

WITNESS MAGAZINE



VOLUME 83

NUMBER 11

NOVEMBER 2000

RESISTING POLITICS AS USUAL

CONTENTS

- 8 The Shadow Conventions:** *'A citizens' intervention in American politics'*
by Camille Colatosti
The alternative conventions which "shadowed" the Republican and Democratic Party Conventions this past summer offered American voters real political debate on critical issues such as poverty and campaign finance reform.
- 12 Challenging two-party politics:** *an interview with Ralph Nader*
by Bill and Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann
The Green Party's presidential candidate talks about his campaign and possible remedies to the "real issues of structural power abuse" that threaten U.S. democracy.
- 16 Walking the God-talk in politics today:** *resurrecting a public theology*
by Fredrica Harris Thompsett
Religious talk has been playing an increasingly prominent role in political campaigns, but people of faith, says this seminary professor, need to be increasing their engagement in public life.
- 20 Resisting money politics:** *an interview with Naomi Klein*
by Jane Slaughter
"Anti-corporate Deadhead" Naomi Klein, author of *No Logo* (1999), talks about the alternatives to electoral politics being pursued by the next generation of activists who, she says, have no stake in the system.
- 24 Striving for equity:** *overcoming the tyranny of the majority*
by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott
Majority rule, points out gender-equity activist Virginia Mollenkott, does not necessarily meet the criteria of an ideal democracy.
- 26 Fusing the spiritual and the political:** *the Image on a coin*
by Arthur Waskow
Using the Talmud in interpreting the New Testament passage about Jesus and the Pharisees who ask him about paying Roman taxes, says Rabbi Arthur Waskow, changes our understanding of the spiritual and political nature of each text.

on the cover

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IMPACT VISUALS

Demonstrators march
without a permit down Broad St.
in Philadelphia during the Republican
National Convention last July.

DEPARTMENTS

3 Letters

6 Media Review

28 Short Takes

5 Editorial Notes

7 Poetry

29 Classifieds

30 Witness Profile

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.

Manuscripts: We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Manuscripts will not be returned.

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LETTERS

Privileged access to the truth?

Reading the September issue last week, one particular sentence in Andrew McThenia's editorial brought me up short: "Academic freedom in a real sense means that religion can be a part of the university so long as it renounces its claim to have a privileged claim on the truth, which is, of course, what religion is all about — knowing the truth."

What exactly do we mean when we claim that Christianity has a "privileged claim on the truth"? This issue has arisen in a number of contexts for me recently — including a discussion on "truth" in a lay course I am revising — and I am increasingly concerned about the way in which the claim to have privileged access to truth can be used to manipulate and oppress others.

We all know only too well how such truth claims are used to manipulate and oppress in cults and in the religious right. Yet the same can happen in "mainstream" churches too. Just this week Rome has stated that other Christian communions should not be referred to as "sister churches," indeed not even as "churches." The reason? Roman Catholicism has a privileged access to truth. Last summer American Episcopalians and Lutherans came into full communion, with the proviso that the ELCA accept an Episcopalian definition of the historic episcopate (a condition not acceptable to all Lutherans, see for example *dialog*/Spring 2000). The reason? Episcopalianism has a privileged access to the truth.

It seems that claims that one's church or tradition has a privileged access to truth are manifestations of the Powers just as much as anything else. I can understand that the context of McThenia's article referred to religion (in general) in the context of the university, and would not wish to argue with his statement. What I am concerned about, however, are the implications of such a claim. For once such a privileged access (or claim) is acknowledged or allowed, Pan-

dora's box is open and the lid is off for good.

My thanks for a thoughtful and stimulating journal.

Peter C. King
East Sussex, England

The Witness at its best

Marianne Arbogast's thoughtful essay on "The pro-life, pro-choice debate" in the April issue represented to me *The Witness* at its very best. The "anti-stereotype" examples that she cited surely encourage all of us to strive to manifest a deep human respect toward those whose approaches to abortion are difficult for us to countenance.

Richard J. Cassidy
East Aurora, NY

Depleted uranium

Depleted uranium (DU) is not used as a coating on armor-piercing shells [as Jeff Nelson claims, see Letters, TW 9/00], but in what is called a long rod penetrator which pierces breached armor because of kinetic energy and on account of its density. E-mail <armymag@ausa.com> and they will be happy to refer you to valid sources.

Oh yes, even the Army is concerned about DU, as they are about many things which impact their troops' welfare — for example, they would dearly love to get Congress to buy effective chemical agent suits, low-tech life savers that Congress ignores in favor of fancy technology that makes money for big contributors.

War is stupid, occasionally unavoidable, and generally benefits no one. But for this guy who went nowhere special and only got medals for showing up, my brief time as a soldier is something I am justified in being proud of.

James Moher
Nashua, NH

Not renewing

At least for this year, I won't be renewing my *Witness* subscription. I've become disturbed by the insularity of the Christian social-just-

tice movement, by the perspective embodied by William Willimon in the September 2000 issue. He shows great hostility for the "flaccid secularists" of the university, the "godless" place that "just doesn't yet know" that it belongs to God. Although he qualifies this by saying that he's had "wonderful moments where I have been embarrassed to find out that people are asking tough, searching questions," I was still appalled. The consciousness of our Christian identity can so easily become a fetish, become a way of doing our good deeds in public for all to see and admire. Acting "from a Christian perspective" implicitly denies secular or ex-Christian people a moral basis for the things that they do. If "we're" out here picketing sweatshops "for Christ," than why are "they" doing it? Do their efforts somehow not count? Do they not love their neighbor as much as we do because they don't consciously love him "for Christ"? Is love not love? Is virtue not virtue? Last time I checked, God makes the sun shine and the rain fall on everyone.

Having said all that, I want to belatedly add that all that fire-breathing should be

placed in context of my wild and total admiration for your magazine and its undaunted courage in "living humanly in the midst of death." Thank you so much, and I'm sure that when I've calmed down and have somewhat more money, I'll subscribe again.

*Savannah Jahrling
(via the Internet)*

We need a new rite

The 2000 General Convention's decision not to approve drafting of a rite to support faithful relationships other than marriages [see Louie Crew's post-GC comments at www.thewitness.org and Julie Wortman's editorial, TW 10/00] was a very unwise decision. There should be a rite for gay and/or lesbian persons and also for other persons who are either widowed or divorced but who would like to live with one another as human individuals. I have believed for a long time that gays and lesbians should be able to live with one another. But now that I am 83 years of age (I retired as Bishop of Central New York in 1983) I know many persons who are in my age bracket who would like to be able to live openly and honestly with a

person of the opposite sex so they would not have to live alone. I am not one of these, but living in a retirement home, persons who know I am a retired member of the clergy often talk about such things to me.

Several days ago a friend said he and his female friend (the three of us had recently had dinner at his apartment) wished that there was some way they could live together. He said another clergy person had told him that "if you two live together, you would not be welcome at our altar."

To me, when Scripture says, "God's Son, Jesus Christ, so loved the world that He gave His life for all persons," that means to me EVERY HUMAN BEING.

*Ned Cole
Liverpool, NY*

Witness praise


I share my copies of *The Witness* with church friends. They appreciate your caring, thoughtful writing (as do I). We need the help and inspiration your subjects discuss and hope you continue.

*Mary Kiefer
Cleveland, OH* ●

◆ FREEDOM TO THE OPPRESSED ◆

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◆ BREAK THE CHAINS OF DEBT ◆



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◆ RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES ◆

Betty LaDuke

On collars and raising questions

by Julie A. Wortman

I WAS BEMUSED, recently, to read an editorial in a conservative church periodical noting the fact that Jane Dixon, the Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington (and, happily, a new member of *The Witness*' board of directors), had been seen on television at the Democratic National Convention asking "questions publicly of persons who presented positive stories about Mr. Gore's candidacy." Deplorably, our editorialist scolded, she was wearing her collar at the time!

Give me a break! Far from an injury, I consider anything that gets people thinking about the relationship of their moral values to the choices they make at the polling booth a benefit to us all — no matter the collar-wearing bishop or religion-professing candidate in question. *Anything* to move us beyond the superficial God-talk and right-wing idolatries of today's politics. Luckily, there are many encouraging signs in this election year that significant numbers of progressive citizens are not only examining the connections between their deepest convictions and public policy, but they are also finding ways to give political voice to their conclusions without settling for soul-destroying political compromise. In some cases this means taking to the streets, in others it means creating intelligent alternatives to the corporate captivity of the dominant parties' political campaigning.

In this development, I believe, we are beginning to see the fruits of a political shift long in the making. At its root has been a deep hunger for an integrated way of living in which daily choices are made in mindfulness of global implications — and spiritual practice becomes a form of political activism. Over the past few years, *The Witness* has brought attention to the iceberg-tips we could see — the community food security movement (see TW 1/2-99), the Free Time/Free People campaign (TW 1/2-00), the socially responsible investing movement (TW 3/96), the 15-year-old bioregionalism movement (TW 6/99) and the array of earth-honoring and justice-seeking intentional communities that seem to be on the increase (TW 10/00), to name just a few. This is the ant-and-spider resistance of which Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung spoke in a 1997 interview with then *Witness* editor Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann (TW 7/8-97): "Like the ant, every one of us, in our local places, can make a small hole [on behalf of justice] in our locality. But we also are spiders. With the Internet and all this information organization, we make connections like spiders. We do works in our communities and keep our light alive, keep our hope alive. It will accumulate."

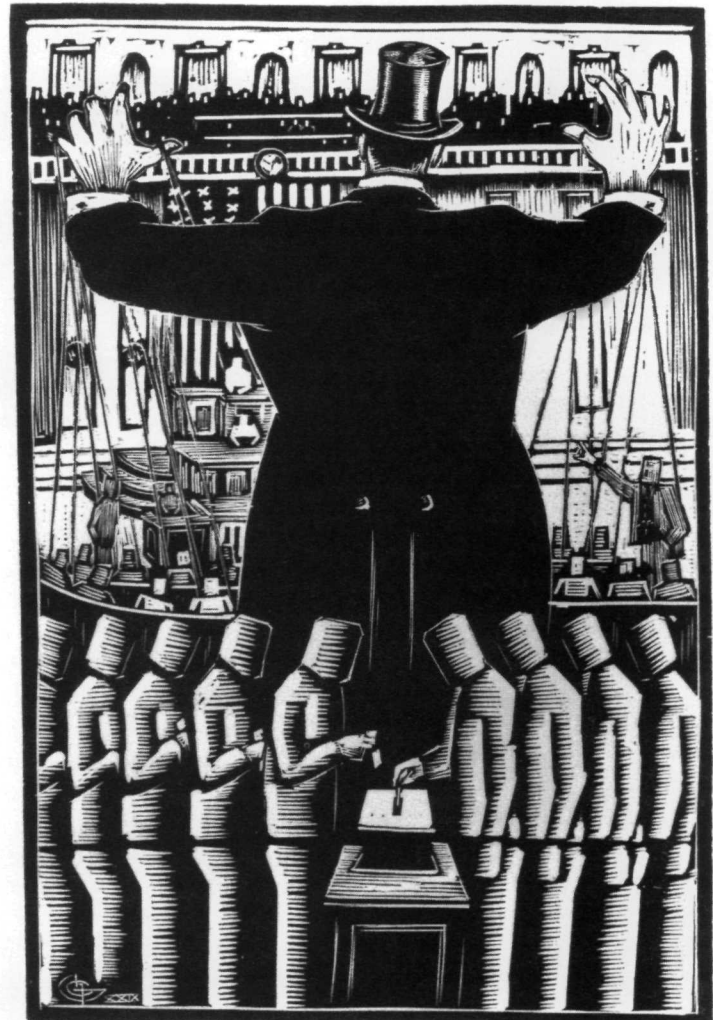
And the accumulating seems to be gaining momentum. No one, for example, not even those who put out the call for concerned people to make their witness at the World Trade Organization's Seattle meeting last November, expected the vast crowds that turned up for that massive protest on behalf of global quality of life. And the speed with which the "Shadow Conventions" were organized this summer still seems miracu-

lous. Both times, people of faith were prominent participants.

So, bizarrely enough, I am not feeling as gloomy this presidential election year as I might. Not because I think my candidate will win (this is the first time in a long time I've *had* a candidate), but because progressive religious people — some wearing collars, to be sure, and many others simply wearing their faith — are showing up, values intact, and raising important questions.

You go, Jane.

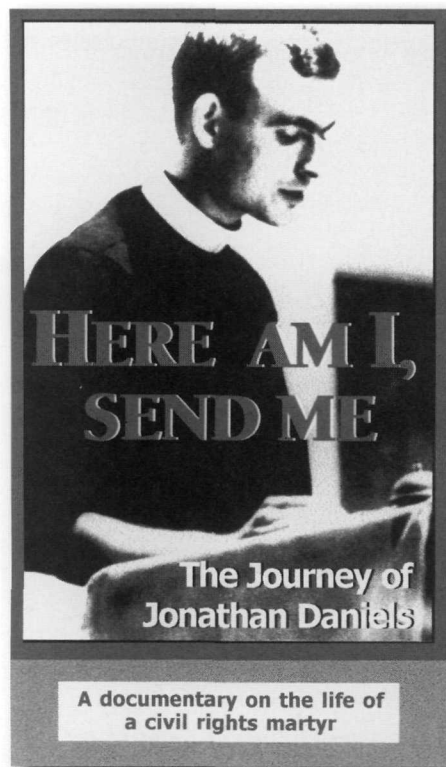
Julie A. Wortman is editor/publisher of *The Witness*.



Henry Glittenkamp, Voter Puppets 1979

The freedom to resist politics as usual

by Anne E. Cox



Here Am I, Send Me: The Journey of Jonathan Daniels

Lawrence Benaquist and
William Sullivan, producers
The Episcopal Media Center
(Atlanta, GA)

HAD POLITICS AS USUAL held sway in the early 1960s, the civil rights movement in this country would never have happened. Particularly for those born and bred to the social and political mores of life in the southern U.S., black and white alike, the rules of engagement were clear: Wealthy whites made the rules; blacks and poorer whites followed the rules or else.

So what changed things? Resistance to politics as usual, refusal to continue to toe the line, recognition that there are some absolutes that are not open to political negotiation and compromise. Most of all, respect for the dignity of every human being, regardless of the consequences.

The story of Jonathan Myrick Daniels, told in the 1999 videotape, *Here Am I, Send Me* from Atlanta's Episcopal Media Center, is the story of one who died resisting the white political structure that held sway in Alabama in 1965. A 25-year-old white seminarian at the Episcopal Theological Seminary (now the Episcopal Divinity School) in Cambridge, Mass., Daniels woke up to racial injustice in 1963 while a student at the seminary. He had spent his undergraduate years at the all-white (and all-male) Virginia Military Institute (VMI), where he gingerly navigated the hazing inflicted on first-year students and went on to edit the school paper and graduate as valedictorian of his class. The video portrays him as a young man who pragmatically adapted and worked through his circumstances, but also as someone who constantly questioned himself internally — wondering, for instance, if going through with the painful and humiliating “rat-line” at VMI, as he did, was endorsing an oppressive system.

The film suggests that responding to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call in the spring of 1965 for white clergy and others from the north to join their black brothers and sisters in Selma was for Daniels a matter, finally, of responding to Isaiah's question, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” with the only possible answer, “Here am I, send me.”

More compelling than answering Isaiah's call, however, is Daniels' discovery of the freedom that comes with conscience. After being tear-gassed during a voter registration march, he wrote that up to that point he

would have gladly taken a rifle to fight his enemies, but he now saw that the white men who opposed him were also captives of racism. As a Christian facing the cross, he said, he suddenly saw that he was totally free to give his life, if need be, for the liberation of all those caught up in this struggle in an eagerness for “the kingdom that is no longer hidden.” Thus he was free to work to integrate the Episcopal Church, free to register black voters, free to go to the most segregationist county in Alabama, free to love even members of the Ku Klux Klan.

And so it was that in this new sense of freedom that Daniels died, shot by Tom Coleman, a special deputy sheriff who never spent a day in jail for his crime despite the many witnesses who saw him shoot Daniels outside a grocery store in Hayneville, Ala.

This compelling film is more than a tale of a modern martyr. It is about the courage of one Christian, the quiet conversion that led him to act on behalf of liberation — and the difference his life has made in ours.

Through dogged spiritual effort, Daniels came to a moral point that eludes too many of us, a point where he recognized some unavoidable absolutes: Absolutely, he needed to go and place his white body next to the many black bodies marching in Alabama. No negotiating, no waiting until his education was finished, no acquiescing to his fears about his personal safety.

In this time of complacency and political expediency in so many churches, this is an important film because its message is that true freedom in Christ is the freedom of which the Magnificat speaks, the freedom through which “the mighty are cast down and the lowly are lifted up” — absolutely. ●

Anne E. Cox is an Episcopal priest and artist who runs a small landscaping business in Martinsville, Me.



Grant Wood 1939

The Unknown Citizen *by W.H. Auden*

TO JS/07/M/378

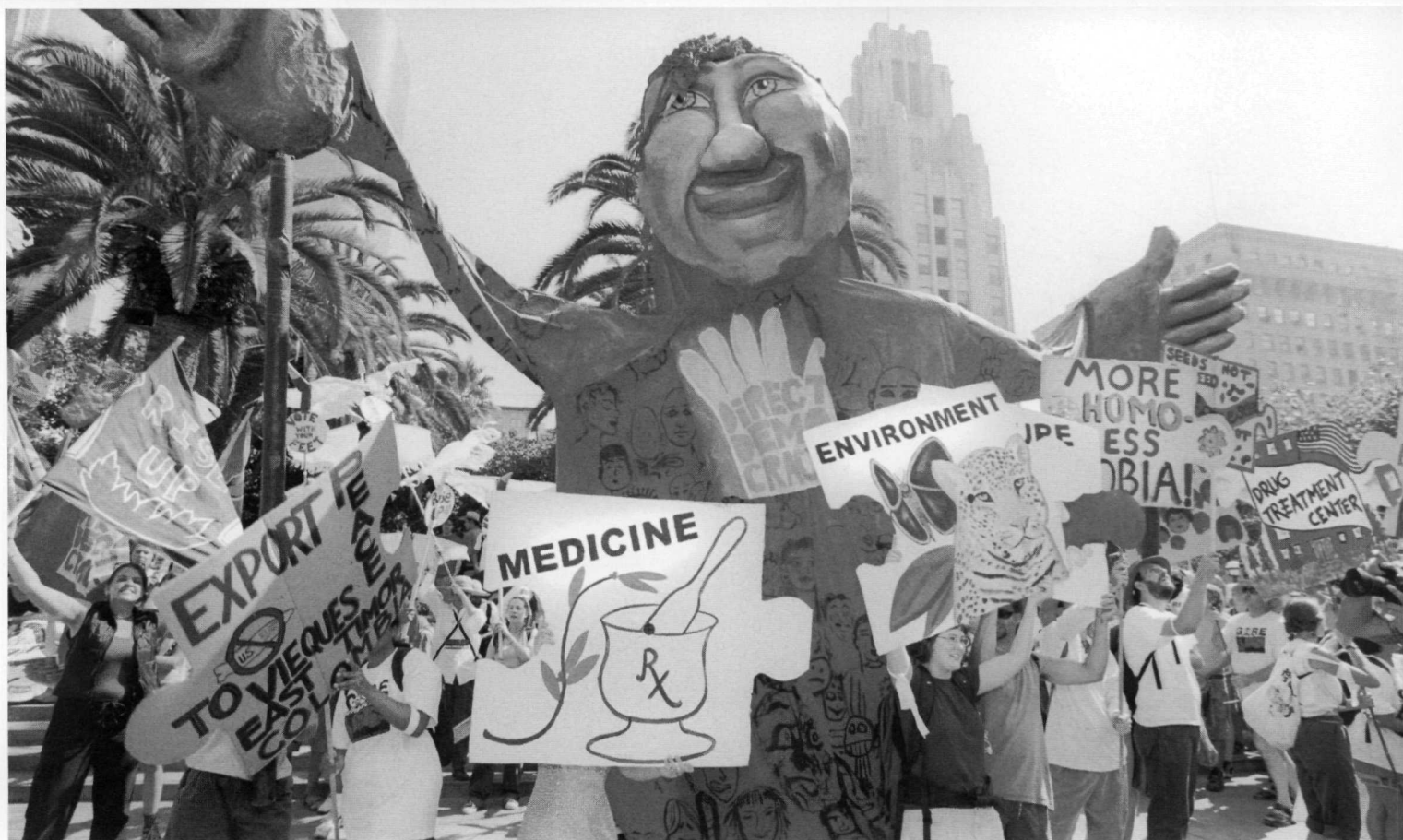
THIS MARBLE MONUMENT IS ERECTED BY THE STATE

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
 One against whom there was no official complaint,
 And all the reports on his conduct agree
 That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
 For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
 Except for the War till the day he retired
 He worked in a factory and never got fired,
 But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
 Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
 For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
 (Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
 And our Social Psychology workers found
 That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.
 The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day

And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
 Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
 And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.
 Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
 He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan
 And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
 A gramophone, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
 Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
 That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
 When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went.
 He was married and added five children to the population,
 Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation,
 And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.
 Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
 Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

March, 1939

THE SHADOW CO



Thousands of demonstrators marched through the streets of downtown Los Angeles during last summer's Democratic National Convention.

'A citizens' intervention in American politics'

by Camille Colatosti

RED, WHITE AND BLUE BALLOONS filled the large convention hall. Flags decorated the walls. Signs — many, again, with a red, white and blue color scheme — blared slogans: “End the Drug War,” “Legalize Marijuana,” “We Need a Living Wage,” “Save the Rainforest,” “Free Circus Animals,” “Moratorium on Capital Punishment,” and more. Speakers included Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Paul Wellstone (D-MN), The Reverend Jesse Jackson, Rabbi Michael Lerner, Governor Gary Johnson (R-NM), Congressperson Maxine Waters (D-CA), singer David Crosby and campaign reform activist Granny D. Actors Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins made an appearance at the podium; Al Franken made the audience laugh

and Arianna Huffington — syndicated columnist and former Newt Gingrich confidant — served as host.

The occasion? The Shadow Conventions. The first, held at Philadelphia's Annenberg Center from July 30 - Aug. 3, paralleled the Republican Convention; the second, held in Los Angeles' Patriotic Hall, took place from Aug. 13-17, at the same time as the Democratic Convention. Each drew about 2,500 participants — mostly political, community and religious activists.

Calling for a politics of ideas, not of electioneering

Free of charge and open to the public, the Shadow Conventions, according to organizers, were meant “to challenge the two major

CONVENTIONS

party conventions to genuinely engage in debate and in a politics of ideas, not a politics of electioneering.” Chuck Collins, co-founder and co-director of United for a Fair Economy, a national organization concerned about the growing income and wealth gap in America, was one of the Conventions’ conveners. As he explains, “The real party conventions were boring, scripted coronations devoid of substance.” The Shadow Conventions were the place for “the voices of the people left behind. Our slogan was ‘a citizens’ intervention in American politics.’ It is the citizens’ friendly and patriotic duty to intervene when things get out of control.”

Criticism of the Democratic and Republican parties has been deepening this election season as both their two presidential candidates — Al Gore (D) and George W. Bush (R) — hope to control the political middle. Each claims to be “inclusive” and “sensitive.” Each claims to represent that part of the population left behind in the current economic boom. Yet, each supports welfare reform and capital punishment. And each seems to defer to the corporations who sponsor their conventions and fund their campaigns.

As Ruth Conniff wrote in an aptly titled article in *The Progressive*, “Speak Democracy, Deliver Plutocracy” (8/15/00), “It was confusing enough to hear the Republicans at their convention make a left-wing critique of the last eight years, championing ‘those left behind’ by the economic boom and borrowing a line from the Children’s Defense Fund to promote their new policies of inclusion. But if the Republicans are pretending to be Democrats, so are the Democrats.”

She describes a “Motown Bash” at the Democratic Convention, honoring Representative John Dingell (D-MI): The Edison Electric Institute, the Nuclear Energy Institute, the American Gas Association, and the National Mining Association were the sponsors.

Scott Harshbarger, president of the campaign-finance-reform organization Common Cause, described the Democratic Convention as a “made-for-TV infomercial characterized largely by lavish corporate-sponsored receptions.” The Republican Convention was, of course, no different. Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, who visited both conventions, noted that, “with the exception of tobacco,” the same corporations were present at both. “The only difference,” he added, “is GM offered the Democrats and the Republicans Cadillacs. The Democrats accepted. The Republicans declined the offer, and instead opted for Buicks and Chevys.”

According to Margaret Prescod and Lisa Fithian, members of the organizing team for the L.A. and Philadelphia Shadow Conventions, “Both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party are bought, paid for and are accountable to a small number of the corporate elite.” The Shadow Conventions were, they say, a way to let the political parties know that the majority of people are not fooled.

The Shadows’ sponsors

Six national organizations sponsored the Shadow Conventions. These groups were the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, Common Cause, The Lindesmith Center/Drug Policy Foundation, United for a Fair Economy, Call to Renewal and Public Campaign. All nonprofit, grassroots advocacy groups, they brought with them expertise on at least one of the Shadow Conventions’ three themes: campaign finance reform; poverty and the growing wealth gap [“Half of humanity is living on less than two dollars a day,” says Harvard professor Cornel West. “The richest 225 individuals have more wealth than the bottom 43 percent of all humankind.”]; and the failed war on drugs and the corresponding rise in the prison population [Federal and state governments will spend close to \$40 billion this year fighting the drug war; 50 percent of those imprisoned in 1999 for drug offenses were imprisoned for possession; the U.S. has 5 percent of the world’s population and 25 percent of the world’s prisons.].

“These issues have something important in common,” explains Episcopalian Carter Echols, a national organizer for Call to Renewal, a new federation of faith-based organizations and denominations who are coming together to end poverty. “These issues all look at problems on which we do not have enough dialogue. They also concern stratification around money. Whether or not you have money influences how these issues affect you. If you have money and are white and get involved with drugs, you will be treated differently than if you are a person of color and are poor.”

Each sponsoring organization was responsible for a specific day or part of the Shadow Conventions. One day at each convention was devoted to each of the three themes. The National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, an organization devoted to increasing employment options for the poor, United for a Fair Economy and Call to Renewal organized the poverty days at each convention. Common Cause and Public Campaign, two organizations dedicated to campaign finance reform, organized the days on that theme. The Lindesmith Center/Drug Policy Foundation, a drug policy institute dedicated to broadening the debate on drug policies and related issues in order to reduce the harm caused by drug abuse and drug prohibition, organized the days devoted to ending the war on drugs.

The groups moved quickly to make the Shadow Conventions happen. As Chuck Collins of United for a Fair Economy explains, “We had our first full group meeting in June. Whatever we pulled off was pulled off in a short amount of time.” Given the magnitude and success of the conventions, this short time frame seems amazing, says Collins. The host of the Shadow Con-

continued in sidebar on page 11

They note that “more people did not vote in the last election than did. That in itself is a vote.” They also argue that Democrats and Republicans have not so much failed America as “succeeded in what they set out to do. They are accountable to who they intend to represent, but they’re not accountable to us. What they have not done is to represent or stand for what people need. Industry is being deregulated, but politics is more regulated than ever, but not by the voter. Governments have been privatized and only those with a lot of money can buy.”

Indeed, big money has dominated this election. A recent Common Cause study reveals that this election season candidates will raise more than \$500 million in “soft money” — unregulated campaign contributions. This is 80 percent more than was raised in the 1996 presidential election.

Organizers of the Shadow Conventions also argue that the Democratic and Republican Conventions are no longer places for real political debate and discussion. As Common Cause’s Harshbarger explains, “The reason for doing the Shadow Conventions is that neither of the major conventions are addressing very important issues that affect a lot of people.” Collins puts it even more starkly when he asks, “What’s happening to our democracy?”

Playing to the press, but providing real political debate

Organizers scheduled the Shadow Conventions with the press in mind. The bulk of the big name speakers addressed the Conventions between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., before protestors took to the streets and before the Democratic and Republican Conventions began. For instance, John McCain, Jesse Jackson and Al Franken all spoke before lunch. The strategy, as *New Republic* reporter Michelle Cottle described it, allowed “the TV cameras [to] swoop in, get their footage of Jesse Jackson or Paul Wellstone, and swoop back out.”

The Shadow Conventions’ afternoon sessions were less glitzy. These were the ones geared not to the press but to activists. There were intense debates on solutions to poverty, for instance. Call to Renewal’s Carter Echols explains: “We had people who didn’t agree,

people who felt welfare reform was the greatest and people who thought this was the worst thing. We did dialogue in some new ways. We were all people who were solution-driven and who have an investment in ending poverty.”

There was also real debate about campaign finance reform. As Chuck Collins explains, “There were business groups who support curtailing soft or unregulated money, but do not support public funding of elections, and then there was Public Campaign, a national organization devoted to what it calls the Clean Money Campaign” — a system of full public financing for election campaigns, with no private financing at all.

Echols found the Shadow Conventions positive both in terms of the impact they had on the major parties and on the benefit they provided participants. “We know that our existence created anxiety for the major parties. A lot of people in the Republican Party got pressure not to speak. There were people who were scheduled to speak and who then jumped off. From the Republican side, we were painted as left-wing liberals. From the Democratic side, we were painted as a Huffington/[Warren] Beatty event, just a bunch of fluff and not serious. In both cases, there were efforts to discount us, but we were too present and too successful to be discounted.”

Echols adds, “For faith-based people who participated, they had increased visibility about their work. They were also able to connect with others and to realize that they were not alone. Both Bush and Gore paid lip-service to partnering with faith-based organizations, and we said to them, ‘We don’t want just a pat on the head.’ We let them know that we are competent national leaders doing real work.”

Echols also believes that positive working relationships were forged among different organizations. “Across topics, we developed a strong sense of a shared ethic. It was very clear that poverty is at the heart of why campaign finance reform is needed. Until we deal with the fact that corporations can buy whatever they want and that the wealthy are running the political system, why should we believe that poor people are going to be on the political agenda?”

Issues, not individuals

The Shadow Conventions did not endorse a presidential candidate. Collins explains, “We’re concerned about issues, not individuals. We want all the candidates to endorse the issues that are important to Americans.”

Collins also urges people to “see your vote as just one small part of exercising your citizenship rights in a democracy. We all need to be concerned about the corporate takeover of our democratic process. The debate is being shaped and narrowed by money. This will not serve the majority of Americans. We need to take back our democracy.”

Nevertheless, some speakers at the Shadow Conventions did make their preferences clear. When Senator John McCain endorsed George W. Bush, he was soundly booed.

Jesse Jackson argued that “the power is not in the ticket; the power is in the picket,” but he endorsed the Democrats at the end of his speech. “I will choose to support not just Gore and Lieberman,” he said. “I support that Congress ... I say on November 7, let’s fight back and stay out of the bushes.”

Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN) also endorsed the Democratic ticket, though his endorsement was weaker than Jackson’s: “I’m going to support the vice-president and be out there, but you know what? Regardless of what position you take vis-à-vis the vice-president, Ralph Nader or others, when this is over, I really do believe that we need to build a kind of independent political force. I didn’t say third party, but you know what? We’ve gotta stop waiting for other people to put forth the new ideas ... I’m tired of waiting. It’s time for us to find our own voice, to do our own organizing.”

Others made it clear that they were not going to wait until November to build an independent political force. Cornel West of Harvard University said, “I am an independent. And I’m a free black man. I speak my mind and heart and soul. And that’s why I’m for brother Ralph Nader. Not because he’s a perfect candidate — no candidate is perfect. But for me, on personal grounds, I reached a point where working people and poor people are so disregarded and disrespected by a corporate-dominated Democratic party, that you have to begin a new cycle somewhere with somebody. And this broad-

ens the discourse and broadens the engagement. And maybe we can see a little leftward leaning in the Democratic party. We shall see. We shall see."

Doris Haddock, best known as Granny D, walked across the country in support of campaign finance reform. At the Shadow Convention in Los Angeles, she, too, urged the creation of independent political forces. While she did not directly endorse Nader, the implication was clear from her remarks:

"As we enter this period of great struggle, let us be willing to have short-term losses for long-term gains. This means that we must vote our hearts and let the chips fall where they may. What would be worse than having someone in the White House for four or eight long years who doesn't believe in campaign finance reform, who doesn't believe in social justice, who doesn't believe in environmental sanity, and who doesn't believe in individual rights?



Labor unions participated in the Democratic National Convention as the L.A. Shadow Convention drew attention to issues of economic justice.

"I tell you what would be worse. What would be worse would be four or eight years of someone who gives us the illusion of reform, the illusion of justice, the illusion of environmental sanity and the illusion of individual human rights. Don't think of your vote as a day trader's investment in the candidate of the moment; vote for the long term. Invest in the moral progress of your nation."

Granny D challenged convention attendants not to accept Al Gore as the lesser of two evils. "The future must be our concern," she said, "not any one election. Don't outsmart yourself by spending your one vote on an attempt to keep the worst candidate from winning; America will never get great leaders if we vote that way."

Camille Colatosti is Witness staff writer.

The Shadows' sponsors

continued from page 9

ventions, Arianna Huffington, first contacted Call to Renewal's Jim Wallis, one of the foremost experts on poverty in America. From there, says Collins, the other organizations came together.

Huffington is a story in herself. Most recently the author of *How to Overthrow the Government* (Regan Books 2000), Huffington has moved in Republican circles for more than 10 years. Originally from Greece, she was educated at England's Cambridge University, and wrote several books before moving to the U.S. in the 1980s. Her political career began when her now ex-husband, Texas oil millionaire Michael Huffington, who served one term in Congress, spent \$30 million of his own money to run for senator of California in

1994. He lost (he also subsequently divorced his wife and announced his homosexuality). Arianna became a regular commentator on many television talk shows, founded her own think tank and began to write her syndicated column. She also became an advisor to Newt Gingrich.

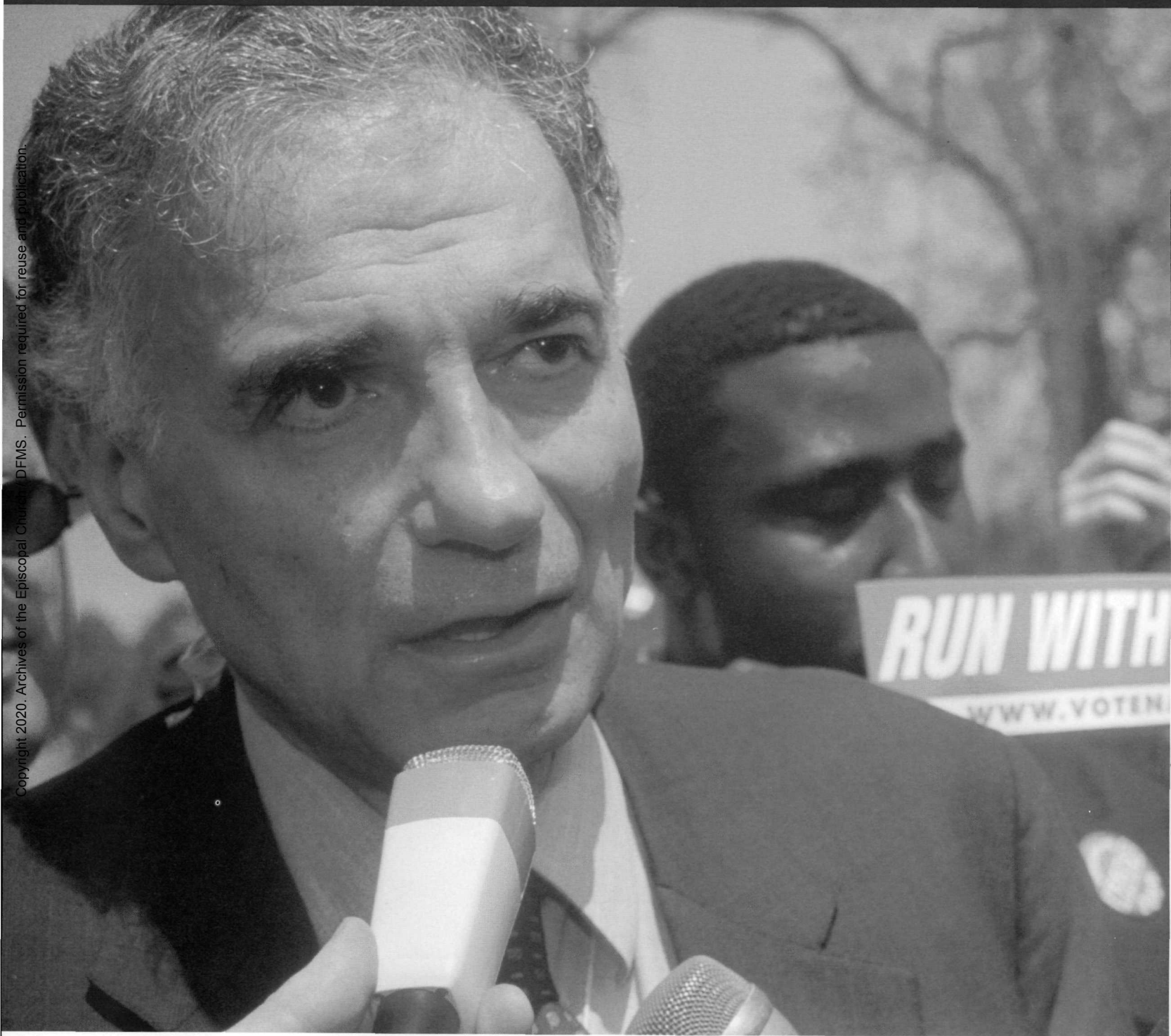
Huffington claims that "a series of epiphanies" led to her transformation from conservative Republican to progressive anti-poverty activist. As she explained in *USA Today*, "I really believed the Republican party would get involved in addressing issues such as child poverty, health care and education. But there wasn't the collective will to put the ideas into practice."

Call to Renewal's Jim Wallis applauds Huffington's change of heart and mind, "We've waited years for someone like her. Her enthusiasms are worth taking seriously."

United for a Fair Economy's Chuck Collins agrees: "She brought tremendous gifts; with her connections, we created a real head-turning event. The media visibility was one of the real benefits. Poverty and the wealth gap became national issues. The Shadow Conventions had tons of press with national coverage; we did radio talk shows; John McCain's speech at the Shadow Convention was covered live on CNN."

Collins notes that activist protests and conferences occur every campaign year, "but they fly below the radar screen of public attention." This year, with Huffington's connections, press coverage was different. "The Shadow Conventions were well-attended, broadcast live on CNN and C-span, and broadcast over the Internet. They served as a political home-base for the majority of Americans who are disaffected with the major parties."

CHALLENGING TW



Ralph Nader, speaking at a Labor Day rally in Detroit this past September.

O - PARTY POLITICS

An interview with the Green Party's Ralph Nader

by Bill and Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

RALPH NADER, along with his Green Party running mate, Winona LaDuke, gained the presidential ballot in 43 states. The epitome of a Public Citizen for three decades, Nader has forced debate on issues ranging from GM's Corvair to the Dalcón Shield. He may be best known, however, for "Nader's Raiders," the host of young activists who have challenged corporate power and built a public interest movement in this country.

Once, querying him on PBS about what he'd do if actually elected, Jim Lehrer expressed concern about Nader's capacity to comprehend the complex array of federal agencies for which he'd be responsible as president. Nader was nonplussed and bemused: "Well, I don't know anybody," he finally replied, "who has sued more of them."

In 1996 Nader merely "stood" for President, neither raising money nor campaigning, but this year he's been aggressively running. Polls suggested he could pull 7 percent of the vote. If he draws 5 percent, the Greens will be eligible for federal campaign support in the future and be established as a credible voice and choice.

The *New York Times* editorialized against Nader on the premise that he is cluttering the political playing field and distracting voters from the clear-cut choice which they regard Bush and Gore as representing. His candidacy has also been controversial, even divisive, in left circles where many argue that his strong showing in swing states like California and Michigan could effectively elect

George W. Bush. That position may best be represented by the Sierra Club, which regards a vote for Nader as environmentally irresponsible. Nader, however, is losing no sleep over the prospect of playing "spoiler." His observation is that the only difference between Republicans and Democrats is the relative speed "with which their knees hit the floor when the big corporations knock on the door."

He regularly makes three points on the "spoiler question." First, that the "evil of two lessers" approach simply legitimizes the downward slide into corporate captivity. Second, there is nothing preventing Al Gore from "stealing Nader's issues." Go ahead. Let Gore open up on corporate crime, corporate welfare, the WTO, environmental and eco-

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nomic justice. And lastly, he points out, rather than diselecting Gore, Nader voters may actually tip the narrow balance in electing a Democratic Congress.

We spoke with Nader by phone just after his return from the Republican Convention, where he'd been smuggled onto the floor during Dick Cheney's acceptance speech. We asked him about it.

Ralph Nader: There was a huge mob of press all around. It sort of shook up the Florida and Michigan delegations before they got wise and took us back to the runway area on the outside. Someone asked, "Why are you here?" I said, "Because it's so grotesque, you have to see it to believe it!" Basically it's a dance between the politicians shaking down the business lobbyists for huge gobs of deductible cash because the IRS has ruled it all a "business expense." They're dealing a terrible blow to democracy and politically accountable parties.

The Witness: This raises for us something of a theological question. Corporations were originally forbidden to participate in the political process. But we're now 100 years into a Supreme Court ruling that grants these commercial powers the legal status of persons before the law with "rights." Even their money is treated as free speech. What's your take on that? Is it reversible?

R.N.: Well, we first developed that idea in 1975 in our book, *Taming the Giant*



The Green Party Convention at Gas Works Park in Seattle last June.

Corporations. Unfortunately there's that Supreme Court decision in 1887 declaring corporations as persons under the 14th amendment. So, you can't do it by statute, but you might find some states that will begin conditioning or revoking the charters of badly behaving companies. That can be done at the state level or by referendum redefining a corporation as a non-person. It is also possible to make the charter a much more conditional mechanism for corporate misbehavior. A state could throw the company into a trusteeship just like creditors can, or banks. Remove the board and the officers and put in trustees to straighten out the corporation. That does it without laying off workers or closing down the company. Federal law does precisely that for crooked labor unions. Why not for crooked corporations?

T.W.: Given the scale which corporations have assumed these days, how close are we to seeing them succeed even nation states as the preeminent structures of power?

R.N.: Well, very close indeed, because they now command, overwhelmingly, capital, labor, technology and government influence. There's no countervailing economic model of any power operative in the world. Well, there are models that are superior, but they're not the power. What kept capitalism

less destructive of its workers and other constituencies was the way they viewed the specter of communism and socialism. There are a lot of models — such as the Bangladesh microcredit or other cooperative models — but basically we see these giant corporations merging with one another like Colossus astride the globe. As the title of David Korten's book says, corporations rule the world. They need not do it directly, but primarily through government proxies. Giant corporate power merges with government, turning government against its own people and making it largely an "accounts receivable" for corporate demands: subsidies, handouts, inflated contracts and bailouts. The corporate welfare matrix.

T.W.: Running for president and raising these issues, you must believe we're not so far down the line on globalization and this fusion with the nation state that government couldn't still be in a position to put the brakes on, or reverse it by creating some new measure of political accountability?

R.N.: Well, yes. I think first of all that the global corporations are losing the important symbols. They no longer can make a claim to patriotism, because pitting one government against another, they really have no allegiance to the U.S., other than to control it. They talk openly about being multina-

tional, anational corporations. And second, they're losing the sovereignty issue, because they're undermining sovereignty in sending petitions to Geneva and the WTO and the like. And third, if things turn bad, if there is ecological disaster, if there is a recession, then that's when the groundwork that's now being laid with the Green Party, with the increasing debate around the country — not yet in the mass media — about corporations as persons and corporate charters will flower. And that is what's important: to be ready with a process of dialogue, a battery of facts, a knowledge of history, and models of corporate accountability, so that when the tide does turn, the progressive forces in the country are ready. You know, that is what the Right did. When Reagan came in, they had all kinds of plans — from Heritage Foundation and Cato and so forth — ready to move. And that's what was missing in the 1930s. It was pretty ad hoc from the citizen point of view. Franklin Roosevelt filled in some blanks, but the 1930s represented a great missed opportunity to deal with corporate charters and corporations as persons.

T.W.: What would you urge people to be doing now to lay that groundwork?

R.N.: Well I think they should be part of the Green Party movement, which is discussing real issues of structural power abuse and what the remedies might be. As well as setting out substantive policies like universal health insurance or shifting power through checkoffs for consumer groups, vis-a-vis banks, insurance companies, HMOs, cable companies and the like. We've got to address poverty, which is a huge agenda, and economically develop inner-city neighborhoods. We must deal with all the environmental areas from environmental racism to ozone depletion and global warming. And we must repeal Taft-Hartley, which is a chokehold on labor. Let votes count by removing private money from campaigns.

T.W.: How do you view the street activity going on in Philadelphia or on a massive scale in Seattle? What's the connection

between street politics and alternative electoral politics?

R.N.: Well, it's very important. First, because the media will pay attention to people who engage in non-violent civil disobedience and protest. At least they will give marginal notice, where they wouldn't pay attention if these groups had sedate press conferences with nice reports. Second, it's an important recruiting opportunity for young people, in particular, who really begin to develop an understanding of how power works in the society and the world. And they tend to commit for a long time. When you talk to people now in their 50s and 60s who have been activists all their lives and say, "How did this happen to you?" "Well, I went to a major anti-war rally" or "I went to a major Earth Day demonstration, or a Civil Rights March." So for recruiting to swell the ranks, it's very important. Thirdly, it feeds right into the Internet activity of citizen groups and all the websites which both prepare the groundwork for these demonstrations by putting out the alerts and inviting people to come to a certain place and time. People are hugely energized by the resultant demonstrations.

Now, that's the first step. Obviously, that doesn't take you to more than first base and you've got to get to home plate. But you don't get to home plate without getting to first.

T.W.: So you would see home plate as the electoral end of things?

R.N.: Yes, once the civil culture mobilizes then there's a political corollary. In terms of the Green Party, they go together and they work together. They each become more authentic. There was a little anti-slavery party that led the way in the 19th century, the pro-women's-right-to-vote party, a workers' party, farmers obviously, the Progressive party. So third parties have led the way, especially when they have emerged out of a citizen movement which needed a political parallel.

T.W.: Could we ask about a couple of issues that you didn't mention? Nuclear weapons, for one. You've made statements on the huge

financial benefits to the weapons makers and environmental fallout, but how do you see these weapons as an element of foreign policy? Are they moral? Necessary? Legal?

R.N.: Well, we've got to drive to abolish them! Even former Strategic Air Command General Butler and Paul Nitze, the hawk of hawks, are talking this way. I mean, a real major push to arms reduction and not just holding the line. Who are the big enemies anymore? We've got a military budget geared for the Soviet Union and a Progressive China. That's not the situation. So that's another area we want to talk about — missile defense and F22 and Osprey and all those boondoggle-type weapon systems for Lockheed's or General Dynamics' profit.

T.W.: You mentioned environmental racism — how seriously do you see the racial divide in this country and what is the role of the federal government in addressing it at this point?

R.N.: Well, the role is obviously to keep enforcing the civil rights laws and affirmative action and preventing police brutality and housing discrimination. One of my favorite concerns is marketplace exploitation and employment discrimination. I would think we have to put a huge class component in dealing with race issues. If you go after class and have any success, that will modify very significantly racial animosities — at least between people and neighborhoods. You don't see the racialism in areas with better living standards that you do in poor areas.

One way, for example, to deal with the merchant exploitation of African Americans and Hispanics around payday loans or rent-to-own rackets at 200 percent interest rates, is to grow community development credit unions where people's money is recycled in consumer-owned institutions offering decent interest rates. That's the greatest antidote to the loan-shark business. So, you see I'm focussing on areas like these, or redlining, that civil rights advocates traditionally ignore.

T.W.: Jeanie recalls from working with you

20 years ago on Detroit's Poletown struggle that you lived a pretty simple life. Unmarried, a spartan apartment, no car or credit card.

R.N.: Yeah, that's still true.

T.W.: How do you see the connection between that and your political work? And, moreover, how do you take care of yourself? A political campaign is pretty brutal. Perhaps they are systematically brutal so that candidates tend to be — spiritually one might even say — deformed by them. How do you resist that and how do you take care of yourself in the midst of this?

R.N.: Well, I've been in training for many years. I've travelled a lot. Going into 50 states between March 1 and June 20 is a little more intense than usual, but actually I did nearly that in 1986 when we tried to keep the insurance companies from destroying tort law.

Second, I'm a very calm person. You have to have some minimum sleep and you have to have a good diet. And you try not to burn yourself out. Don't drink; don't smoke. And you keep a historical perspective, you keep a little humor, and keep your eye on the ball. And you don't develop a political ego — on which I may have gone to the reverse extreme — it's hard for me to say I, I, I, every day. I do use the "we" more often because it is a "we" after all — there's a whole team together on this.

And, finally, if you have to campaign knowing that should you say a certain thing you're not going to get money from some special vested or corporate interest, that creates a lot of tension. We don't have that tension. We say what we mean. We mean what we say. If people want to give, they can give. We take no PAC money. We take usually no soft money. That simplifies matters. And it develops a certain purposeful tranquility to the whole campaign. ●

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WALKING THE GOD-TA



Retired Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, lights a peace candle during ceremonies launching a Peace Center honoring his struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

Resurrecting a public theology

by Fredrica Harris Thompsett

COLUMNIST GEORGE F. WILLS recently reported that we have to go back to the presidential campaign of William Jennings Bryan to find more invocations of God and Christ than there are in politics today. The irony is that recent studies show there does not seem to be a corresponding increase in active public engagement by persons of faith. I call this the “more talk, less action” incongruity. Or, to turn toward a similar and apt Texas aphorism, perhaps our situation can be described as “all hat and no cattle!” As a Christian, a feminist and an Episcopalian inheritor of the Anglican emphasis on exercising moral responsibility in the world, I believe we are currently facing a perplexing paradox and perhaps an ethical crisis.

According to Robert D. Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), levels of participation are diminishing in virtually every area of civic life, whether secular or religious. Such shifts, he says, began in the 1960s and accelerated over the past two decades. Putnam also describes an ominous decline in “social capital,” which is the valued accumulation of time, talent and treasure that fosters outward-looking social connections, cooperation, and trust among and beyond like-minded communities.

Participation may be too lofty a standard for measuring civic interest. Even the simple act

WALK IN POLITICS TODAY

of following media coverage of public events has suffered. A recent study of television network newscasts reveals lagging interest in domestic coverage and low market ratings for overseas news. It is estimated that more people watched television's popular "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" than tuned into coverage of the two national political conventions. Print news media, particularly newspapers, face decreasing markets as well. Some observers of public life estimate that we are, with few exceptions, on our way to becoming a country of disengaged, civil illiterates.

Disestablishment in a 'passionately Christian nation'

What does this have to do with the multifaceted relationship of religion to politics and to public life in general? A few words about history might help. Despite newspaper editorials to the contrary, the selection of Joseph Lieberman as the vice presidential Democratic candidate has not suddenly turned political attention toward religion. In large measure, such attention has been there all along. Whatever the framers of the Constitution's First Amendment exactly had in mind — and this is still under dispute today — they were not trying to draw distinctions between religious and irreligious persons. The spirit of this provision was to prevent the state from using religion to privilege or divide citizens. James Madison thought that the best sort of relationship between religion and the government was one of "mutual interdependence," with no one religion being "established" over others.

The question is whether the constitutional framers intended disestablishing religion as a prelude to secularizing politics. If so, they failed. As Karen Armstrong reports in her recent study of fundamentalism, *The Battle for God* (2000), "By the middle of the 19th century the new secularist United States had become a passionately Christian nation." Moreover, the reform movements spun off by the revivals collectively known as the Second Great Awakening were not only focused on individual conversion, they were directly aimed at changing society. Abolition, temperance, penal and educational reform and other endeavors were progressive, modernizing efforts that helped 19th-century evangelicals learn planning and organizing strategies to intervene in public life.

Another episode in which religious leaders became actively involved in societal reform occurred in the last decades of the 19th and the early decades of the 20th centuries. The social gospel movement, which attracted clergy and laity in the Episcopal and other churches, challenged notions that clergy should not engage in politics. This movement resulted in organized reform efforts to address the injustices of industrial society and to work for improved living and working conditions for laborers.

Mobilizing evangelicals and fundamentalists

Both Armstrong and Martin Marty ("Will Success Spoil Evangelicalism?" *Christian Century* July 19-26, 2000) also point toward a more recent escalation in organized religious involvement in American politics and public life. This pivotal change began in the 1960s and continued in the 1970s and 1980s with the resurgence of fundamentalist and evangelical Christians as a mobilized political force. In this period, Marty notes, evangelicalism left behind its early 20th-century quiescence and emerged as an organized participant in both the local civic and national political scene. Marty adds that this was one of several adaptations in the changing public face of evangelical commitments, including shifts from otherworldliness to worldliness, from disapproving popular culture to adopting it, and from focusing on the "dispossessed" to proclaiming "family values."

Armstrong also asserts that fundamentalism as a political force is clearly here to stay. In a new book William Fogel, a cliometric economist, describes the rise of the Christian Right as *The Fourth Great Awakening* (2000). He lauds the preeminence given by evangelicals to personal responsibility and individual spirituality in times that he describes as materially prosperous. Not only are the poor and working poor excluded from Fogel's viewpoint, systemic social analysis and public intervention in support of the dispossessed are replaced by private, autonomous enterprise. If Fogel is accurate, it is difficult to imagine what role this new-style evangelicalism might have in pro-actively and systemically addressing the "common good" and the work of the larger body politic.

Let me add two more historical observations about the entanglements of religion and political life. Political piety and religion have long been part of the presidential campaigns of both major parties. William Lee Miller in *Piety Along the Potomac* (1964) identifies religion in modern presidential campaigns with Eisenhower's Cold-War piousness, and others have traced presidential piety through Clinton's visibility as a biblically steeped Baptist. Second, it is important to name the significance of African-American Christianity as a definitive force in the national conversation and social transformation of political and civic life. The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s stands as vivid testimony to public theology at work. Informed by the prophetic vision and mobilization of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other leaders, "public" and civic spaces like polling booths, schools and libraries were at last opened to the local community.

If anything is new these days, it is that Senator Joe Lieberman, the first Jew nominated on a national ticket, is a member of a minority faith. Political piety is no longer, although in fact it never was, exclusively a Christian, a conservative, or a Republican domain.

Public theology: an oxymoron?

Yet, for many Americans today— especially for those in predominantly white denominations — making connections between theological and civic obligations can be challenging, given the sharp divisions many in this society make between public and private realms of life, divisions not generally experienced by those in the African-American community. Is it the case, as poll takers note, that religious commitments are essentially seen as private, personal, spiritual beliefs that are best contained within religious services? Or are religiously affiliated Americans — whether Jews, Christians, Muslims or others — truly sent forth with strength, courage and with a responsibility not only to “talk the talk” but also to “walk the walk” as citizens of the church and of the world?

When I recently told a neighboring seminary colleague that I was exploring the dynamics of “public theology,” he quickly declared this phrase an oxymoron. All religion, he insisted, was personal. Denominations, he assured me, have no business speaking out on political issues, although (as I pointed out) denominations and ecumenical and interreligious groups often do take public stands on wider societal concerns. What was most evident in our extremely labored conversation was that we were working out of vastly different theologies.

Feminist ethics have always held that “the personal is political.” Theology is substantially a matter of public discourse and civic consequence. Apathy and disengagement from public life — whether in local and national elections or in the wider sphere of community and civic life — are theological issues. Accordingly, part of the solution is theological. Who we believe God is, what we affirm as the character of humanity, and how we envision the mission of our religious institutions are three questions that come first to mind.

Resisting a ‘too small God’ ...

Today’s tendency to invest deeply in personal spirituality and problem-solving has too often left the primary protagonist, God, out of the religious picture. How can we bear witness to the intended reign of God, let alone remain faithful to the biblical witness of people at work in the world, if our central image of God is at best personal? The late Joseph Sittler, in his 1986 book, *Gravity and Grace*, bluntly describes this theological error: “We are tempted to regard God primarily as a God for solitude and privacy and only secondarily a God for society.”

Sittler echoes for me the indictment repeatedly made by the great African-American preacher, Samuel D. Proctor, that we have settled for a “too small God.” In a privatized theological imagination this “too small God” apparently has little room or sufficient power to address the purposes of humanity and of all created life.

William Temple, an influential 20th-century Anglican theologian and Archbishop of Canterbury, once acerbically remarked that it was a great mistake to think God is chiefly interested in religion. Think about it. Temple went on to argue, in his popular book *Christianity and the Social Order* (first published in 1942), that the doctrine of the Incarnation results in a positive attitude toward the world that was redeemed by that event. This doctrine also grounds the duty of Christians to interfere in temporal as well as spiritual matters. For

Anglicans and other Christians, God’s intervention in the Incarnation is a reminder of the social and ethical consequences of exercising moral responsibility in the world which God so loved (see John 3: 16). The theological failure of a “too small God” minimizes anticipation of God’s continuing revelation, let alone judgment, in the affairs of this world.

... and a limited sense of mission

Passivity about participating in civic and public life, at least among Christians today, is reinforced by limited, parochial teaching about the mission of the church. Churches are accountable for informing their members’ expectations. If the cause of peace and justice is not at the heart of a church’s mission and witness, then we can expect empty piety and sentimental, Hallmark-card theologies with starkly limited Gospel promises. The promise of the Gospel is fuller than personal salvation, as important as this is. The biblical emphasis on forgiveness liberates Christians — individually and collectively — to promote justice, peace and love.

Part of the failure of many churches to preach the full promise of the Gospel is apparent in preaching. Recently, a longtime urban pastor was alarmed to hear a well-established New York City rector boast that in 20 years of preaching he had never addressed a social or political issue. This remark prompted a course that Frederick B. Williams and I are teaching at the Episcopal Divinity School entitled, “Prophecy, Advocacy and Responsible Preaching.” Here we will pay specific attention to the public and pastoral role of biblical preaching on difficult topics. Our goal is similar to that advanced by Lutheran theologian James M. Childs, Jr. in *Preaching Justice: The Ethical Vocation of Word and Sacrament Ministry* (2000): “Preaching justice is at the core of the church’s gospel proclamation.” Like William Temple, Childs argues that seeking the reign of God includes community dialogue and advocacy, as well as activism.

This is but one of several steps we can take in theological schools to challenge those who persist in separating faith from political and social action. Overall, Episcopalians and other biblically informed Christians need to reexamine our theological roots lest public theology becomes a forgotten or, as for Anglicans, a discarded vocation.

Confronting a false dualism

Another is to encourage reexamination of the contemporary tendency to separate personal religious claims from political and civic responsibility. I admire the title of Barbara A. Holmes’ new book about Congresswoman Barbara Jordan’s ethics, *A Private Woman in Public Spaces* (2000). Most Americans are both/and people, seeking privacy while living in community. Moreover, for most of the world’s citizenry, sustained privacy is a luxury affordable only to privileged persons. Choosing between public and private understandings of ourselves is a false dualism.

Similarly, it is a good idea to challenge visions of Christianity that insist upon apolitical religion and limit expectations about religious leadership. It was a small step, yet a public act to be applauded, when Massachusetts’ Episcopal bishop, M. Thomas Shaw, spent a month this past spring in Washington, D.C. as a congressional intern learn-

ing about politics and the roles that religious leaders can play as public policy advocates. Shaw's rationale was that "our public life is very much a part of our [religious] journey." At one point, Shaw described his political internship as a "journey into the heart of God." In his words and actions, this church leader gives priority to the public good and refuses to separate the life of faith from politics and social action.

While we are examining our assumptions about politics as usual, it is also important to look to the margins of political and civic activity. Here various groups, individuals, and coalitions — many without fanfare — are shaping consequential responses that ethically engage the intersection of politics and religion. Sociologist Mark Chaves suggests that institutionalized habits formed a century ago are not adequate for today's challenges ("Are We 'Bowling Alone' — And Does It Matter?" *Christian Century* 7/19-26/00). We might well expect new and renewed expressions of activism. I have in mind such networks as Protestants for the Common Good, or the "Hip-Hop campus activism" described in a recent issue of *The Witness* (9/00). Such efforts can move outward, welcoming diversity while identifying systemic economic issues. This has been true, for example, in the international women's movement. Robert Putnam also finds particular reasons for optimism among young people. He points out that youth who join service organizations and serve as volunteers are more likely to remain politically active as adults. Electronic media can identify new opportunities for organizing and building coalitions. Participation matters, Putnam insists, pointing to higher levels of education, child welfare, and health care in those states and cities that foster civic engagement.

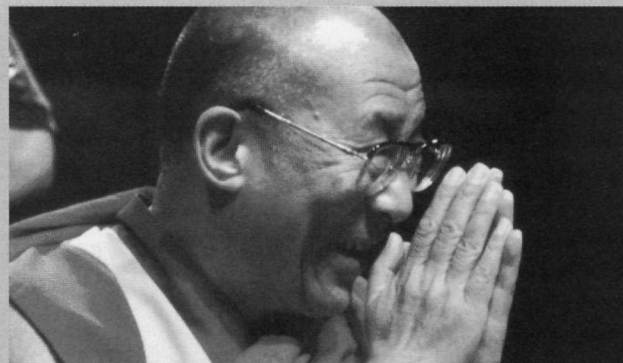
Moving beyond WWJD

Still, as Martin Marty reminds us, there are very good reasons to be wary about the intersection of religion and politics: "Faith can produce staying power, prophetic insight, creative visions — just as, admit it, faith can be twisted into idolatry of nation, party, and policy" (*Sightings*, 9/5/00). But being cautious does not prohibit dialogue and action. The health of the nation can benefit from sustained theological reflection on complex public issues. A clear example of the significance of religion in public life can be seen in the theological narratives of Martin Luther King, Jr. Here, as elsewhere, a variety of voices is important for assuring freedom. The cultivation of conscience obviously involves much more than wearing a "WWJD" bracelet, or declaring an annual "Jesus Day."

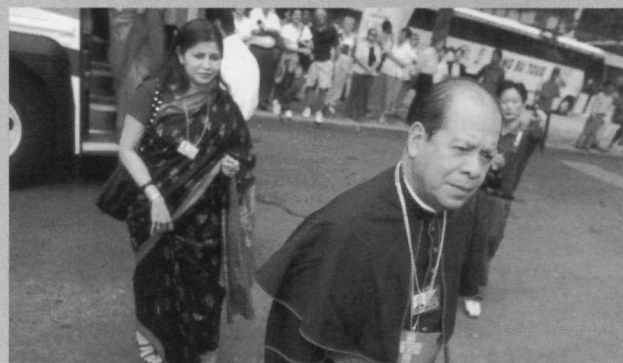
Meanwhile, the most enduring strategy is to look for and work for the coherence of words and actions! Do I work, as well as pray, for peace and justice? Does the preacher "walk the talk"? Does a politician's rhetoric of morality and religious claims jibe with her public record? Are public analysts and journalists helping us see through religious stereotypes to deeper issues at stake?

Public theology can make a thoughtful, if not determinative, contribution to the central social issues of our time. Our shared life demands such informed commitment. ●

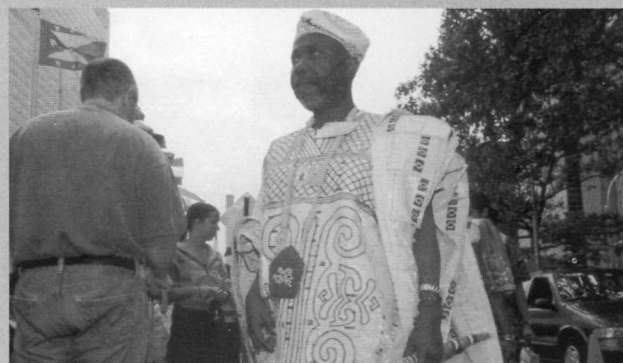
Fredrica Harris Thompsett is Mary Wolfe Professor of Historical Theology at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. For the past three years she has been part of an ongoing ecumenical inquiry into the intersection of religion and public life as it is addressed in theological schools.



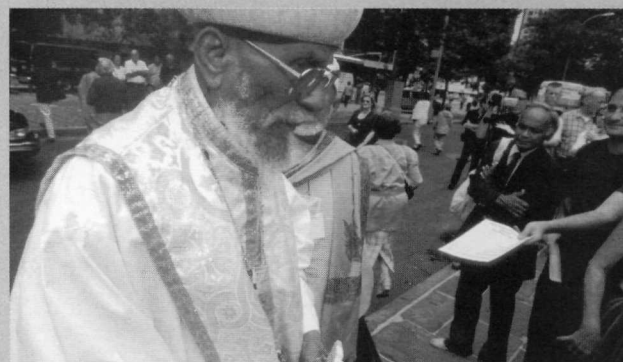
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Global religious leaders gathered at the U.N. in late August to discuss their moral role in promoting world peace. The Dalai Lama (top), who did not attend, was only belatedly invited. The U.N. organizers apparently feared offending China by including him.

RESISTING MON

An interview with Naomi Klein

by Jane Slaughter



NAOMI KLEIN, 29 and a native of Toronto, is a self-described “anti-corporate Deadhead.” That means that if protesters are in the streets against the World Trade Organization in Seattle a year ago, or confronting the World Bank in Prague this September, she’s there. Her 1999 book, *No Logo*, captured the spirit of the worldwide anti-corporate movement, spearheaded by the young, that confronts head-on the corporate domination of our cultural, political and economic space. Sometimes that movement is called “anti-globalization,” but in fact its foundation is a profound internationalism.

No Logo both predicted “Seattle” and explained how corporations’ profit strategies are backfiring, creating in the next generation a core of activists who have no stake in the system.

The Witness: You’ve written about the alternative politics exemplified by the Seattle demonstrations against the World Trade Organization (WTO) and by the protests at the Republican and Democratic conventions. Can you sum up what these protests are about?

Naomi Klein: Pretty much all the issues fit into the analysis that corporations have grown far too powerful and that there needs to be a citizens’ movement to rein in that power.

It’s important to understand that Seattle didn’t begin it all. The U.S. is playing catch-up. Seattle was an important turning point, but there had been protests of that size, of that level of militancy, even with that level of diversity, in other cities around the world. In June 1998 there was an anti-debt, Jubilee 2000 protest where people created a human chain all around Birmingham [England] when the G-7 leaders were meeting there. That was followed by an anniversary of the WTO, in Geneva, with riots that went on for two days. Then, June 18, 1999, you saw the riots in London, in conjunction with the G-8 summit in Cologne. There was a counter-summit in Manila during the APEC [Asia Pacific Economic Coop-

eration] summit. Seattle was really about Americans joining an international movement in mid-stream.

The strength of Seattle was the coalition of young protesters and labor. It was Teamsters and turtles; that was what made it extraordinary. But Seattle was also about Jose Bove [the French sheep farmer who led an attack on a McDonald’s outlet] coming from France and meeting the leader of the Philippines peasant movement, who then came and testified at Bove’s trial in France; and *maquiladora* workers marching with steelworkers; and Indian farmers who had been campaigning against genetic modification of foods meeting British campaigners and American campaigners. That was the strength of Seattle—it was all those coalitions.

The internationalism of this movement is not just a hobbyhorse. It is the *power* that it has. And the internationalism is exactly where the World Trade Organization and the World Bank leaders around the world have targeted their attacks. This is where they’re trying to break the coalition. Immediately after Seattle, *The Economist* magazine ran a cover of a starving Indian child: “Why are you trying to take my food away?” Their rhetoric is, “Global trade is a mass philanthropic project, and you people are just selfish.”

T.W.: How do people who are acting out of a faith perspective fit into this grand coalition?

N.K.: A lot of the anti-sweatshop work has come from church groups. Sweatshops became a moral issue. But there’s a real diversity in religious activism on the sweatshop issue. There are very radical religious leaders who see their work within the context of a labor movement, and then there are religious groups who use a charity model. The charity-based model has created a lot of discord among labor activists in the developing world, who aren’t sure whether this is about supporting their right to form unions, which is really the only thing they’re interested in, or is it about feeling sorry for young child laborers?

EY POLITICS



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The charity model means that instead of looking at root causes of why Nike might use child labor to produce soccer balls, you just sit down and try to negotiate with the company, get them to pass a resolution. There wouldn't be worker involvement. It sends a message to workers in the developing world that this is not about building an international labor movement, it's just about appeasing the conscience of shoppers in America. One of the very few groups that has successfully unionized free-trade-zone workers is a church group in the Philippines. They're a very radical group that believes that the Catholic Church is the church of the poor, and what that means is that they have to bring unions into the free trade zones. If they had just been an independent union

that had decided to try to organize those workers, there would have been a serious crackdown. There's a very clear and understood rule that you're not supposed to unionize the free-trade zones. But because that church was the absolute center of the community, that left the authorities very little room to move.

T.W.: You've written that much or some of the movement actually calls capitalism into question. What's the difference between anti-corporate and anti-capitalist?

N.K.: For many people, anti-corporate means a perception that corporate power has grown in a very unhealthy way. That we as

nations have had a balance in our relationship with corporations that grew out of New Deal-type policies, that we learned as nations to rein in the power of our national corporations, and as corporations have gone global, we have lost the ability as citizens to counterbalance that with any kind of system of rules and regulations. So what we need is to figure out new ways to do globally what we did on a national scale. That's not anti-capitalist.

Then, for a lot of other people, anti-corporate politics is anti-capitalist politics with training wheels. It's a process that leads to a questioning of the entire system. You start by talking about Nike sweatshops, and then you talk about how the larger picture is really corporate power, and then the next thing you're talking about is how you have to smash capitalism. I've seen that happen with lots and lots of young activists. Which does not mean that they're socialists and communists, because a lot of them are green anarchists.

T.W.: In *No Logo*, you write that corporations' own strategies are creating resistance.

N.K.: What we've seen is a convergence of all these pockets of anti-corporate activism — all these people deciding to go after corporations in a way that uses the power of corporate marketing against itself.

I was in my early 20s, in the most desirable demographic, and I experienced myself what seemed like a new voraciousness in marketing. We went from being really uninteresting to marketers, when they were still interested in baby boomers, to being stalked by marketers. All these ideas we thought were very cutting-edge were suddenly appearing in Benetton ads.

So one part of the resistance was a rise in ad-busting and culture-jamming, which is basically street-level media criticism. Culture-jamming takes many, many forms, but say, downloading an advertisement and changing the message so it says something that the company wouldn't want. Scaling up the side of a building and changing a Big Mac billboard. Changing Joe Camel into Joe Chemo, hooked up to an IV machine. For a lot of young activists that I know, that was a

first taste of direct action against corporations.

Young people today have grown up with the idea that there isn't a moment's delay between when a new idea enters youth culture consciousness and when it gets sold back to you in the form of a Sprite ad. Everything's been co-opted, whether it's been feminism in Nike ads, or the very idea of being a rebel — anything. This logically leads you to the idea that you want advertising to shut up every once in a while. So that's a shift.

And that attitude, of hand-to-brand combat, was spreading to different areas. You could see it in the McLibel trial in Britain [where McDonald's sued two environmental activists for libel]. They were using all the power of McDonald's against itself to, in effect, put this massive multinational corporation on trial, and by extension put the entire economic model on trial, very consciously.

T.W.: How and why did "branding" get to be so ubiquitous? What are some examples?

N.K.: When I started to write the book I didn't understand the difference between advertising and marketing. I wanted to write about anti-corporate activism, and I knew that a lot of the young people who were getting involved felt they were over-marketed-to, but also that they had the freedom to go after these corporations, because they in no sense expected job security, or basically anything, from them. They felt that corporations' messages were everywhere, but on an employment level, maybe you'd get a barista job at Starbucks [the people who serve the coffee], but it's not like they're the anchor of your community and you have to be loyal to them because they employed dad for 50 years.

By reading marketing books and magazines, I came across this idea that has gripped the corporate world in the last 15 years: If you want to be a successful corporation, you don't just have to advertise more and better. You have to produce a brand—not a product. If you read these books you get the sense that if you produce your own product, somehow you're lowly, you're a lower order of corporation.

Branding is this rush towards weightless-

ness, becoming a hollow corporation. Instead of a product, what corporations are about is the dissemination of a brand idea, whether that idea is "transcendence through sports," if you're Nike, or "community," if you're Starbucks.

T.W.: It used to be that corporations wanted to be seen as solid, like the Prudential rock.

N.K.: Now being solid is being cumbersome, being weighed down. This is what the downsizing of the late 1980s, early 1990s has turned into. All that restructuring and streamlining led to this fundamental questioning of production itself.

T.W.: Well, somebody still has to do the production of all those sneakers and coffee beans.

N.K.: Your contractors, your Taiwanese and Korean contractors who produce the stuff, they aren't the top order of corporations. The most respected corporations on Wall Street are the ones who have managed to figure out how to produce nothing. If you're a manufacturing company, the model is Nike, which doesn't own any factories; it's a brand-production machine. You hear a lot about companies embracing "the Nike paradigm." If you're Microsoft, the way you do it is by keeping a third of your workforce classified as temps. If you're Starbucks you do it by doing what everybody in the fast-food industry does, which is to convince their workforce that they're not really workers, that they're students, they're just trying to make a little bit of extra money, so they don't expect job security.

When I started to understand this mania in the corporate world for producing brands, not products, the two sides of the argument that I was researching in *No Logo* came together. One of them was this rise in more voracious marketing and the loss of public space to marketing, and the other was the loss of job security. It was the same piece of ideology fueling both of these phenomena.

T.W.: And so for the activists, it all fits: We hate you, Gap, for all kinds of reasons, including the fact that you own sweatshops.

N.K.: Exactly. We hate the fact that you have colonized our neighborhoods, we hate the fact that you're co-opting youth culture in your advertisements, we hate the fact that you use sweatshops, and we also hate the fact that the only jobs we're going to get from you are as sweater-folders.

That's why the companies are so confused, because they've always assumed that they were dealing with 1970s-style boycotts — they just had to stop doing the thing that people were upset about, and then all the anger would be defused. What they're finding is that their very active coming at people with public relations is just seen as more intrusion.

T.W.: What is the relationship of this sort of alternative politics to traditional electoral politics? Or is there any?

N.K.: The reason you have this generation of activists who've made the decision to go

after corporations is that they have decided that the traditional means of politics, i.e., going after government, no longer works because government is so beholden to corporations, that essentially there's been a power shift. The way you respond to that power shift is by going to where the power is, and the power is with the corporations. They're realizing that in many cases the best way to get at policy is to get at the corporations themselves, and then you get the attention of your political leaders.

The best example of that might be the campaign against genetically engineered foods in Europe, which was an anti-corporate campaign that turned into a policy campaign around labeling. First the activists went after supermarket chains, and got many of them to agree not to carry GE foods anymore. Then, once a few corporations are successfully targeted, they often turn to the politicians and say, "This isn't fair — you have to level the playing field and develop

some sort of across-the-board legislative response," for instance, that genetically-engineered or modified foods have to be labeled. Which is what happened in Europe.

So it's an alternative to electoral politics. Just because you realize that it doesn't matter which party you elect, they're all going to do the same thing, doesn't mean you're going to just play dead; you have to find other ways to change the world. What was significant about the protests around both the Democratic and Republican conventions was that for a lot of younger activists, it was the first time they were even giving the time of day to politicians. And they were doing it not to say who to vote for, but to say, "This entire system is corrupt, but we're not just going to leave it at that. We're going to politicize the way in which money has taken over politics."

Freelance writer Jane Slaughter lives in Detroit, Mich.

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STRIVING FOR EQ

Overcoming the tyranny of the majority

by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott



Lani Guinier

IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY where the majority rules, change can take a long time — even after attitudes have begun to shift. For instance, although most Americans would give at least lip-service to the concept that men and women are equal citizens deserving of equal opportunity, attorney Deborah L. Rhode estimates that “at current rates of change, it still would take more than three centuries to achieve equality between the sexes in political representation.”

And, of course, merely electing equal numbers of males and females is not the same as electing people with a firm commitment to human equality. Yet a transformative vision of gender equity is necessary in order to transcend, convince, and overcome the opposition of moneyed, seniority-oriented “old boy” networks. As Rhode comments in her 1997 book *Speaking of Sex*, “we are unlikely to establish gender equality as a

political priority without substantial changes in the electoral process.” Although Rhode is talking chiefly about dimorphic male-female equality, what she says is just as true in the context of achieving omnigender equity or any other positive social change.

How then to bring about change a little more rapidly than three centuries? Rhode offers some suggestions born of her several decades as professor at Stanford Law School: Those who care must agitate for campaign finance reform so that the system is “less hostage to financial influence”; must try to increase voter knowledge; and must seek public recognition of gender pioneers. Only 5 percent of national historic landmarks are currently dedicated to women. Imagine the percentage of publicly displayed paintings, statues, and plaques honoring transsexual leaders, or gay or lesbian leaders! Even retrieving our history is a major project, let alone achieving public recognition. I remember gazing in awe at the bust of lesbian novelist Willa Cather in the state capitol in Lincoln, Neb. Even though she was being honored for her local-color artistry, not for her transgender leadership, it was a first for me, and a great moment.

Rhode also suggests the old standbys: writing letters, organizing fund-raisers, building networks among colleagues and friends, sending checks to organizations with gender-related concerns. “Overall,” Rhode writes, “America’s foundations target less than 5 percent of their funding to the specific needs of women and girls. Some 60 women’s funds are now struggling to fill the gap, but their endowments remain quite modest.”

The need for funding is even more desper-

ate, of course, in those organizations that are working to expand society beyond binary gender definitions. In my own charitable giving, increasingly I am trying to give larger percentages to those organizations least likely to attract widespread funding because of their cutting-edge commitment to justice for people of all sexes and/or genders. I hope others will do the same as the following principles become better known: that male-female gender differences have been overemphasized because of unquestioning acceptance of the binary gender construct; that everybody suffers because that construct does not meet the needs of society as well as an omnigender construct promises to do; and that the objective of an omnigendered society, according to Martine Rothblatt in *The Apartheid of Sex* (Crown, 1995), is “to provide equal, non-discriminatory opportunity for personal fulfillment to all persons.”

As much as I support Deborah Rhode’s suggestions, however, I am still left pondering her statement that if we are ever to make gender equity a priority in American politics, we need “substantial changes in the electoral process.” Lani Guinier is someone who has given considerable thought to those “substantial changes.” Although Guinier’s focus is primarily racial equity, Yale law professor Stephen L. Carter, writing in the foreword to Guinier’s 1994 book, *The Tyranny of the Majority* (The Free Press), is certainly correct that “whenever there are consistent winners and losers, her analysis applies.” In my opinion, Guinier is a person to take very seriously because of her honorable career as a civil rights litigator with, as Carter comments, “a deep firsthand knowledge of both

the theory and practice of her art.”

President Clinton has admitted that withdrawing his nomination of Guinier to head the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department was the low moment of his first year in the White House. And since the transgender political movement is also a civil rights movement, we do well to consider Guinier’s suggestions about how to break through the tyranny about which she writes.

Guinier’s point is that, “In an ideal democracy, the people would rule, but the minorities would also be protected against the power of majorities.” To achieve that, “we may need an alternative to winner-take-all majoritarianism ... the ‘principle of taking turns.’” But “giving the minority a turn does not mean the minority gets to rule; what it does mean,” Guinier explains, “is that the minority gets to influence decision-making and [therefore] the majority rules more legitimately.” When minorities perceive that the system is fair enough to respond to their concerns, political stability is enhanced: “Losers continue to work within the system rather than seeking to overthrow it.”

For decades I have been involved in the effort to achieve equal representation and opportunity for women in Christian ministries and in local and national religious decision-making bodies. And for almost as long, I have been active in the effort to achieve justice for Christian gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (glbt) people. Repeatedly, these causes have been frustrated by the tyranny of the majority. For instance, according to John Leland, who reported on two *Newsweek* polls last March, although “only” 46 percent of the American general public still believes that homosexuality is sinful, those churchgoers who are elected as delegates to denominational conventions tilt in the other direction, with roughly 46-48 percent supportive of equality for their gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members,

and about 52-54 percent denying that equality on the basis of the “sinful lifestyle.” Yet that slim majority continues to block access to church rituals or union ceremonies for those glbt members who request them.

And although 83 percent of the general public says that homosexuals should have equal rights in employment, within most Christian denominations that 52-54 percent majority continues to block the ordination of openly glbt ministers or priests. In many local congregations where a large minority wants to proclaim the congregation a welcoming and safe space for glbt people, that move is similarly blocked by the tyranny of a small majority.

It is in these and similar situations that Guinier’s suggestions could make a difference. One of her suggestions is to give minorities a voice in the decision-making process by the use of cumulative voting. Each voter is given multiple votes which they can distribute as they see fit. For instance, a church voting on five new policies could give each member ten votes, which they could distribute according to the intensity of their preference. Some voters might put all ten of their votes for or against a policy that would forcefully impact their lives. Other voters, feeling less strongly impacted, might put two votes for or against each policy. “Like-minded voters can vote as a solid bloc, or, instead, form strategic cross-racial [and/or cross-interest] coalitions to gain mutual benefits. This system ... allows voters to organize themselves on whatever basis they wish.”

Therefore, Guinier says, “any self-identified minority can plump or cumulate all its votes for one candidate [or one policy].”

Guinier does not pretend that cumulative voting is a radical new idea; rather, she points out that in Clinton County, Ala., which uses cumulative voting to elect both the school board and the county commission, the system has elected three white Republicans and

four Democrats (three white and one black), whereas previously only white Democrats had been able to achieve election. And in some Western European democracies that use similar cumulative voting systems, national legislatures have “as many as 37 percent female members compared to little more than 5 percent in our Congress.”

Guinier is more cautious about her second remedial voting tool, supermajority voting, which requires that “more than a bare majority of voters must approve or concur before action is taken.” Again, this voting system is nothing new: Guinier points out that it was used to give small-population states equal representation in the U.S. Senate. And the Reagan administration approved the use of supermajority rule in Mobile, Ala., where “the special five-out-of-seven supermajority threshold is still in place today and is credited with increasing racial harmony in that community.” The advantage of supermajority voting is, of course, that it gives “bargaining power to all numerically inferior or less powerful groups, be they black, female, or Republican” — or, I might add, Democrat, people of any non-normative race or ethnicity, and people of any non-normative gender or sexuality.

I am in full agreement with Guinier’s basic thesis that “democracy in a heterogeneous society is incompatible with rule by a racial monopoly of any color.” And I extend that thesis to say that democracy in a heterogeneous society is incompatible with rule by a gender monopoly or any other monopoly of any one inflexible configuration. ●

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Professor of English, Emeritus, at the William Paterson University in Wayne, N.J., was guest editor of The Witness’ April 2000 issue on sexual and gender ethics. This article is adapted from her forthcoming book, Omnigender: A Christian and Trans-Religious approach to Gender Justice (Spring 2001, The Pilgrim Press).

FUSING THE SPIRITUAL

The Image on a coin

by Arthur Waskow

**The Rabbis drew
an analogy
between the
image a human
ruler puts upon
the coins of the
realm and the
Image the Infinite
Ruler puts upon
the many "coins"
of humankind.**

ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN, and most puzzling, stories of Jesus' life is the tale of an encounter concerning the image on a coin.

The story appears in Matthew 22: 15-22, Mark 12: 13-17, and Luke 20: 19-26. It is almost the same in all three places.

According to the story, some of Jesus' opponents among the Pharisees sent people to trick Jesus into saying something that would provide a pretext for his arrest. (The Pharisees were the religious grouping who initiated the reforms and reinterpretations of Torah that became Rabbinic Judaism — and who in general sided with the poor against the Roman occupation and its allies in the Jewish "establishment." Some scholars today see Jesus as himself a Pharisee, among their "radical" wing. In that case, "the Pharisees" as a body were probably not his opponents, but some among them probably were.)

One of them asked him: "Rabbi, we know that what you speak and teach is sound; you pay deference to no one, but teach in all honesty the life-path that God requires.

"Give us your ruling on this: Are we or are we not permitted to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor?"

Jesus saw through their trick and said to them, "Show me a silver coin. Whose image is on this coin, and whose inscription?"

Let us pause for a moment. What was the "trick"? Since the coin had Caesar's image on it, with the inscription "Divus" — "God" — use of the coin might constitute idolatry in Jewish law, and thus be forbidden. But by Roman law the taxes must be paid. So the "trick" was that by answering one way, Jesus would break Jewish law; by answering the other way, he would break Roman law. Either way, he would be subject to arrest.

But Jesus had not quite answered. Instead, he had answered the question with a question. (Says the folklore, this is an old Jewish habit. As it is taught, "Why does a Jew answer a question with a question?" Answer: "Why not?")

According to Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus

answered: "Whose image is on this coin?"

The man who had challenged him answered, "Caesar's!"

And then Jesus did respond: "So give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

This answer, say Matthew, Mark and Luke, took his opponents by surprise, and they went away and left him alone.

But for 2000 years, Christians have argued over what this answer meant. What is Caesar's and what is God's? Does the answer suggest two different spheres of life, one ruled by Caesar and one by God? Does it mean to submit to Caesar's authority in the material world, while adhering to God in the spiritual world? How do we discern the boundary?

Why did the questioners go away? Was it simply because Jesus had avoided the horns of the dilemma they had brought, and so could not be arrested for his answer?

Or was there a deeper meaning to the answer? Is the answer simply a koan, an answer that forces the questioner to seek a deeper question or break through into enlightenment?

Now let us introduce a passage from the Babylonian Talmud, that compilation of the wisdom, the debates and dialogues, the puns and the parables, the philosophical explorations and the practical decisions of thousands of rabbis living over a period from about the beginning of the Common Era to about 500 CE, some in Babylonia and some in the Land of Israel.

Our passage from the Talmud appears on Sanhedrin 38a (Soncino transl., p. 240):

"Our Rabbis taught: Adam, the first human being, was created as a single person to show forth the greatness of the Ruler Who is beyond all Rulers, the Blessed Holy One. For if a human ruler [like the Roman Emperor] mints many coins from one mold, they all carry the same image, they all look the same. But the Blessed Holy One shaped all human beings in the Divine Image, as Adam was shaped in the Divine Image [Gen. 1: 27], *b'tzelem elohim*, 'in the Image of God.'

AND THE POLITICAL

And yet not one of them resembles another.”

Let us absorb this. The Rabbis drew an analogy between the image a human ruler puts upon the coins of the realm, and the Image the Infinite Ruler puts upon the many “coins” of humankind. The very diversity of human faces shows forth the Unity and Infinity of God, whereas the uniformity of imperial coins makes clear the limitations on the power of an emperor.

Now reread the story of Jesus with a single line and gesture added:

“Whose image is on this coin?” asks Jesus.

His questioner answers, “Caesar’s!”

Then Jesus puts his arm on the troublemaker’s shoulder and asks, “And Whose Image is on this coin?”

Perhaps the troublemaker mutters an answer; perhaps he does not need to. Not till after this exchange does Jesus say, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”

Now there is a deeper meaning to the response, and to the troublemaker’s exit. Jesus has not just avoided the question and evaded the dilemma: He has answered, in a way that is much more radical than if he had said either, “Pay the tax” or “Don’t pay the tax” — a way that is profoundly radical, but gives no obvious reason for arrest.

Jesus has not proposed dividing up the turf between the material and the spiritual. He has redefined the issue: “Give your whole self to the One Who has imprinted Divinity upon you! — You, you who are one of the Rabbis, my brother Rabbi — you know that is the point of this story! All I have done is to remind you!”

The coin of the realm will matter very little, if the troublemaker listens.

So the questioner walks away, suddenly profoundly troubled by the life-question that he faces.

We might ask, why does the line I have inserted not appear in the three versions of

the story that we have?

It is possible that the line was censored out, as Christian tradition faced both the threats of an Empire to shatter this religion, and the invitation of an Empire to become the Established Church.

Or it is possible that Jesus never needed to say the words, because his “Pharisee” questioners understood the point perfectly well. After all, on the basis of the passage in the Talmud, we can easily imagine that the teaching comparing God’s Image on Adam to the Emperor’s image on the coinage was already well-known among the rabbis.

For me, this reading of the two passages — one from Talmud, one from the New Testament — brings with it two levels of greater wholeness and deeper meaning.

The first level is that each of the two passages enriches the meaning of the other. Read together, they fuse the spiritual and the political, instead of splitting the world into two domains. In this reading, the claim of the Divine Ruler to rule over an emperor includes the political realm. God can create infinite diversity and eternal renewal, and so is far richer than the imperial treasury — which can create only uniformity and repetition. But this is not just a philosophical or biological point. Because God rules over all rulers, because God calls forth from every human being a unique face of God, each human being must follow God — not Caesar.

Without the passage from the Rabbis of the Talmud, this meaning of Jesus’ response remains unclear. Without the tale of Jesus, the Talmud passage seems “merely theological” — without a thrust into everyday life. To become whole and create wholeness in the world, the passages need each other.

Yet the editors and framers of the Talmud and New Testament took care that both passages appear in neither text. They were walled out against each other. So the second level of wholeness that this reading teaches

me is the importance of mending the fringes of the Jewish and Christian traditions.

In Jewish tradition, what makes a garment holy is the careful, conscious tying of *tzitzit* — a certain kind of fringe — on the corners of a piece of clothing. Just as a landholder must let the poor and the landless harvest what grows in the corners of his field, so these corners of a garment remind us that it is not “good fences make good neighbors,” but good fringes make good neighbors.

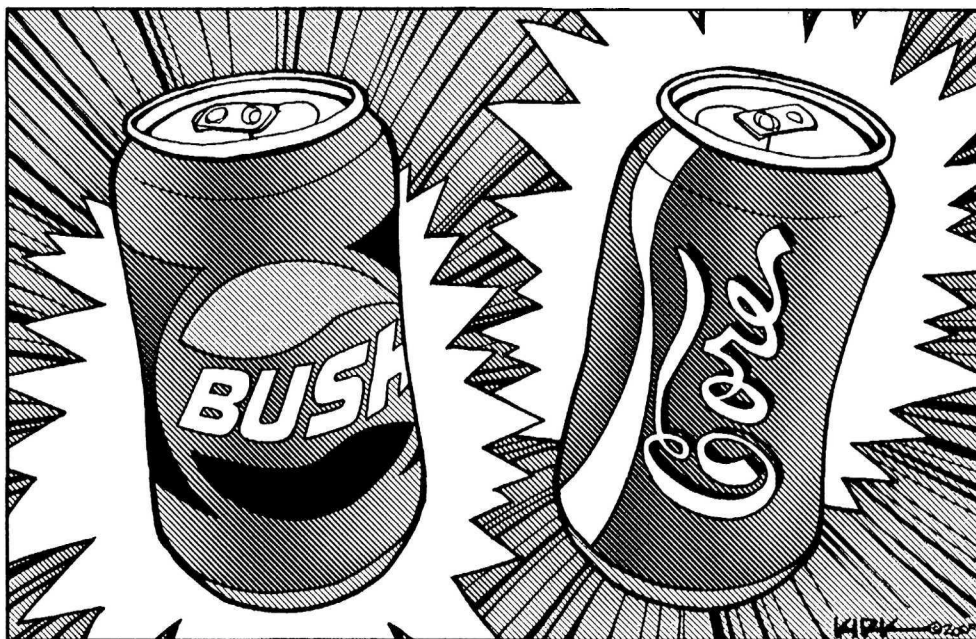
What makes a fringe a fringe is that it is a mixture of my own cloth and the universe’s air. What makes *tzitzit* *tzitzit* is that they are tied according to a conscious, holy pattern — not left as helter-skelter fringes. They are fringes that celebrate their fringiness.

That is what we need between traditions. Not the dissolution of all boundaries, nor the sharpness of a wall, a fence — but conscious, holy fringes.

I think these two passages are *tzitzit* of both traditions, reaching out as threads of connection that also honor the two different garments on which they are tied.

If we fail to tie such sacred fringes or let them become invisible, the garments lose their holiness. So let us turn with newly open eyes to see what Rabbi Jesus and the Rabbis of the Talmud shared, as well as where they differed. ●

Arthur Waskow is a Pathfinder of ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal. He is author of The Freedom Seder ; Godwrestling ; Seasons of Our Joy; Down-to-Earth Judaism: Food, Money, Sex, and the Rest of Life ; and Godwrestling — Round Two (recipient of the Benjamin Franklin Award in 1996). In 1983 he founded and continues to direct The Shalom Center, a division of ALEPH that focuses on Jewish thought and practice to protect and heal the earth and society. Website: <www.shalomctr.org>.



THE AMERICAN FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

Selling water

Globalization is exacerbating a growing worldwide water crisis, according to Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians (*Resist Newsletter*, 6-7/00).

"Forces are already established that would see water become a private commodity to be sold and traded on the open market, controlled by transnational corporations and guaranteed for the use of private capital through global trade and investment agreements through the World Trade Organization (WTO)," Barlow says.

"In industries ranging from municipal water and wastewater services to an explosion in bottled water to massive bulk water exports by tanker, corporations are lining up to exploit the increasingly desperate global demand for water. 'Water is the last infrastructure frontier for private investors,' says Johan Bastin of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

"The world of privatized water is overwhelmingly dominated by two French transnationals, Vivendi and Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux. They are joined by mega-energy companies like Enron, that has just set up a water division headed by Rebecca Mark

(who swears she will not rest until the entire world's water is privatized) and by global shipping companies eager to begin the global trade in commercial bulk water. ...

"Water must be exempted from both NAFTA and the World Trade Organization, as must the trade in genes, seeds, air, health, education, social services, natural resources and culture. That is not to say that those of us living in water-rich areas of the world don't have obligations to water-scarce regions, especially given the fact that it is the corporations of the First World that have caused such devastation in the Third. But there is a world of difference between water-sharing and water-trading. You can be sure that under the WTO, it would not be the world's poor who would gain access to water; rather, countries, water-intensive corporations, free trade zones and wealthy communities able to pay top dollar would win the prize."

Klan adopts a highway

"A stretch of highway sponsored by the Ku Klux Klan was recently named after civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks," according to the *SPLC Report* (6/00). "Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan signed legislation in late May that

created the Rosa Parks Highway, a portion of Interstate 55 near downtown St. Louis. The Klan won the right to join the state's Adopt-A-Highway cleanup program in November and was assigned the I-55 stretch.

"I think the governor appreciated the irony of the KKK picking up trash along the Rosa Parks Highway," a spokesman said."

'Interculturation'

Asked in an interview about "inculturating" the Gospel (*The Christian Century*, 8/00), world religions scholar and Roman Catholic priest Raimon Panikkar replied that "it is of interculturalization that we need to speak — that is, of a meeting between traditions and cultures, and not the implantation of one culture in another. It would only be a proof of colonialism to pretend that one religious message, like the New Testament, has the right and the duty to inculturate itself everywhere, as if it were something supracultural. The church ought to take existing traditional cultures more seriously, and work for their mutual fecundation. ... The Christian truth is not the monopoly of a sect, a treatise imposed by a kind of colonization, but an eruption that has existed since the dawn of time, which St. Paul defined very well as 'a mystery that has existed since the beginning,' and of which we Christians know only a very small part."

Why not give them Mercedes?

"The U.S. is on the verge of undermining an international missile control regime with the potential sale of 25 ballistic missiles to the tiny Persian Gulf State of Bahrain," according to the Council for a Livable World (*Arms Trade Insider* #36). "The U.S. intends to squeeze the missile under the limits of the Missile Technology Control Regime by making modifications to its range and payload. The U.S. has repeatedly berated other countries for potential violations of the missile regime, and will surely set a precedent that the regime's limits

on the sale of ballistic missiles can be ignored or bent to suit one's needs.

"It is ironic the U.S. would modify the missile, considering the U.S. chastised the French-British consortium Matra Bae Dynamics for a proposed sale of the Black Shahine cruise missile to the United Arab Emirates in November 1998. The consortium proposed that it would alter the missile's capabilities to qualify under the regime's guidelines. The regime's voluntary guidelines limit the sale of ballistic missiles with a range over 300 kilometers and over 500 kilograms of payload. In that case, the U.S. argued that the sale undermined the spirit of the regime, but it now appears that the U.S. missile should not be held to the same standard. Given U.S. policy against the spread of ballistic missiles to developing nations, it is hypocritical to sell these modified ballistic missiles to Bahrain.

"Furthermore, introducing the ballistic missiles to the Persian Gulf will exacerbate the existing regional arms race. If the U.S. sells these missiles to Bahrain, the other countries of the region will want similar missiles, further eroding regional security and the missile regime.

"Bahrain has no need for these missiles because it already has missiles in its arsenal capable of defending against any potential invasion. Secondly, Bahrain serves as the host for the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, a massive deterrent force in its own right.

"Bahrain has served as one of the U.S.' closest allies in this region, allowing bombing runs from its soil during times of crisis with Iraq. If this sale is to serve as essentially a reward for past good behavior, there are other, safer methods to achieve this. As one Congressional staffer remarked, 'If we are doing this sale just to make Bahrain happy, why don't we give them some Mercedes instead?'"

Alienating allies

Writing about the convention protests, Juan

Gonzalez notes that he saw "disturbing signs of class and racial bias even among some of the most committed protesters in Philadelphia and L.A." (*In These Times*, 9/18/00).

"There was, for instance, the young activist outside the West Philadelphia puppet-making center that police raided, arresting 70 people inside who had committed no crime. A phalanx of young cops, most of them black, had been posted outside the warehouse while commanders negotiated the surrender of those inside. The raid itself was inexcusable and a clear violation of basic civil rights, but the cops on the detail were courteous and well-behaved. I listened in astonishment as the young white activist began to berate the black cops, calling them traitors to the memory of Martin Luther King, defenders of racism and oppression, and a variety of other names.

"As someone who has spent years chronicling the harrowing experiences of untold numbers of black and Latino cops within urban police departments in this country, I have no doubt that the average black officer encounters and often battles against far more racism than that young radical could ever hope to imagine. Not to recognize that even within the most repressive agencies and institutions of our society there are many men and women of good will battling for justice — people who could be potential allies — is an arrogance and immaturity the new movement cannot afford."

Tax resisters' gathering

The 15th annual New England Gathering of War Tax Resisters is set for Nov. 17-19, 2000 at the Woolman Hill Conference Center in Deerfield, Mass. There will be a workshop for those new to war tax refusal as well as opportunities to talk with long-time refusers. For details, contact Melinda Nielsen, 24 Clark Ave., Northampton, MA 01060; 413-584-5608. ●

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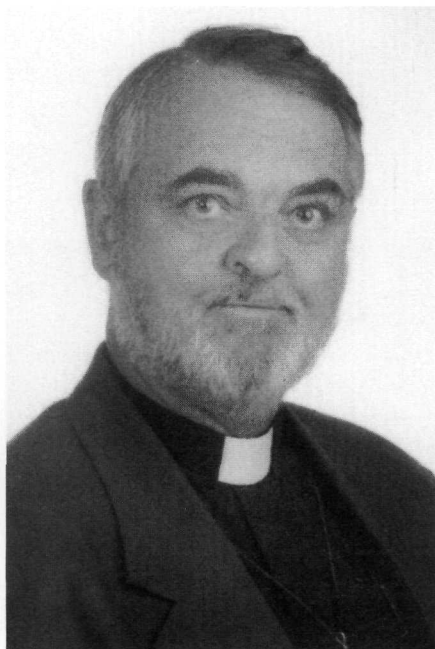
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Taking on public policy as a matter of Christian stewardship

by Marianne Arbogast



"It takes a lot of psychic energy to start with, to get beyond all of the name-calling and shibboleths that all of us carry around with us, to asking, where can we see God inviting us to act in ways that express God's justice and mercy?"

WHEN PETER PETERS was asked to represent the Diocese of Rochester at an ecumenical public policy meeting in Albany several years ago, he found the experience unsettling.

"Albany is a very unnerving place to be," he says. "It's a bit like Washington, D.C. — big buildings, offices, bureaucrats and lots of things going on. I'd done a bit of lobbying and advocating before, but not a lot, and so I found myself asking, why do I feel this way and how does the church gain confidence to be part of this process?"

Upon returning home Peters, rector of St. Luke's, Fairport, N.Y., set about creating a public policy task force in his congregation, as well as one on the diocesan level.

"I decided that, for me, my most significant community of empowerment was the church and, in particular, the congregation I serve," he says. "It seemed that if I was going to try to integrate my faith life with my civic life, that would be the arena in which I needed to test this out. So I called some people together and said, I want to form a public policy group."

The group — which adopted the name PPICS (Public Policy Issues and Christian Stewardship) — pledged themselves "to rediscover the Church's traditional role in supporting/assisting the poor and the needy, and to discover how this is to be expressed in the present political climate."

They decided to begin by focusing on one issue and chose welfare reform.

"What we discovered in practice was that it takes a long time for us to study issues and become well-versed enough that we feel we have something to offer others," Peters says. "It takes a lot of psychic energy to start with, to get beyond all of the name-calling and

shibboleths that all of us carry around with us, to asking, where can we see God inviting us to act in ways that express God's justice and mercy?"

Since the group included members who spanned the political spectrum, there was a need "to find a common discourse," Peters says. "There was a real effort to say, how do we as Christians relate to the poor, and to recognize that not all of us trust government agencies as being the best equipped to meet the needs of the poor. We didn't solve the problem of who should do the delivery, but we did recognize that we ought to be involved in getting something done."

By Lent of 1997, PPICS was able to organize a teach-in on welfare.

"We had over 60 people on Sunday evenings coming to talk about welfare reform," Peters says. "And then, something really remarkable happened — a city church came out to the suburbs to join us. It was a Baptist church, and they wanted to join us in conversation. It enriched us enormously. Then we had welfare people come out and talk to us, and that blew my mind. Here were these young women talking to us about their experiences with a dignity and an invitation to recognize their dignity that was compelling."

As a result, St. Luke's established an ongoing relationship with Lake Avenue Baptist Church.

"One of our most conservative members became involved in the Lake Avenue Baptist Church Outreach Program," Peters reports. "He was particularly concerned that they get some support for a youth initiative they were trying to do, and he and another member of the group leveraged money for the program. We found that one of the skills we brought to

the table is skill in knowing how to leverage things — and that was a way that we could become empowering of others.”

Peters feels it is important, however, to maintain a focus on advocacy.

“It’s easy to get tempted to become simply a traditional outreach committee, getting connected with hands-on experiences,” he says. “We’ve tried to say no, we have the role of advocacy. We want to advocate in areas of public policy on behalf of those who are disempowered, and we want to educate the community about the impact of public policy on the disenfranchised or the marginalized. We also are willing to leverage ways to assist existing programs, but we’re not going to become an outreach program of the church.”

Peters also meets every other month with the diocesan public policy task force “to consider ways in which we can best serve the diocese to give it a more public voice.

“We’ve not done anything incredible yet — the most we’ve done so far is to get on board with the rural farmworkers bill. Farmworkers were not subject to New York State labor laws, and we became part of an advocacy group to try and get that changed. That has been somewhat successful; they are now treated under minimum wage law, they have the right to a day off a week and to have bathroom and handwashing facilities in the fields.

“The other thing we’re trying to do is give people in parishes a theological rationale for being involved in public policy. The essential theological part of that is to say, look, public policy is really an aspect of Christian stewardship. One thing that’s been given to us is power, and how we use our power — political and civic — is an aspect of stewardship.”

The diocesan task force has held a workshop and created a study guide on “The Church and Public Policy.” Peters is aware of at least two congregations, in addition to St. Luke’s, which have begun their own task forces.

Peters does not regard himself as an activist.

“I haven’t been the kind of person who has been out banging the drums,” he says. “I’m a member of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, but have not been an aggressive member. But I am a person with a thorough commitment to what church is: Church is not a retreat, church is an engagement with the living God and a community through which one joins the living God in working for justice.”

Peters traces the beginning of his vocation to a priest who befriended him in Sydney, Australia, where he landed after running away from his home in England at age 16.

“It was this very conservative evangelical setting, and the priest led me to a personal relationship with Christ. And for me as an adolescent, a young man who had run away from an unhappy home, it was an incredible sense of belonging. I wanted to be part of that, and the best way I saw of being part of that was being a priest. Wherever I have lived, the church has always given me that sense of belonging. What’s become more important to me is belonging to a community that has a real sense of place and context for ministry, and belonging to a community that is seeking to deepen its relationship with the mystery we call God.”

After ordination, Peters worked in a parish in a university town in Australia before coming to the U.S. to study at Yale and then Vanderbilt.

“I had begun to drift from this evangelical, personal-salvation sort of focus before leaving Australia, and I was beginning to ask myself, what is it about my relationship with Christ that has to do with how I behave in the world around me? And as I encountered people at Yale and later at Vanderbilt, and read people like H. Richard Niebuhr and Reinhold Niebuhr, I began to understand that I was now in a relationship with God who was seeking to make God’s rule manifest among us.

“What I’ve done since then is continue to read and reflect on how theology and context relate. I’ve become much more aware of the fact that my context shapes how I hear and read theology.

“Also, my wife, Gayle Harris, has been to me an enormous source of having my consciousness raised about my assumptions. I grew up poor and a school drop-out, and now I have a PhD. How did that happen? Well, a lot of it happened because I decided that I needed to make a better job of my life. But a lot of the doors that opened for me seemed to open with some degree of ease, and as I listen to Gayle tell her story, it’s a different story. There’s the sense that being white and male, it’s easier to knock on doors than it is when you’re black and female. She faces challenges that I would never be faced with, and she’s questioned in ways that I’m not questioned.”

Peters regards Anglican tradition as supportive of the church’s voice in the public square.

“Anglicans are really able to raise up this passion for the common good. Incorporated in our liturgy is an awareness that we live together as a political society. We pray for our political leadership. We pray for our institutions of government and civic concern. They are central to our sense of who we are as a people.”

Peters believes that when people want the church to “stay out of politics,” it is most often out of fear of “the animosity, the divisiveness, the shrillness of the voices in the public square. They want a safe place where they will not be treated with the same kind of rhetoric.

“I’m trying to encourage them that, yes, the church can be a safe place, but we need to take the risk of dealing with differences and conflict, and putting them on the table in such a way that we maintain respect for each other. If the church does not encourage conversation around public policy issues, it really is conducting a kind of museum exercise — you know, let’s do the ancient crafts and pretend that we’re ostriches for a couple of hours. This is a place where we need to reflect, but also leave here ready to engage the wider world.” ●

Marianne Arbogast is associate editor of The Witness.



Author Taylor, 10, Community of Hope, Washington, D.C. 1989 / *SHOOTING BACK, A Photographic View of Life by Homeless Children*

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