling up his pant leg he shows a scar from his knee nearly to his ankle. With a dozen other children he was injured in the January 25 U.S. bombing of the Jumariya neighborhood. Four children

were crushed and killed. Where was the military target, Mr. President? Was this young boy a national security threat, Secretary Cohen? Is this the price you were willing to pay, Madame Albright? One definition of evil is that which harms children. If so, I have seen evil today.

**5:00 p.m.:** At Mass with the Archbishop of Bashra. The Gospel will be read in Aramaic, the language of Jesus. Modern-day Iraq is the birthplace of Abraham, the land of Jonah, and starting point for the Magi who followed the star. Like the Magi, it was a call to follow the star of Christ that has brought me to this Holy Land and face to face with this slaughter of the innocents.

**10:30 p.m.:** Reflecting back, the streets of Bashra remind me of neighborhoods in Detroit. The abandonment, the destruction, the degradation that forced poverty brings is so similar. Detroit, too, has suffered from decades of economic warfare. My heart sinks to think of all the time, money, and resources spent destroying Iraq. Resources not being used to better the lives of children in our own communities. Sanctioning Iraq, we sanction ourselves.

**8:30 a.m.:** The next morning: Hussein's prediction is confirmed. Yesterday U.S. warplanes bombed a neighborhood in Northern Iraq. Two children were killed and dozens injured. Will this reign of terror ever end? ●

*Jeff Nelson is a seminarian who works in Detroit with Groundwork for a Just World.*



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# DISCIPLESHIP

## The unpredictable stuff of life

By Anna Hernandez

I'M ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE who seem to have two vocations, for which I often curse God. There are days when everything looks like discipleship, and days when nothing at all will do. Mostly, though, it looks a lot like customer service. I work in an Episcopal bookstore, and 35 hours a week I show up, and deal with whomever God sends through the door — no receptionist or office door to hide behind. You walk in, you get me and, like it or not, I get you. At best, it's a really challenging pastoral ministry. At its worst, it's a day filled with too many phone calls and e-mails, and careless, thoughtless people. Like the man who asked me, "If you were a woman, what color Bible would you like?"

I try to hold my tongue, but am not always successful. I try not to be mean to people (it makes them feel bad), but neither will I let myself be stepped on (it makes me feel bad). I helped that man to the best of my ability, and moved on to the next person. He's still a customer, and we like each other. Discipleship?

There's an old man, who comes in about four times a year, monopolizes my time, totally disrupts the store and all who are therein, and never buys a thing. He yells, "Where's the girl? Is the girl still here? I need help, I want a Bible. I can't see, I need large print. The girl can help me." He's going deaf, too, so he yells, and people stare at him (and at me, I guess to make sure that I'm aware of the situation). He doesn't smell great, and he looks like he could really use a new pair of shoes. He asks a question, but talks over the answer, and then he asks it again, louder, and

talks over the answer. After he leaves, people tell me how amazed they are that I am so patient with him. My boss says, "That one, he will get you your wings."

This man's been coming into the store for about five years or so, and I've never been able to help him before. When he comes in, I tend to leap headfirst into the pit. We go through the usual drill: I show him all of the large print and giant print Bibles we've got, and he rejects them all. Only, the last time, he didn't reject them all. He took one from me, and opened it up about 3 inches from his face, and said, "I like this one. I'll take it." Well, I guided him over to the cash register, rang it up, found someone to help him out to the street, and moved on to the next person.

I wonder how he gets along, and if I'll ever see him again. I wonder why I don't mind helping some folks, but others I don't want to help at all. I mean, Jesus didn't wander around asking people, "Whatchya gonna look at after I heal your blindness?" Or, "If you are going to listen to that hip-hop crap, I am not going to heal your deafness, young man!"

Almost every day, there's a close encounter. Sometimes they haunt me. A woman I'd never seen before walked up to the cash register, and handed me two books to ring up. She said, "I lost my baby. I was at 8 months. This is my first day back at work." In that kind of moment, what can you do? God's calling, and you're having an attack of low self-esteem, which is manifesting itself as a huge urge to fly away, because you are not prepared for this. I took a deep breath, looked up and said, "I'm so sorry, that's an

"WHERE'S THE GIRL?"

IS THE GIRL STILL HERE?

I NEED HELP,

I WANT A BIBLE.

I CAN'T SEE,

I NEED LARGE PRINT.

THE GIRL CAN HELP ME."

impossible situation.” Then I remembered a book of meditations written for that very thing, and she looked at me, and we both tried not to cry. I asked if she’d like to see it, and she said yes, so I went and got it and handed it to her. She sighed, and said in an undertone, “I didn’t see this.” After a quick glance, she bought the one I’d fetched, walked out, and I’ve never seen her again. I wonder how she’s doing. She seemed pretty strong. There was something about her that made me feel like she was going to be alright no matter what I did, or didn’t, do.

Some days, discipleship looks like that woman; devastated beyond belief, yet reaching out for my hand. It hasn’t always occurred to me that people might want to reach out for my hand, that my hand might be a lifeline: It’s not actually my hand they’re reaching out for. I don’t even always recognize it. When you show up, miracles occasionally happen; I’m just the one lucky enough to be there. It’s no small miracle I was able to remember where the book for that woman was. I think, though, that if I were a real disciple, I’d just be able to give her the damn book because she needed it, thus avoiding the mammon portion of our show. However, that’s not the way of the world, so I took her money, and moved on to the next person. I often wish I could give people the books they need.

My other vocation is as a musician. It’s an awful lot like customer service. As a musician, though, I actually feel discipleship more of the time. Most of my gigs are for worship services. Every third Sunday at my church (St. Clement’s in Hell’s Kitchen, NYC), I’m the music leader. The Clementines are a great singing congregation, and I like it there. I try to be mindful in planning the hymns, try to avoid the more annoying texts and tunes that used to fascinate Christians, and sometimes (sigh) still do. I hear the people singing and am often moved, and when it works like it’s supposed to, I can see that they are also moved. We try to stay open to the urgings of the Spirit. Sometimes, I’ll start stomping

out a beat, or playing a drum pattern to a hymn that’s never been previously associated with any percussion, and other people join in; some just singing, some just stamping their feet, some doing both, and by the last verse, we are all having a pretty good time. Discipleship?

Don’t get me wrong, being a musician isn’t always a picnic. I’ve been hired to play at conferences to provide music for worship, and gathering music in order to build com-

“WHY AM I HERE?”

LEO TOLSTOY ONCE SAID:

“I HAD INTENDED TO GO

TO GOD AND I FOUND MY

WAY INTO A STINKING BOG,

WHICH EVOKES IN ME ONLY

THOSE FEELINGS OF WHICH I

AM MOST AFRAID: DISGUST,

MALICE, AND INDIGNATION.”

munity, and then the worship service I’ve planned (at their request) is a two-hour meeting instead, people talk over the gathering music and ignore it, and I think to myself, “Why am I here?” Leo Tolstoy once said: “I had intended to go to God and I found my way into a stinking bog, which evokes in me only those feelings of which I am most afraid: disgust, malice, and indignation.”

When I feel useless, ignored, and like I do not matter at all, I tend to get impatient and frustrated. Headfirst into the stinking bog. Glub, glub. But you know what? There’s always someone else in the bog, too. Last time, I met another musician. So, we stuck together, and the experience became less irritating because I made a new friend!

Oftentimes my worlds collide: Once I sold a priest some books in the afternoon, and saw him later on in a church where I had a gig. Afterwards, he came up to me to tell me that he liked what I’d done. I said, “Thanks. You got some great books today.” He looked at me like he’d never seen me before, and I must be crazy, and said, “How do you know I bought books today?” I said, “I sold them to you,” and he gave me a dismissive look, and said “Oh, I never look at the help.” Then he walked away.

Definitely a blow to discipleship. I’m sure he did like what I’d done musically, and I’ve found that people are mostly clueless as to how I’ve been affected by what they say, and they usually don’t mean harm. But discipleship is nigh unto impossible if one person denies the other one’s existence, especially if I’m the other one. You need at least two people in order to have discipleship, and maybe that’s why those disciples went out in pairs. There are times when my ego is too little to help me. There are other times that I’m sure my ego will interfere in a situation, but somehow, it’s not a problem. Even the old man bought a Bible, and that was surely the grace of God.

Discipleship seems to be a slippery little devil: You can’t predict it, and you really can’t expect it to happen; you can’t live without it, and you can be fairly certain that it will not be the way you would want it, but it does happen, and it’s almost always a surprise. ●

*Anna Hernandez manages the bookstore at the Episcopal Church Center in New York City. Formerly a member of the popular singing group, The Miserable Offenders, she now makes music on her own.*



# DISCIPLE

## Accomplice in a consecrated conspiracy

by Ken Sehested

I WAS A SENIOR IN HIGH SCHOOL when it happened. It was our first football game of the season, and we were playing New Iberia, not far from Avery Island where Tabasco hot sauce is made, 90 miles or so from home in Houma, Louisiana, southwest of New Orleans. The year 1968 is now, 30-plus year's hence, a metaphor for a whole new reality for my reading of history: assassinations, civil unrest and troops in the streets both here and abroad.

"IF ANY WANT TO BECOME  
MY FOLLOWERS, LET THEM  
DENY THEMSELVES AND  
TAKE UP THEIR CROSS, AND  
FOLLOW ME."

— *Mark 8:34*

Back then, though, I was a star athlete and a traveling youth evangelist.

Headline news failed to factor into my world view, not so much because of my age as because of my piety.

I regained consciousness at half-time, sitting on the bench at my locker, head in hands, my thumb curled around the face-mask of my helmet. A blow to the head



©Betty LaDuke Africa: Oum Rambow

had knocked me silly sometime during the first half of the game, but I was still upright. As my teammates loitered about the locker room — sipping the sticky sweet beverage designed to maximize energy and rehydration, some retaping ankles or hands, complaining in small huddles about busted plays and brutal humidity — my rattled brain began to regain its composure.

“You gonna be okay?” said a voice from behind. I mumbled something-or-other, just enough to dispense with the distraction. My mind was intensely occupied, on something distant and obscure, but strangely compelling. When the fog finally lifted, I found myself quoting, over and over again, very much like a mantra, the words from John 3:16 — the *sine qua non* of evangelical Christian preaching texts, which begins: “For God so loved the world ...”

Although I did not know her work, novelist Flannery O'Connor's paraphrase of another text from John's Gospel would later become my all-time favorite and would describe my spiritual journey, my intense desire to be a disciple of Jesus, beginning with my preadolescent baptism, through the momentous and genuinely mystical experience which overtook me in my early teens, all the way through the years of theological dissonance, deconstruction and reconstruction of young adulthood. “You shall know the truth,” O'Connor wrote, “and the truth will make you odd.”

There was a time when my spiritual journey was characterized by a profound sense of schizophrenia. Who was that person, sharing my name, pictured in that hometown newspaper article headlined “FUTURE EVANGELIST”? By then I was caught up in a barely-secret cynicism, my inherited faith quickly dissipating and emerging new faith still *en utero*. My own personal “sacred canopy” was coming apart — foundations shaking, as Bro. Tillich would say — and instinctively I read through the book of Job, slowly and deliberately, during breaks between classes, at lunchtime and during study hall.

I felt destined to be numbered among the damned; but regardless the cost I stubbornly refused to grovel before a gangster god or

prostrate myself on an altar festering with pompous religious posturing.

My new-born faith would come with much labor, after an emotionally-panicked transition — something akin to the fear felt by all childbearers as the birth canal's trauma threatens to halt the beat of one, if not both, monitored hearts.

Like Job, however, I was caught up in a whirlwind of sorts. Part of the joyful surprise on the other side of that rebirth was sight of the bridge which connected my present to my past journey of faith. However crudely conceived (“We don't

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smoke and we don't chew, and we don't go with the girls that do”), at the core of my earlier faith was the credo that belief could get you in trouble (or at least make you “odd”). And that core remained, intact, sharper than ever.

A favorite hymn from my earlier years was an old Gospel tune, “This World Is Not My Home,” a song I had come to revile for its escapist piety. Now, suddenly, the lyrics made sense, when “the world” is understood (as used in the New Testament) not as creation but as the complex web of social, cultural, economic and political arrangements which govern the earth.

Indeed, this present world is an inhospitable home to a vast array of creatures, human and nonhuman alike; and they are, in fact, the ones signified by biblical references to the “lost coin” and “lost sheep” and “the children” and “the poor,” all those on whom God's attention is riveted: all those for whom “the world” has no use, is abandoning, will “write off” as an acceptable loss.

“To choose the road to discipleship is to dispose oneself for a share in the cross,” wrote the U.S. Roman Catholic Bishops in their 1984 “Challenge of Peace” statement. “It is not enough to believe with one's mind; a Christian must also be a doer of the word, a wayfarer with and a witness to Jesus.”

Or, as Bonhoeffer would write from prison to his grandnephew on the occasion of the latter's baptism: “With us thought was often the luxury of the onlooker; with you it will be entirely subordinated to action.” (The original German title of Bonhoeffer's classic *The Cost of Discipleship* was *Nachfolge Christi*, literally “Following Christ.”) Faith, as Clarence Jordan would say, is not belief in spite of the evidence, but life lived in scorn of the consequences.

The disciple is one who refuses “the luxury of the onlooker,” but chooses, instead, the role of accomplice in the consecrated conspiracy of life against the reign of death. Those so immersed (sometimes literally by both water and by blood) discover their buoyancy, not by the will to power or the weight of moral urgency, but by the wonder of grace. As Matthew Fox has written, “The paranoid and the pious share one thing in common: The former believe the deepest forces of the universe are allied against them; the latter, on their behalf.”

So rejoice, you “odd ones,” even though you are reviled; for yours is the future vowed in creation and vouchsafed in the new creation. ●

*Ken Sehested is executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. His football career finally ended, at Baylor University, after a fifth concussion. But he can still quote a host of Bible verses by memory.*

# *Spirit of Justice* Awards Reception

**General Convention**

**Sunday, July 9, 2000**

**4:00- 6:00 PM**

**The St. Francis Center**

**2323 Curtis Street**

**Denver, Colorado**

*The Witness* awards reception will be held Sunday, July 9, 2000 at the St. Francis Center, a mission providing mental health and substance abuse counseling, medical services, job training and placement, telephones, showers, storage space and clothing to Denver's homeless population during daytime hours. The reception will be catered by the Women's Bean Project, a non-profit business marketing soup mixes, gift crates, baskets and catering services as a means to help women overcome barriers they have encountered in their lives. Through the business they learn new life skills: budgeting, conflict management, assertiveness training, interviewing for jobs, developing their own support systems, increased self-sufficiency and a sense of personal responsibility.

## **THE FEATURED SPEAKER:**

Rt. Rev. Peter Selby, Bishop of Worcester, England

## **THE AWARDS:**

- ◆ The William Scarlett Award (labor activist and Episcopal Church bishop)
- ◆ The Vida Scudder Award (feminist and socialist) ◆ The William Stringfellow Award (theologian and lawyer)
- ◆ The William Spofford Award (longtime *Witness* editor and outspoken labor advocate)

## **T I C K E T I N F O R M A T I O N**

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# SISTERS OF EARTH

## Religious women and ecological spirituality

Rosemary Radford Ruether

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**S**ISTERS OF EARTH is a network of Roman Catholic religious women and affiliated laity, mostly in the U.S., who are converting their land and institutions into centers of ecological literacy and environmental sustainability. This work reflects a new awareness among women religious of ecological crisis, and yet such ventures have deep roots in older monastic tradition.

Monastic communities historically were rural, land-based and supported themselves by agriculture. They cultivated a communal way of life committed to voluntary poverty and simplicity. They practiced withdrawal from the luxury and corruption of the "world," or what we today might call "consumer society." Monasticism spread in Western Christianity at a time of the collapse of Roman imperial civilization, a collapse that was political, economic and ecological. It was a time when the things of "this world" were seen to have failed. Monasticism was an effort to construct an alternative way of life suitable to salvation.

The monastic way of life was not simply "other-worldly," it also held forth a vision of the restoration of creation. It promised a restoration of the original harmony of all creatures with one another and with God. The natural world corrupted by human sin would be restored. One sign of this was a restored peace between humans and animals that was corrupted at the time of the flood (see Genesis 9:2). Stories of friendship between animals and monks, a return to simple subsistence agriculture, the holding of all things in common, were all marks of this intended return to an original state of creation as intended by God.

Many early Church Fathers believed that God created the riches of the earth to be held in common. The rise of private property in the hands of the rich, impoverishing the majority of humans, was an expression of fallenness. For example, in the fourth century Ambrose, bishop of Milan, wrote:

*Why do the injuries of nature delight you? The world has been created for all, while you rich are trying to keep it for yourselves. Not merely the possession of the earth, but the very sky, air and the sea are claimed for the use of the rich few. ... Not from your own do you bestow on the poor man, but you make return from what is his. For what has been given as common for the use of all, you appropriate for yourself alone. The earth belongs to all, not to the rich. (De Nabuthe Jezraelita 3, 11)*

For Ambrose, simple living, land held in common with equal benefits for all, restored God's order and intention for creation.

Monastic tradition has also stressed service to society and help for the poor. Monastic communities in the West have been centers of literacy and education. Thus for women religious to reshape their land and buildings to make them centers for ecojustice and learning about an ecologically sustainable lifestyle is a modern renewal of some very traditional impulses of Christian monastic life.

The Sisters of Earth movement has a more recent history in the U.S. In the 1940s the Catholic Rural Life Conference (CRLC) promoted a back-to-the-land movement for U.S. Catholics. Part of this was a perception of city life as corrupt. Catholics, then largely urban immigrants,

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would recover a “purer” life by moving to the country and taking up family farming and traditional home production skills, such as bread-baking. But the CRLC was also concerned about justice for farmers being driven off their land by corporate enterprise. Catholic communitarian social justice movements, such as the Catholic Worker and the Grail, were influenced by the CRLC and created farming communities, even while retaining urban service work.

In the 1960s, the Grail and other groups of religious women reemphasized urban ministry, under the influence of organizers such as Saul Alinsky, and abandoned communal farming. But the 1970s saw a discovery of the issue of ecology as a crisis of industrial civilization. The Club of Rome report and the celebration of Earth Day in the late 1960s heralded a new awareness that consumer society was using the resources of the earth unsustainably.

The guru of the Catholic ecological movement, however, has been Passionist priest Thomas Berry. Berry was a professor of the history of religions at Fordham University who turned to a focus on ecology and cosmology in the late sixties. He founded the Riverdale Center of Religious Research in 1970, focusing on a sustainable relation of the human community to the earth and the universe. His collection of essays, *Dream of the Earth* (1988) has become a classic of the ecological spirituality movement. Together with physicist Brian Swimme, he authored *The Universe Story* (1991), which redefined modern scientific cosmology as a new creation story.

Berry's most recent book, *The Great Work* (1999), defines the creation of an ecologically sustainable culture as the primary historic challenge of the present human generation. Berry's seminars at the Riverdale Center and the distribution of his papers and tapes, became musts for the continuing education of Catholic women religious. Other Catholic centers of spirituality, such as the Sophia Center at Holy Names College in Oakland, Calif., have claimed Berry's work as the central pillar of their educational vision.

Berry is not the only influence on the Sisters of Earth Movement. Another important shaper of this movement on the practical level is Jesuit Al Fritsch, director of Appalachia — Science in the Public Interest. Fritsch's Center does ecological sustainability inventories for institutions, including religious orders. Women's religious orders,

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particularly, have asked for his assessments of the sustainability of their properties. From the mid-1980s Fritsch's center carried out such inventories on over 60 motherhouses of women's religious orders.

Fritsch's resource audits are comprehensive and include the areas of energy use, food use, land use, the physical plant, transportation, waste management, water use and wildlife. In the area of energy, Fritsch's audit includes both avenues of conservation and partial self-sufficiency in energy needs. He recommends such possibilities as solar,

wind, biomass and hydro energy; solar food drying and cooking, the use of greenhouses, passive space and water heating, and photo electric potential. The audit points out ways to increase self-reliance in food and to reduce costs of food from production to preparation. He examines land use to promote self-sufficiency, edible landscaping, aquaculture, multiple use of land, wildlife refuges and the aesthetic and spiritual aspects of land use.

In assessing the physical plant, Fritsch examines the physical condition of the building and its use patterns and suggests more efficient use of the present building. He examines the transportation uses of the community, both public and private, to recommend greater efficiency and environmental quality. Waste disposal is assessed to discern present practices and recommend recycling, composting and use of compost toilets. Water use is examined as well as management of wetlands, with recommendations for conservation and alternative sources.

Finally the relation to wildlife is examined, both flora and fauna, to suggest improved protection of habitat. (See Resource Auditing Service, PO Box 298, Livingston, KY 40445.)

Why have religious women been the primary agents of this kind of ecological conversion? Men's monastic orders have similar roots that would seem to dispose them equally to such concerns. The answer seems to lie in the greater prophetic consciousness of religious women as they have taken hold of the renewal of their communities in the last 35 years since the Second Vatican Council. An important factor in this greater prophetic consciousness has been the influence of feminism on American women religious. American nuns have become aware of the injustice of the clerical establishment to women in general and to themselves as religious women. This critical view of the church institution has fostered greater independence and initiative among religious women to undertake their own work for justice, rather than depending on the leadership of the male clergy.

An ecofeminist approach that blends fem-



inism, ecology and justice seems to have a particular appeal to Catholic religious women. Ecofeminism brings together spirituality and scientific rationality, prayer and practical management, outreach to society and service to the poor with cultivation of the inner self; critical reason with the poetic, artistic and intuitive. Berry's vision and Fritsch's practicality make for a wholistic reshaping of religious community life. It allows religious women to reclaim the best of the past tradition of monastic life with the call to renewal. Ecofeminist leader Miriam MacGillis uses the metaphor of "reinhabiting" for this process of conversion which both reclaims and transforms the places that one already lives. Religious women are "reinhabiting" the land, the tradition, the calling for community life that they already have.

Women's religious orders and movements began to apply ecological sustainability to their lands and buildings in the early 1980s. The Grail, for example transformed their property in Loveland, Ohio to develop a permaculture garden and solar heated greenhouse. They added "how to" courses on permaculture and solar heating to their regular course offerings, with their own work as demonstration training sites. Other women's orders also underwent their own conversions of their properties and the founding of training centers for others to learn from their experience.

The Sisters of Earth built on this accumulation of centers over the past decade, bringing them together as an organized network in 1994. At the present time there are about 300 members of this network, mostly across the U.S. The network has a larger global reach than these numbers suggest, since many members represent centers that influence local regions, and their religious orders have ties to their sisters in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa. The network allows for mutual support and a sharing of experiences through a newsletter, a national conference every two years and an Internet connection (contact through Mary Lou Dolan, <elm@woods.smwc.edu>).

Although the transformation of mother-

houses as ecological sustainability and teaching centers suggests a rural focus, much of the work of members of Sisters of Earth ranges across urban institutions as well. Most notable is the application of energy, food and waste recycling to hospitals, a major ministry of religious women. Other ecologically-minded religious women have focused on their work in parishes and schools. A considerable number of the leaders in the Sisters of Earth movement have been teachers of science, and ecological sustainability has given them a new outlet for their training and teaching.

Among the projects undertaken by Sisters of Earth members have been solar heated houses and greenhouses, strawbale houses (to demonstrate the cheap and energy efficient nature of this kind of building material), wind energy systems, solar ovens, composting toilets and community gardens. Typically all these projects are undertaken not just for internal improvement, but are made into demonstration projects for teaching programs that combine a new vision and spirituality with practical skills. These skills have also been shared in the mission work of religious women. Learning how to build composting toilets and solar ovens has enhanced the work of religious women in the poorest communities, in areas such as Central America and Africa.

Sisters of Earth members have also been active with international agencies. One member, Jean Blewett, the founder of Earth-community Center in Laurel, Md., offers workshops and retreats on ecological spirituality and practice, and monitors the debate on sustainable development at the United Nations. Others are active with such organizations as Worldwatch, Environmental Defense Fund and Greenpeace. Another, Aurea Cormier, a university professor of domestic science, has developed a textbook entitled *World Food Problems*, and organizes an annual forum on food and nutrition issues.

While many of these women have created centers that do ecological literacy training, the most important such center, where many Sisters of Earth have gone for their own

training, is Genesis Farm in Blairstown, New Jersey. Genesis Farm was founded by Miriam MacGillis. MacGillis has written extensively on the new universe story and ecological spirituality and is a frequent lecturer on these topics around the world. Genesis Farm offers major training courses in such areas as "The Universe Story and Bioregionalism" (a two-week program), a six-week and a twelve-week earth literacy program, and such focused seminars as "simplifying our life-styles" and "re-visioning the vowed life."

Ecological spirituality and practice is also reshaping prayer and literacy for these religious women. Several have developed ecologically-focused labyrinth walks. Genesis Farm has shaped a sacred space on their land as an earth meditation walk. The stations of this walk bring together the stages of the universe story with the stages of each person's life cycle story. An ecojustice center in the Philippines, organized by religious women there, has created a meditation walk on their land modeled on the stations of the cross. Each station focuses on an area of the sufferings of the earth and its creatures, inflicted by sinful humankind: pollution of water, fouling of the air, the poisoning of the soil, extinction of species, social violence and poverty.

The prayers of the church year also allow for a recovery of the relation of liturgy to the seasons, the winter and summer solstices, the fall and spring equinoxes. Prayer is also integrated into rhythms of daily life: rising and sleeping, food preparation, eating and cleaning up, fasting and feasting. Sisters of Earth is an inspiring example of how a traditional Christian form of community of life, the monastic order, is being redeveloped, or "reinhabited," to make them vehicles of ecological living and learning. ●

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Rosemary Ruether is the Georgia Harkness Professor of Systematic Theology at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary. She is author of many books, including *Gaia and God* (1992).

# WHAT'S LOVE GOT



# TO DO WITH IT?

## A sermon by Kelly Brown Douglas

TEXT: John 15: 12-15

ON FEBRUARY 5, 2000, nearly 3,000 people visited a despairing, manger kind of neighborhood in Detroit's Cass Corridor for an Episcopal service of ordination and consecration of Wendell Gibbs as bishop coadjutor of the Diocese of Michigan. Kelly Brown Douglas, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Howard University in Washington, D.C., rocked the neighborhood with a sermon that challenged the church and its newest bishop to exercise a radical discipleship and "a manger kind of love."

**M**y dear church friends, what's love got to do with it? What's love got to do with this gathering of young and not so young, lay and ordained, black and white, female and male, gay and non-gay, lesbian and non-lesbian, coming together not in dissension, but coming together with one voice to affirm the call of this man Wendell to be bishop?

What's love got to do with it?

What's love got to do with this man becoming bishop, this one who carries the legacy of Absalom Jones, Alexander Crummell, Peter Williams and all the nameless others who suffered the patronizing indignities and dehumanizing rejections for daring to accept their call as black priest in an unashamedly white colonial church of slaveholders?

What's love got to do with it?

What's love got to do with this man, blessed with ebony grace, being called as coadjutor in a church that not less than a century ago would, if it tolerated him at all, tolerate him as only a suffragan?

What's love got to do with it?

Hert Gunn



Oh my friends, the ironies and paradoxes of this moment are many, from a black man being consecrated bishop to a black woman preaching, and all that I'm left to ask at such a time as this is, "What's love got to do with it?"

In this morning's Gospel, we encounter a part of what John presents as Jesus' last discourse. In this last discourse, we find Jesus speaking not to a hostile or non-believing crowd; instead we find Jesus speaking with care and concern to "his own," to his disciples to those who supposedly believe in him.

In this last discourse, while the Jesus who speaks is present, he speaks really as one who transcends space and time, as one who is already on his way to his Father. Yet, he speaks as one who is concerned not to abandon those he will leave behind, those who will remain in the world. In a sense, although Jesus speaks on earth, the words he speaks are to be heard as words being spoken from heaven. And, although Jesus speaks directly to his disciples, his words are to be heard as words directed to those in all times who are followers of him. For this last discourse represents, if you will, Jesus' last will and testament, meant to be heard and read after he is gone.

And so what is it that we find Jesus telling his disciples this morning in his last discourse?

Jesus says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

But precisely what kind of love is it that Jesus commands of his disciples? It is, my friends, not a one-time love. It is not an "I did" kind of love, not a "I should" kind of love, rather it is a "present" love. That is to say, in every present moment, those who are Jesus' disciples are to love one another. In every present moment, Jesus commands us to love.

"This is my commandment," he said: "Love

one another." He does not say, I command that you have loved one another, or I command that you will love one another. No, Jesus uses the present tense to command a present love. He thus calls us to love not here and there, not every once in a while or even most of the time. No, Jesus commands that we love continuously. In every present that is graciously given to us to live, we who are disciples of Jesus are to love one another.

It is an incomprehensible kind of love. Jesus makes it quite clear when he says, "No one can have greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends," or better translated: "No one can have greater love than this: to lay down one's life for those one loves."

Although this passage is no doubt predicting Jesus' death on the cross, and while this text has been, for some, the foundation of Christian martyrdom, Jesus is not really commanding of us a love that kills. He is not calling his disciples into death. Rather, Jesus is calling those who would follow him into a certain way of life, a certain way of living. He is commanding that we give our total lives, all of who we are, our very beings, over to one another in love.

This, then, is a love that has no limits. It is not conditioned upon what others do or whether or not they love us back. This love is boundless — so intense is the love that it obliges our very life. Such a love is utterly incomprehensible, except to the one that has been loved in such a way as we have been loved by Jesus. And this brings us to another aspect of this love, which Jesus commands.

What kind of love is it? It is a present, incomprehensible kind of love and also a productive kind of love. It is a kind of love that subsists only as it produces itself. Jesus makes it clear when he says, "You are my friends if you do what I command." Or the translation I prefer "And you are the ones I

love if you do what I command."

Now we should not hear these words as Jesus offering the rules for special membership into his inner circle. Jesus is not saying to us that if we obey his command to love then he will love us. This is not an if-then statement. This is not a test of who's loved and who's not loved; who's in and who's out; who's saved and who's not saved. Rather, Jesus is telling us that those who know, who really know the love of Jesus, those who know, really know that Jesus loves them are those who love one another. Essentially, Jesus loves us into loving.

But my dear church friends, as important as it is to understand the present, incomprehensible, and productive quality of the love that Jesus commands of us, there is to me something even more significant about this love which he calls us into. And it is this something more that best captures Jesus' final call to us.

What kind of love is it? It is a manger kind of love. Jesus said to his disciples, "Love one another as I have loved you." And how is it that Jesus loved?

Jesus loved as one who was born in a manger and not ashamed of it. Jesus loved as one who never forgot his manger roots, his manger beginnings in this world. Jesus' love was a manger kind of love.

Now what in the world do I mean by a manger kind of love? It is the kind of love that the enslaved Africans testified to when they sang, "poor little Jesus boy, born in a manger; world treat him so mean, treat me mean, too."

A manger kind of love is a love that constrains us, downright obligates us, to love those who the world treats mean. A manger kind of love loves those who the world cast out. It loves those to whom the world says, "you are not good enough." It loves those to



whom the world and, yes, even the church, tells, "There is no room for you in the inn."

A manger kind of love loves those the world, and, yes, even the church, says are the wrong color, the wrong gender, express their sexuality in the wrong way, talk funny and come from the wrong country. A manger kind of love is a love defined by being directed to manger kind of people.

You see, my friends, it is really quite simple. What kind of love is it that loves only those whom the world claims to love? This is an exclusive, actually hateful kind of love. But Jesus calls us to something different. Jesus calls us to love as he did, to love those whom the world doesn't love and maybe doesn't even like. Jesus calls us into loving those who feel unloved. He calls us to love them into loving themselves and one another even as he loves them. Now, that is a manger kind of love.

My friends, a manger kind of love is a love not meted out from a distance, a love not decreed from the sterile places where kings rule; no, a manger kind of love is a love that is up close and personal. It is a love that takes us, as it did Jesus, to the messy, ordinary places where people strive to make a life. It takes us into the places where people live, where people hurt, where people struggle, where people are in pain, where people die. It takes us where people are, so that we can touch them, know them even as they touch and know us.

You see, again, it is really quite simple, for it would be hard to hand down decrees which shut people out, which take food from person's tables, jobs from their communities, education from their children, health care from their bodies. It would be hard to do those things if we knew them.

It would not be so easy to be so unjust and discompassionate and unloving to those whose eyes we have looked into, whose faces we know, whose hands we have touched, whose tears we have shed. A

manger love is a love that loves manger people in the very mangers in which they live.

Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you." And how did Jesus love? Jesus loved as one born in a manger: walking the highways and byways, touching the lives of manger people. Oh yes, my dear friends, Jesus calls us to a present, incomprehensible, productive, manger kind of love.

Oh yes. Be clear it was a manger kind of love that allowed Richard Allen and Absalom Jones to know that they were full-fledged children of God, worthy to worship God despite church leaders yanking them from their knees of prayer.

Oh yes, they knew a manger kind of love and to know it is to pass it on — that is why we are here.

Oh yes, be clear it was a manger kind of love that allowed eleven women to know that they were called from the womb to be priests in God's church, even when doors of churches were being barred to keep them out. Oh they knew a manger kind of love and to know it is to pass it on and that is why we are here.

Why are we here today consecrating this man Wendell as bishop? Because there has been a present, incomprehensible, productive river of manger love that has flowed through this Episcopal tradition saving it from its sterilized, institutionalized self so that it could be a church, a church of the one born in a manger.

And so my dear, dear brother Wendell, what does all of this mean for you as you are about to begin a new part of your journey as a child of God? It means that you are to remember that God through Jesus has not called you to a big hat. God through Jesus has not called you to a pretty robe, a purple shirt or a shiny new ring. No, God through Jesus has not even called you to a big chair, a cluttered desk

or an office with a view. Oh no, God through Jesus has not called you to decree-making from bishop's houses or convention floors. No, to none of these things has God called you.

Instead, God through Jesus has commanded that you, Wendell, love as Jesus loved. You are commanded to love in all of your present moments, incomprehensibly, productively, as one unashamed of his manger heritage. You are not to let yourself be hidden by the clothes, sheltered by the buildings or protected by the decrees. You are commanded to love as Jesus did and to walk the highways and byways of manger lives, loving manger people.

What's love got to do with it? That, my friends, is the question for all of us to ask in all that we are and in all that we do as followers of Jesus. We, too, are called to nothing less than a present, incomprehensible, productive, manger kind of love. And we have no excuse, for to know the love of Jesus is to pass it on.

What's love got to do with it? Oh Wendell, oh church, as I stand here, as we gather here we are here on the shoulders of countless, unnamed people to whom the world and church has said no. I can feel their love right here with us. It is the love of an Absalom Jones. It is the love of an Anna Julia Cooper. It is the love of a Pauli Murray. It is the love of the names of those blessed with ebony grace that never made it to be bishop. It is the love of Jesus, and, my friends, to know that love is to, in the time we have been given to us, to pass it on.

Jesus commanded his disciples, "Love one another as I have loved you." And that's what love's got to do with it. ●

*Kelly Brown Douglas is an associate professor of systematic theology at Howard University in Washington D.C. Her latest book is Sexuality and the Black Church (Orbis, 1999).*

# INSPIRED

## Reviving the gospel genre

An interview with James Carse

by Richard Marranca and Dorothy Orme

established at the Council of Nicaea a canon which put a stop to the writing of gospels. Up to that time, there had been a lot of gospels. I thought that gave a kind of imperial quality to Christianity. It let Christians think that there is an absolute truth. It encouraged the kind of extremism with Christians that we have seen too often in history. Gospel-writing was an early Christian tradition; there may have been as many as 200 gospels written in the first several Christian centuries. So I thought, good, I'll resume the tradition, the old practice of writing gospels. So all of that came together, the tradition of writing gospels, my uneasiness with the canon, and my interest in midrashic interpretation of the Gospel. It evolved in a rather nice way.

### Did this happen by chance?

Yes. I'm always happiest when things appear, when I discover something in the process of writing. I like to be involved in writing projects that are in a way beyond me. I like to start something I'm not really sure about or I'm not sure I can finish, so that in the process of writing, the book takes a form I never could have imagined, and this book is definitely of that character. You could say, in other terminology, it was inspired by the Holy Spirit! (laughter) But anyway, that's the process I like to follow. It means that books come slowly, but I'm much happier with it.

### At the time that your book depicts, were there hundreds of gospels?

We have fragments of about 35 gospels, only one of which is complete, the Gospel of Thomas. After the Second World War a collection of these gospels was uncovered in the sands of Egypt. How many others lie undiscovered is anyone's guess. It may overstate it to say there were hundreds but certainly there were scores. It is important to note here that gospel is a literary form unique to Christianity. It makes sense for many reasons to resume writing them.

JAMES CARSE IS PROFESSOR EMERITUS of Religious History and Literature at New York University. His recent book, *The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple* (Harper San Francisco, 1999), is an attempt to revive the genre of gospel writing. Neither a novel about Jesus, such as those by Kazantzakis and Norman Mailer, nor a harmonization of the traditional gospels, like those of Leo Tolstoy and Reynolds Price, the work aspires to be a somewhat piecemeal narrative of the life and teachings of Jesus, by one of his disciples — in this case a Samaritan woman.

### Could you give us a little background on your latest book *The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple*?

I started years ago retelling classic stories and myths from the Gospels, actually even making up stories in the tradition of the midrash, the Jewish method of interpreting one story by telling another, making a rather free interpretation of classical religious texts. Then all of a sudden I realized I had quite a collection of material from the Gospels, or rather, a kind of alternative version of the Gospels. I realized, too, that for a long time I've had questions on the role of the canon in Christianity. In 325 (C.E.) Constantine

# AUDACITY?

**In your Gospel, Christ comes into being as a teacher much more accidentally than in the official gospels.**

There's even strong evidence in the New Testament that he might have developed that way himself. Scholars largely agree that Jesus had no consciousness of himself as the Messiah. Only once or twice, in very odd ways, does he say he is, in the canonical gospels. If he really had thought he was the Messiah, he would have said it a lot more often and the gospels would have reported his having said it more often. So I'm following the tradition that Jesus really didn't understand what was happening in his own life. And I take it a step further. That is, he understands that he doesn't understand what's happening. He knows that things are more mysterious than any single mind can grasp, so that becomes part of this teaching.

**In your Gospel, and in the tradition, Christ starts out questioning the other rabbis, and soon other people start to follow him, not by his design, but by pure chance. People came to him, not because he performed miracles, but because they can see the suffering all around, and also because he needed to heal himself.**

They all saw a vulnerability in him, an insight into things that was astonishing to them, so they followed him spontaneously, without knowing exactly what he was teaching. They were drawn by his person, as much as by his teaching, which is also the picture found in the canonical gospels.

**So one of the things you point out is the struggle. That's not really in the gospels that much, the struggles.**

There's some of it. In the Gospel of Mark, there's constant conflict between Jesus and his disciples. They not only don't get it, but they positively annoy him. But the canonical gospels don't have much in the way of the development of Jesus' own character and self-understanding. They present it after he's arrived at it. I wanted to have a more developmental, evolutionary view of the way Jesus comes to his ministry. After all, it's a very brief ministry. From the canonical gospels, it could have been either one year or three years. They don't agree on the amount of time. So I made it one year, which seems to me to be reasonable. Just one year of public life — quite a year! There had to be something about him that attracted attention. It must have been really quite dramatic to be remembered that way after simply one year of ministry.

**Who was responsible for Jesus' execution?**

You know, there is one thing I want to stress in this gospel. A disturbing element of the New Testament and of the Christian tradition has to do with the culpability of the Jews in crucifying Jesus. In the New Testament, there's a lot of vagueness here. Who actually executed Jesus? The Jews or the Romans? The New Testament account is incomplete, though as we know, Christians over history have held the Jews responsible. It's extremely unlikely the Jews would have executed Jesus — he broke no law requiring such action.

All of Rome's subject peoples were prohibited from using capital punishment. Rome reserved that punishment for itself alone. So now the question arises, if the Jews could not have done it, if the Romans had not permitted them to do it, then what Roman laws could Jesus have violated to lead to something as extreme as capital punishment?

From the canonical gospels we can't see any Roman laws that would have caused that kind of punishment. In writing this, I wanted to show two things. One, that his ministry was not in contrast or conflict with the Jews; it was itself a Jewish ministry. He was a Jew through and through. Also, there must have been something he had done that struck them as really dangerous to the Romans. That's why, in this book, it seemed to me to be necessary to show Pilate as someone who understood what Jesus was up to, and that he was dangerous. He was dangerous because he was a teacher of peace. He was not teaching insurrection against Rome, which only justifies its harsh role. He was teaching a kind of indifference to Rome. Let Rome die in your hearts, he taught. And Pilate was smart enough to know that this was the kind of thing that would eventually bring Rome down. So that was the reason he not only had him executed, but had him executed, as it were, illegally, innocently, so that his followers would be tempted to rise up and oppose Rome and therefore justify Rome for putting them down.

**One of the things you get across in this book is that you wanted to open up the tradition of gospel-writing again, because the story's not finished. And the woman, the Samaritan, in whose voice the gospel is set, recognizes that the story is incomplete.**

Right. It's an unfinished story. Not only is the Gospel an unfinished story, which is one of the assumptions of this book, but a lot of the stories in my book have the quality of open possibilities, rather than defining, narrowing, limiting things. ●

*Richard Marranca is a fiction writer and college professor living in Nevada. Dorothy Orme is a language teacher in college and industry.*





## Jane Fonda born-again

Jane Fonda has become a born-again Christian and is attending services and Bible studies at a black Baptist church in Atlanta. According to a story in *The Washington Times* [1/14/00], friends of Fonda have said that her conversion contributed to her separation from her husband, Ted Turner, but that the couple hope to work out a reconciliation. According to the story, Turner "has been an outspoken critic of Christianity, calling it a 'religion for losers.' ... Mr. Turner has told friends that he had accepted Christ as a young man at a Billy Graham crusade, but lost his faith after the death of his sister." The *Times* quoted Gerald Durley, pastor of Providence Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta, as saying that he was "extremely impressed with the genuineness and sincerity in [Fonda's] search for spirituality and wholeness." The story cites a number of people as instrumental in Fonda's conversion, including Ginny Millner, wife of Georgia Republican leader Guy Millner, and Nancy McGuirk, whose hus-

band is an executive in Turner Broadcasting Co. Fonda's chauffeur also played a role, according to Ted Baehr, chairman of the Christian Film and Television Commission in Los Angeles. The *Times* story reports: "The key figure in Miss Fonda's search ... may have been her chauffeur, who shared his faith with her, Mr. Baehr said. When her husband became upset when she began attending Atlanta's fashionable Peachtree Presbyterian Church, Miss Fonda 'asked her chauffeur where she should go.' The chauffeur invited her to attend his church, the predominantly black Providence Missionary Church.

"She accepted the invitation, and became a regular parishioner there, though she apparently has not joined the church. Miss Fonda, who founded the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, helped Providence Church establish its Fathers Resource Center, which educates young men about the emotional and social responsibilities of fatherhood.

"She has not publicly talked about her political views, or whether she has changed any of them, but she is said to have declined to participate in a meditation ceremony at an environmental conference not long ago with an admonition that 'it would be better to pray to Jesus Christ.'" The *Washington Times* writer states that "spiritual growth may be difficult for Miss Fonda because of her Hollywood background. The Academy Award-winning actress, who was called 'Hanoi Jane' after her 1971 trip to North Vietnam, where she was photographed posing on an anti-aircraft battery, 'has been in a cultural universe that is utterly hostile to Christianity,'" according to Robert Knight of the Family Research Council, a conservative advocacy organization.

## Car-sharing

"For the past nine years, Bremen, Germany, has been encouraging its 550,000 inhabitants

"SPIRITUAL GROWTH MAY  
BE DIFFICULT FOR MISS  
FONDA BECAUSE OF  
HER HOLLYWOOD  
BACKGROUND."



to abandon car ownership through a car-sharing scheme that allows them to rent a vehicle quickly and at low cost," *Timeline* reports (11-12/99). "The cars can be rented at 37 locations around the city for a short shopping trip or a weekend excursion. For about \$40, a Bremen resident buys a smart card that allows a driver to make reservations and to gain access to the vehicles, with a choice of 10 models from subcompacts to vans. The cars recognize the smart card through a transponder field on the windshield that opens the doors; upon return, a swipe of the card across the windshield locks the doors and transmits trip information for billing. Rates are cheaper than rental agencies' because the city picks up costs such as wear and tear, taxes, insurance, gasoline and cleaning."

## Staying put, moving on

Every place needs both people who are committed to it as their home and people who move in and out, Scott Russell Sanders, author of *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World*, said in an interview with *The Sun* (2/00). "I think it's essential that there be many people who are deeply committed to their places," Sanders said. "If every community, watershed, and bioregion had a core of people who'd made that commitment, then other people could move around. In fact, places also need people who are moving around, people who bring in new ideas from outside and break the ethnic or religious or economic pattern. The problem is that our entire culture encourages us to move rather than to stay. All the voices we hear are saying, 'Change, move, seek novelty.' If I lived in a culture where everybody stayed put, I would probably have written a book called *Moving On*, because for wholeness, you need both: people with a commitment to a place, and people who bring new ideas from elsewhere."

## Resistance to change

"All attempts at change mobilize resistance," Walter Wink writes in *Fellowship* (1-2/200). "The power of What-Is attempts to squelch That-Which-Attempts-To-Be. Perhaps What-Is succeeds, but in the very act of repression, draws attention to and gives credibility to the emergent new. Psychotherapists are trained to recognize massive resistance as a hopeful sign; it means that the resistance may be on the verge of capitulating altogether. Institutions function the same way.

"When the Church is about to accept a mutation in doctrinal explanation or disciplinary direction, the whole edifice of tradition refuses to acknowledge the possibility of change.' Precisely at that point, argues Francis X. Murphy, the turnabout has begun. Resistance to Jesus led to the cross; it did not succeed in stopping the New Reality that he brought."

## Democractic capitalism?

"There is something particularly evil about U.S. elites' use of the term 'democratic' in connection with an increasingly universalized and worldwide capitalism," Paul Street writes in *Z*. "Few if any aspects of contemporary capitalism are less democratic than precisely its tendency towards globalization. ... Capital seeks through globalization to evade, subvert, and preclude popular and governmental regulation and to roll back labor power.

"According to a recent study by the New Economy Information Service (NEIS) — a labor-connected think tank that gauges the impact of globalization — American corporate capital particularly likes to float into global territories controlled by dictatorships. By cross-checking U.S. government and World Bank statistics on world trade and investments with Freedom House's comparative ranking of world nation states as 'free,' 'partly free' and 'not free,' the NEIS recently discovered that 72 percent of U.S. manufac-

turing investment in 'developing' (Third World) countries goes to 'unfree' nations. At the same time, U.S. imports from 'unfree' states have risen from less than half to nearly two-thirds of U.S. imports from the 'developing' world since the end of the Cold War, even while the number of Third World nations meriting Freedom House's criteria for 'free' status has also grown. It should be remembered, of course, that much of what passes for import trade with the 'developing' world is in fact the shifting of product assets from Third World to U.S. branches of American-based multinational corporations." ●

## CLASSIFIEDS

### Women's Caucus

Christian feminists: Plan now to attend the Evangelical & Ecumenical Women's Caucus biennial conference, "And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy," July 27-30, 2000, North Park University, Chicago, IL. Speakers include Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B. and author/EEWC foremother Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. For information, visit <http://www.eewc.com> or call 847-825-5651.

### Episcopal Urban Interns

Work in social service, live in Christian community in Los Angeles. For adults 21-30. Apply now for the 2000-2001 year. Contact: EUIP, 260 N. Locust St., Inglewood, CA 90301; 310-674-7700; email: [euip@pacbell.net](mailto:euip@pacbell.net).

### Order of Jonathan Daniels

An Episcopal religious community-in-for-mation striving for justice and peace among all people. OJD, PO Box 29, Boston, MA 02134, <[OrdJonDan@aol.com](mailto:OrdJonDan@aol.com)>.

# Successful U.K. strategies for getting GE foods off supermarket shelves

by Beverly Thorpe

These are all things that can be undertaken by real people, in the places where they live and shop for dinner. Remember, safe food issues cut across all the usual political dividing lines. We're all human, we all eat, we all want to live long and healthy lives. You will most likely find that your neighbors are somewhat informed and at least moderately concerned about genetically engineered foods already. By organizing, you give them the opportunity to take a stand about the substances they put into their bodies.

## Target popular products you know contain GEs

Beanfeast is a vegetarian version of Sloppy Joe and is made by Unilever, the largest food distributor in Europe. Beanfeast was one of the first foods to be labelled in the U.K. with the information that it "contains genetically modified soya." Although Unilever's name was not on the packaging, it was our intention that Unilever feel the impact of the Beanfeast campaign. What did appear on the packet was a well-known brand name, Batchelor's. This company also makes other well-loved English food products.

The campaign was conducted by Greenpeace U.K., Friends of the Earth, and Genetic Concern. Using the following tactics, U.K. consumers caused a 50 percent decline in Beanfeast's sales in one year's time. This stunning impact led Unilever to adopt a policy to source non-genetically engineered products in Europe. Here's how we did it:

We handed out postcards addressed to Batchelor's, which consumers then mailed to the company. These cards made it easy for shoppers to address their concerns to the company responsible.

We distributed store "disloyalty" cards. These resembled the discount or shopper reward cards supermarkets give to customers. Ours said, "Batchelor's Beanfeast contains genetically altered ingredients — what's next?!" Here we displayed pictures of other Batchelor products, ones known NOT to have GE ingredients — yet. We distributed postcards and fact sheets with the Unilever 1-800 number and other company contact information and urged consumers to contact the company to make their opinions known. We asked consumers not to buy Beanfeast.

## Conduct supermarket tours

These tours were an extremely effective element of Greenpeace's efforts in the U.K. They are something you can do wherever you live, to raise the consciousness of markets and consumers alike. Your group will be most effective if you dress nicely and are courteous, but firm.

For your target market, choose one that's part of a big chain, opposes product labeling and has so far refused to phase out genetically engineered ingredients. Contact the supermarket manager roughly four days before you plan to conduct the tours. Explain what you intend to do, and why. Ask for their cooperation. If they refuse, proceed anyway.

Advertise the supermarket tour widely and well in advance. Extend personal invitations to local church and civic leaders, politicians, chefs and restaurant owners, educators, bankers. Also invite organic food producers and food coop organizers.

Plan your route through the store and prepare your script. On tour day set up a command post outside the market. Have a portable table stocked with printed hand-

outs and a tablet for collecting names and addresses of participants. Have friendly, courteous volunteers ready to talk about GE foods to anyone who happens by.

At tour time, assemble your participants. Introduce yourself. Thank them for coming and brief them on what to expect inside the store. Make sure everyone has a copy of your print information. Tour leaders should carry additional leaflets to give people who join the tour inside the store.

Inside the supermarket, you need two people to conduct each tour—a guide and a traffic manager. The guide leads the tour and speaks at each station. The traffic manager follows the group, keeping it together, and invites other shoppers to join the tour.

At each station of the tour route, be ready to talk specifically about the foods in that market section. Talk equally about the dangers of genetically engineered products and the virtues of organic food.

At each stop, encourage tour members to take action. You want them to ask lots and lots of questions of the supermarket manager at the checkout stand. How can I be sure these foods contain no genetically engineered ingredients? Do you stock organic products? How about organic butter? Organic pizza? Are all your products clearly labeled? Let them know it's perfectly okay, in fact, intended, that their questions should slow up the flow of commerce.

Point out the 1-800 numbers on product packaging. Urge tour members to call these numbers frequently, asking questions and expressing opinions about genetically engineered ingredients.

Don't fall into the trap of praising or blaming specific products. Send tough questions to the supermarket manager or to that 1-800 number at the food company.

### Where to go, what to say

By the fresh fruits and vegetables, talk about organic farming. Raise the following points: At the end of the World War II, chemical weapons companies like Monsanto transformed themselves into pesticide companies. The average daily diet now includes a cocktail of different pesticides. GE food continues this massive use of pesticides in two main ways:

Weed resistant plants — Monsanto's soya bean plants do not die when sprayed with Monsanto's own weed killer, but all the wildlife in the field does. Up to 50 percent of the U.S. soya crop is this GE soya.

Insect-resistant plants — a GE corn plant produces its own pesticide. In the U.S. this corn is regulated as a pesticide, not a food. All insects, whether harmful or beneficial, die when they feed on the crop. This also means no food for the birds.

By the organic food, present organic farming as the solution. Points to raise: Organic farming promotes health of the entire farming system — soil, crops, animals, people. It involves systems designed without regular use of antibiotics, growth promoters, genetic engineering or artificial pesticides. Organic farming is guaranteed by a certification label (show one). The organic market in Europe is growing at 25 percent per year — faster than computers and telecommunications.

Someone will no doubt complain about the higher cost of organic food. Raise these points: Organic farmers don't receive the subsidy intensive farmers get. We pay the true cost of industrial food through our taxes. To change this, buy organic, bug your store manager and the public relations folks at those 1-800 numbers for organic foods, and lobby your congressional representatives to support organic agriculture and reject

subsidies to genetically engineered crops.

By the sandwiches, ready meals and pizzas, address labeling. In the U.K., tour guides carry a magnifying glass to show how small the print is and how little it says. In the U.S., where labeling is not required, up to 60 percent of food products contain GE ingredients.

By the chocolate, talk about GE ingredients. Urge tour members to call the 1-800 number on the package and ask the company to use non-GE soy lecithin. Have them ask both the candy company and the store manager for organic chocolate.

By the baby food, make it clear we don't know the long-term health effects of GE foods. Raise these points: There has been no long-term testing on humans. Health concerns include both unexpected allergies and unexpected toxins. Many responsible scientists recommend that GE foods should be tested as rigorously as GE medicines, that is, with 20-year human trials. Right now, we are the guinea pigs.

Consumer pressure has led Gerber and some other manufacturers to declare they will not use GE ingredients in baby food.

By the meats, talk about problems of antibiotic resistance. Raise these points: Soya and corn are used in animal feed. Novartis GE corn is of particular concern because it contains a gene that confers resistance to antibiotics. Rising antibiotic resistance is already a problem for veterinary and human medicine because of antibiotics mixed with animal feed. Antibiotic resistance means bacterial diseases become unresponsive to treatment by known drugs. Organic meat is free of antibiotics and organic animals are well cared for.

By the Tampons, diapers and cotton balls, point out that GE ingredients affect more

than our food. Cotton — 50 percent of the U.S. cotton crop is Monsanto GE cotton. Corn is used for toothpaste, make-up, cigarette butts, tablets and glues. Non-food uses of GE crops affect the environment and are likely to increase if more food manufacturers stop using GE soya and corn.

At tour's end, tell people what to do next:

Use your wallet — boycott GE food and buy organic — and use your voice — phone up 1-800 numbers; ask the supermarket owners and store managers to stop stocking GE brands and to increase the organic food available; contact Clinton and Gore and your Congressional representatives. ●

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Copyright © Beverly Thorpe, 2000 All Rights Reserved. Beverly Thorpe, of Clean Production Action, was at the heart of the grassroots campaign that made clear to British food retailers their customers would not tolerate products containing genetically engineered or modified ingredients on their shelves or in their food supply, <bthorpe@web.net>; <www.most.org.pl/cpa>.

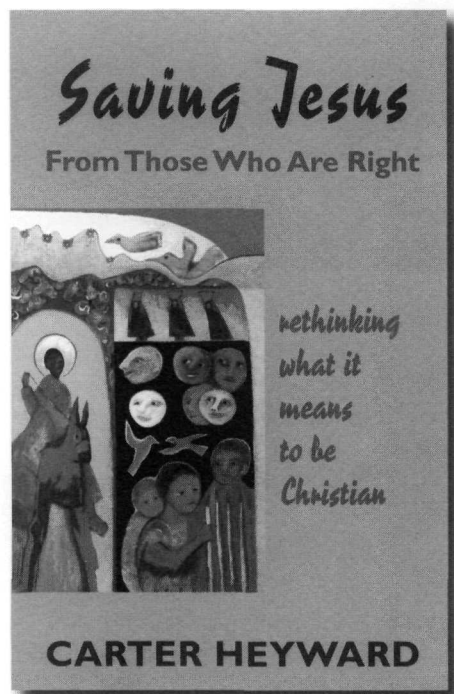
A third tactic Thorpe recommends is "guerrilla check-out actions." A campaign in the U.K. focused on Marks and Spencers, a prestigious, high-end food retailer that was initially a strong defender of the benefits of GE food. In July 1999, after about 10 check-out actions in different locations, Marks and Spencers told Greenpeace that "all the food products sold in our stores are now being made without GM ingredients or derivatives. This has been a major achievement by our food technology team, who have been travelling the world to source 'identity preserved' non GM ingredients." All food retailers in the U.K. now have the same policy.

Contact Greenpeace USA for a True Food Action Kit or to join the True Food network, <Charles.Margulis@dialb.greenpeace.org>.



# 'Messin' with my Jesus'

by Bill Wylie-Kellermann



## **Saving Jesus from Those Who are Right**

by Carter Heyward

Minneapolis:

Fortress Press, 1999

I'VE JUST FINISHED teaching a class on Urban Principalities. The students, with one exception, were entirely African American, some quite streetwise. An account of Jesus, howsoever biblical, as provocateur engaging economic, political, and structural powers, prompts one student to warn me, "Now you're messin' with my Jesus." Out comes an urgent anxiety about gatekeeping a certain black church orthodoxy. Out come passionately held versions of the atonement, which I do not share and into which I lean. He bolts the room to catch his breath and regather thoughts. Since I know my brother was indeed saved from the grip of genuinely demonic powers in a bottomed-out instant of accepting Christ, I tread carefully when he returns. To mess with his Jesus is to shake foundations on which he stands, to stretch boundaries that hold back the waters of chaos. In the end, however, he grants that Jesus may be more than he knows.

Carter Heyward has written a Christology calculated to mess with any number of peoples' "Jesuses." And yet she treads an unexpectedly gentle and careful path, indeed an open and dialogical one. I am grateful, when she names the readership for whom she writes, to find myself roundly included. Her specific intent to offer the book in the mutuality of relation and conversation sets my approach to this review. Moreover, I know her as a longtime friend of *The Witness*.

There is, admittedly, a temptation to negative Christology in this project. Jesus Christ as authoritarian lord or moralist or obedient Son of an angry Father has been made to function in ways deadly to women, or slaves, or gays, among others. Christology "matters" to them. And this book is an act of resistance and no-saying, as the polemics of its title might suggest. But it is more than that. It is an act of constructive, even biblical, theology which sets out to rethink our relation to Jesus.

The biblical sections are surprising in a way. They are unencumbered with self-conscious hermeneutical footwork. This is not the suspicious, deconstructive phase of study. These are more meditations, set in motion by selective texts, which rework the narrative around a theological language of "mutual relation," both personal and social (in which God, as a verb, is the sacred connective energy of "justice-love"). In this framework, even the Trinity (so subject to hierarchical modeling) may be noticed intimating the Sacred as relational. "Right thinking" (orthodoxy) is supplanted by "right relation" in importance. And discipleship (a term I can't recall her even using), as opposed to "following the Lord," becomes walking with Jesus as brother in the struggle.

Make no mistake: The cross remains an important reality here. It is not, however, for Heyward a place of reconciliation, or liberation, or transformation (which I do take it to be), but it is the inevitable consequence of a ministry threatening to the authorities (which I firstly take it to be as well). She sees the cross not as an extraordinary turning-point, but as the ordinary commonplace, that normal fate of those who confront power.

As have others in feminist and womanist circles, she exposes that doctrine of atonement which posits a Father so angry at the lawbreaking sin of humanity that he can only be satisfied by the submissive blood sacrifice of his Son. It is functionally pernicious. Thomas Merton once called it "the moral theology of the devil" (*New Seeds of Contemplation*, 1961). Heyward says, "Atonement, making right relation with God, occurs in the context of wrong relation — relation steeped in authoritarian, moralistic, violent dynamic." I would add further that in the process the principalities and powers, the "gods of this world" who crucified Jesus, are



let off the hook, are nowhere to be found, are read out of the doctrine's narrative formula. Unless they be "god." At one point Heyward writes that "because he was living in relation to a very different Spirit, Jesus was killed by the god of patriarchy." How doctrinally ironic, perverse and odd that the god of patriarchy, rather than the God whom Jesus loved, should be elevated and honored in this formula, a certain theological triumph for the powers.

The principalities are on the map in *Saving Jesus*. It may actually be a danger of a thoroughgoing relational theology to omit them. And indeed, in thinking about evil, she seems to suggest that blaming systems and structures (like slavery or capitalism or sexism or homophobia), let alone the Devil or Satan, lets us off the hook of examining our own lives for responsibility. Yet, in the end, they are named and identified in her book and theology. I may be a little fuzzy on how she sees them — elaborate and alienated social configurations of wrong relation? But they are, at any rate, prominent and on the scene. It is one thing, she suggests, to cite certain leaders of the Christian Right as evil, and another to understand the larger forces — social, economic, political — behind their fear-based politics. "Far more evil, seductive, and dangerous is the massive, elusive structure of the global political economy." In a related connection she may speak of the self-absorbed individualism of "capitalist spirituality," which is the matrix of our complicity. Liberation from the powers means, essentially, living in right (mutual) relation nevertheless. Resisting and refusing structural "power over." It means imagination as a form of freedom. (And these would presumably be the marks of "discipleship" as well).

Biblically, however, Heyward doesn't find

in Christian scripture any substantive "power analysis." We learn social analysis, as it were, from Marx and friends, not from Mark and friends. In her view it takes the tools of sociology to read between the textual lines Jesus' critique not only of individual sin, but of the structures of oppression. I disagree. The scriptures seem to me substantially an unfolding conversation about power, from Genesis 1, to nations and empires, Israel's own monarchy and the consolidation of wealth, or the table fellowship of the house churches. Patriarchy is a player involved. The New Testament epistles struggle explicitly to comprehend the principalities, and Jesus' acts of ministry are, virtually in every instance, portrayed as simultaneously personal and social. When an act of "pastoral care" raises an eyebrow, he invariably pushes it further in public provocation of the powers as he has discerned them. In the context of debt and purity code, for example, the healing encounters are far more like Rosa Parks' movement-sparking than exercises in bedside manner.

Heyward makes an interesting christological concession in connection with the powers. "Many African Americans point out the significance, in the context of white racism, of Black people's affirmation that JESUS is Lord! — Jesus, not the slave owner, is Lord!" She goes on to cite this as sanction for her continuing participation, even with serious misgivings, in public worship that employs authoritarian images — and by extension, I presume, her ongoing ordered relationship with Anglicanism (see also, "There is a River" TW, 3/2000). My location in the same context is admittedly different, but the same could be said of Jesus, not American nuclear empire — Jesus, not the WTO or global corporations — Jesus, not white supremacy — how about: Jesus, not

patriarchy? She opens the door on a question: Can a structurally problematic and ambiguous biblical "orthodoxy" function in a truly radical way? Or again, can the judgement of God, being the judgement of God alone (another problematic), function to underscore the ambiguity in which we live — radically marking the moral "recognition and acceptance of the limits of our capacities to discern, judge, and condemn"? Heyward's approach to exposing idolatry and "rightness," even close to home, is, of course, different.

I like very much how this book moves toward nonviolence (albeit with one persistent equivocation) and forgiveness. It is somehow unexpected and courageous, though completely in accord with a relational Christology. The section is a well-developed, creative, and spiritually thoughtful contribution to kindom movement. I confess I entered on the reading wondering if the Right, as most persistent "enemy" on the present scene, would come back in as anything but a counter example. They do not. By its own accounting, the book is not written for them (they would rail and rage and spit it out, their Jesus thoroughly messed with). And yet I wonder on.

Apart from cynical leaders, these are generally folks who shape their lives on a relationship with Jesus (albeit not "mutual" right relation, as friend and brother). They are in the grip of deadly anxieties and fears (legitimate and manufactured, inflated and manipulated). Where might dialogical grace and forgiveness lead?

Perhaps Jesus would mess with us. ●

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Bill Wylie-Kellermann is Witness book review editor. He directs graduate theological studies at the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE) in Chicago.

# Go to other villages and live the Gospel

by Marianne Arbogast

**G**INNY DOCTOR considers herself “first and foremost, a missionary.” Yet her understanding of her role might surprise people who are accustomed to a more narrow definition of the vocation.

Doctor, a Mohawk Indian from New York who has lived in Alaska since 1993, sees her fundamental mission as “restoring the spirituality of the people.”

“If people want to return to their traditional ways, which were the ways that God gave them years and years before the missionaries came, then that’s what they should do, and that’s what I tell people,” says Doctor, who now serves as Special Assistant to the Bishop of Alaska, Mark MacDonald. “I’m not here to convert people to be Episcopalian, but to give people direction in their spiritual lives.”

Doctor’s own spiritual journey took her through a time of questioning the Christian faith in which she was raised, and to which she is now personally committed. Growing up on a reservation, Doctor was brought up in the Anglican tradition of her grandmother.

“I can trace my Anglican roots way back to the 1700s on my mom’s side,” she says. “My grandmother was a stalwart, steadfast Episcopalian, and because we’re a matriarchal society, everybody did what Grandma said.”

But when the birth of a new Indian consciousness called Christianity into question, Doctor was affected by the critique.

“Some harsh kinds of words were coming, like, you cannot be a Christian and an Indian at the same time. We were being called ‘apples’ — red on the outside, white on the inside, because we were Christian. I was young at the time, and those words really struck me and really hurt me. And because I was very proud of my Indian heritage, I turned away from the church for a number of years because I wanted to find out what it meant to live the traditional way.”

The effort was unfulfilling, Doctor reports, largely because she did not understand the language. Ultimately, it was her grandfather, who was not a Christian, who convinced her to return to the church.

“My grandfather was a traditional kind of holy person,” she says. “He was a healer, and he knew all the songs and dances of the tradition. He never pushed any of his traditional beliefs on us, out of respect for my

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grandmother, because he knew that that was her role and that was her power, to make us what she wanted to make us.”

Doctor should return to the church, her grandfather told her, because that was what she knew best. He explained that as long as she believed in God, it didn’t really matter where she worshiped.

Doctor soon found herself on her parish vestry, and was asked to attend a national church conference.

“That became a life-changing experience,” she says. “I thought we were the only Indian Episcopalians in the whole wide world. But at this convocation I met all kinds of Indian Episcopalians and became connected with them almost immediately. I could see that we

carried some of the same things.”

Doctor soon found herself deeply involved in the life of the national church. She has served on the National Committee on Indian Work, the Committee on the Status of Women and the Council for Women’s Ministries.

In 1976, Doctor became executive director of the Urban Indian Center in Syracuse, a post she held for 17 years. It was her experience there that led her to missionary work.

“I began to see that we were operating a revolving door, that we were seeing the children of some of the children we had worked with,” she says. “We saw them coming to the door again and again, because they had never healed the things in that family’s life to help them move on. We filled lots of social and economic needs, but I came to the conclusion that the only way that we could really restore people was to restore the spirituality of the people that had been broken years and years ago. But it was difficult in that setting, because our funding would not allow us to work on those kinds of things.”

Since childhood, Doctor had dreamed of going to Alaska. Her impasse at work, combined with the election of Steve Charleston, with whom she had worked on past projects, as Bishop of Alaska provided the impetus for her to make the move.

Doctor moved to Tanana, a remote, “fly-in” community on the north bank of the Yukon River, with a population of about 350 people, about 90 percent Athabascan Indian. Most are at least nominally Episcopalian.

“It’s a river culture — our lives are centered around the river and what the river brings, and where we can go on the river. It’s a big fishing community and a place where people live off the land as much as they can. But like any Indian community — or any non-Indian community, as far as that goes — there are social problems. There is a constant

battle with alcohol and drugs.”

Though her work is based in the church, Doctor says that her main concern is not church attendance, but “whole and happy and healthy families. It doesn’t make one bit of difference to me whether or not they come to church every Sunday. If they’re off in the woods, doing something family-oriented, if they’re up at fish camp putting up fish and the whole family is there and there isn’t any alcohol, that’s more important than coming to church.”

Doctor was initially charged with helping to implement Charleston’s vision of raising up ordained leaders in the villages. Her work in Tanana has resulted in the ordination of a local elder in February of this year. Doctor herself is also preparing for ordination.

With the election of Mark MacDonald as bishop, the focus shifted to discipleship, Doctor says. She explains that MacDonald believes “it’s important to create circles of discipleship first, and then see what comes of that.”

When Doctor is at the diocesan center in Fairbanks — about 130 miles from Tanana — she joins the diocesan staff in prayer and scripture study.

“We engage the Gospel on a daily basis. We reflect on it and see what the Gospel is calling us to do on that particular day, that particular time, whatever it is that we’re involved in. In doing that we have noticed the Holy Spirit moving and have felt all kinds of changes in people.”

In September, the diocese is planning to enlarge the circle at Vigil 2000, a major gathering of disciples at Fort Yukon. Doctor is the staff liaison to coordinate the event.

“We want to call people together to come and engage the Gospel in love and prayer — people from the outside and people from Alaska,” she says. “We’ll come together and live our lives for three days in discipleship and see what God is calling us to do about many of the things that impact us as being Christian, and also as stewards of the planet.”

Invitations have been sent far and wide — to Alaskan Christians of all denominations, to people who have expressed interest in partnership with Alaska, to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Queen of England.

In addition to providing an opportunity



for communal discernment, the vigil is intended to address “the need for healing and reconciliation,” Doctor says.

“The native people lost something by the church’s presence in Alaska,” she says. “While the missionaries brought the Gospel to the native people, the people made a sacrifice. The sacrifice is now catching up to people, because of the loss of language and the loss of land. People began to lose their way of life, and that created all kinds of problems because the people were not whole, they were missing that spiritual element.”

Doctor defines discipleship as a commitment “to not only engage the Gospel but live the Gospel. Whatever God is calling me to do after reflecting and engaging the Gospel, that is my charge, and I have to carry that out as far as I can. It’s called me to go to other villages where I’m out of my comfort zone, where I have to live differently than I live here. Actually, it was hard to come here, too. I left my family, I left friends in New York. Last spring I went to Africa to help do some training of trainers [Women of Vision leadership training] and that was hard.”

But her life is “very happy,” Doctor says. “I think I’ve found a good balance in my life — a spiritual, mental and physical balance. Tanana’s not a place where you can just turn on the faucet and get water, where you can just turn up the thermostat and get heat. I chop wood and haul my water. But the physical work keeps me in balance. In doing what God has given you to do, even though it’s hard, there’s joy there.”

Individual calls vary, Doctor believes.

“I think we can only do as much as God gives us to do. But God knows this, so for God it’s okay. But God, I think, expects us to at least do something. I don’t see it as being arduous. I think that the more people are equipped with the Gospel, the easier it gets. If you’re sitting in the circle where there may be discussion about something difficult, and if Jesus is in the center — if you’ve reflected on the Gospel — then it’s amazing what that Gospel can do to bring you to a good place with everything that’s going on.” ●

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Michael Bergt—The Night Watch

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