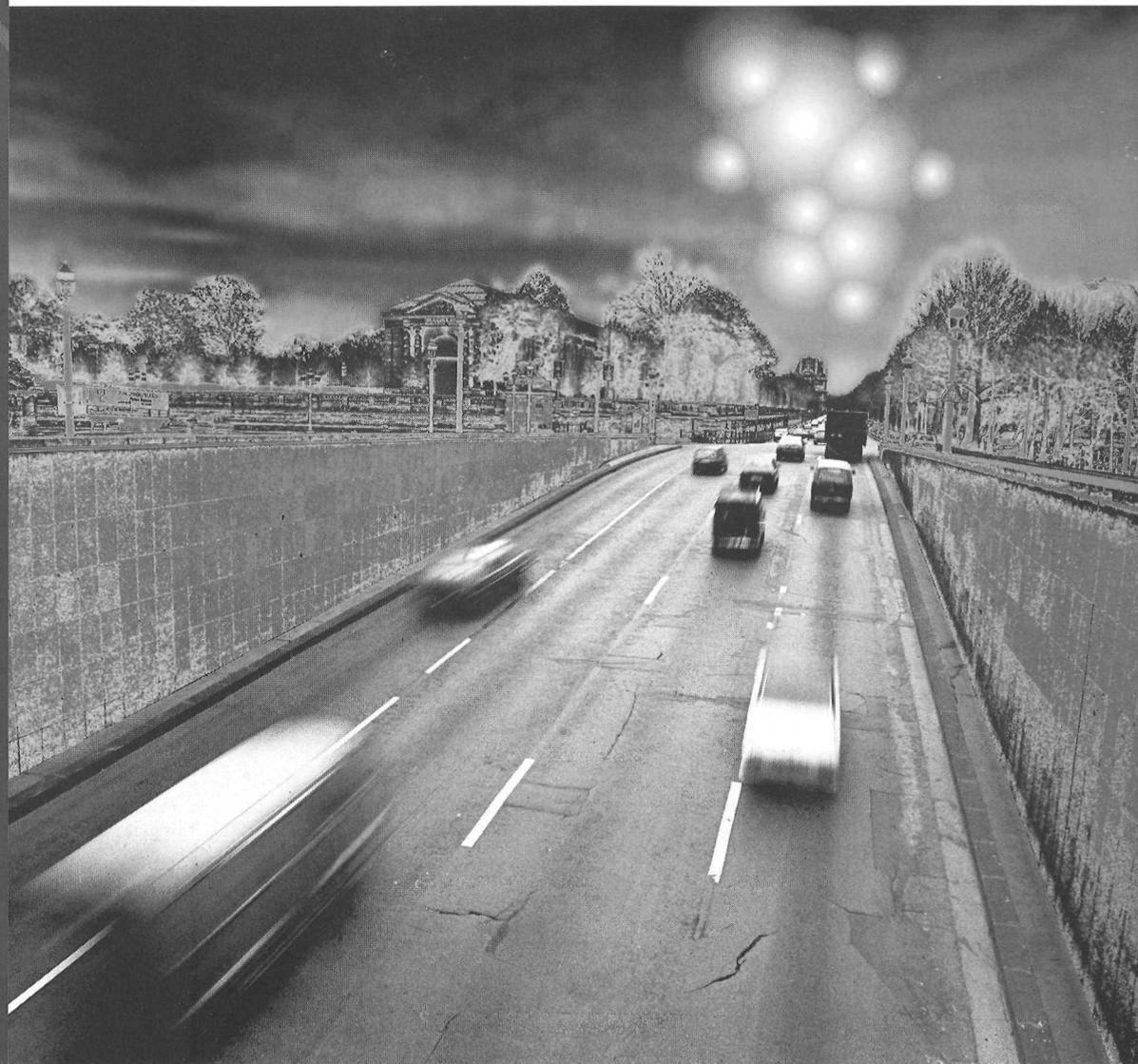


WITNESS MAGAZINE



REIMAGINING FAITH AND ACTION

VOLUME 84

NUMBER 7/8

JULY/AUG 2001

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Photo by Dan Burkholder

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

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LETTERS

Novel coverage

It never ceases to amaze me how, month after month, you come up with novel coverage of urgent and relevant topics. This one on the technobiology of food is so well done (it happens to be a concern of much interest to me), and the photographs are outstanding and touching.

Margaret Collins
Portland, OR

Resisting despair

Your last issue was so valuable! All of them are but I have been struggling with how not to be immobilized by despair, particularly as Bush unleashes his assault on all that I value.

Margaret Bresce
Marshfield, VT

Poster child for punishment

Thank you, Mr. Lowenstein, for this story. Tommy's spirit is intact [TW 3/01]. He has a friend and is beloved. He has been blessed. "Poster Boy for Punishment" is alliterative and compelling, but the real story is that he has been redeemed in large part by your love and commitment. Whether he is prisoner or freed man, he is redeemed.

It is a timely piece for me. At 46, the cumulative effect of crime is getting to me in the most existential way. I grew up in the city which boasted of its status as murder capital of America. By the time I was 30 I had known five human beings whose lives were taken by murderers, three randomly, one drug-related, and one domestic. By the time I was 40 my life had been fractured by the violent break-in and subsequent shooting by police of a 16-year-old boy. I had already experienced the terror of an attacker's break-in as a young woman in law school. As a lawyer, my office received bomb threats from an employee's angry husband. I neither sought nor invited any of these experiences. Victimhood is not a club anyone wishes to join EVER. Our society hates weakness. We like tough people, crim-

inals who stand up to "cops" and the criminal justice system and vice versa — thus the celebration of the criminal world in movies and television. We like stories of victims who publicly outpour forgiveness and get on with it, whatever it is. Per your story, the true victim is the perpetrator drugged and savage, the perpetrator tried and convicted. The rest of us have to keep our lower brain-stems in check and our mouths shut. We get to read about the redemption of killers and the uncivilized "vengeance" of the victims' rights movement and their "heinous" re-interpretation of the crimes committed. I do not see any compassion for the survivors in your work, those whose blood gets super-injected with adrenalin without warning at the emergence of the memory. (But I understand. When I see these angry people on television, even I have to look away.)

I am saddened but, on the other side, you make me care about Tommy. Whether I could care about the one who killed Helen or the one who killed Tracy, I don't think so. I saw their parents and grandparents at the funerals. Their sisters and brothers and friends. Can anyone pay that price in one lifetime? The ones who killed Eddie are unknown to me. The ones who killed Paul and Blair are themselves dead, a much neater solution — moving on is so much simpler. Parole hearings cut deep into old wounds.

Who should be the Poster Boy for Punishment? I don't know much about the victims' rights movement, but shouldn't they have any? We work to rehabilitate the killer, this is good, but where are the funds for treatment of the wounded? Tommy could buy typewriters for his cellmate. His victims could buy nothing for nobody, but really, is there any amount of money that could stop that terror, that torture that began the night he picked up his gun?

Dear Tommy, go in peace. Return no one evil for evil. If the system has made you a whole and heroic man, amen.

Dona E. Bolding
(via the Internet)

Most every issue of *The Witness* is about “reimagining faith and action,” but this month we’ve decided to face the topic head-on. In both church and society, the times seem to be calling Christians of a liberal/radical stripe to speak out and act up on behalf of all that they hold holy — without apology and without fear that our openmindedness may seem intellectually lightweight, that our theological questioning will be accused of masking disloyalty to our Christian identity, that our belief that someone on “the right” could possibly have a valid perspective will be mistaken for spinelessness.

Progressives, more than most, understand that reimagining faith and action is a continual process, called for by the unavoidable fact that each new day is, well, a new day. Yesterday’s absurdities have a way of becoming today’s realities.

Our vocation is a vital one for both church and world. In our hope to be truthful to ourselves and one another about the signs of the holy we detect, we find ourselves constantly, if sometimes timidly, stepping outside the theological, political and institutional boxes that confine and oppress.

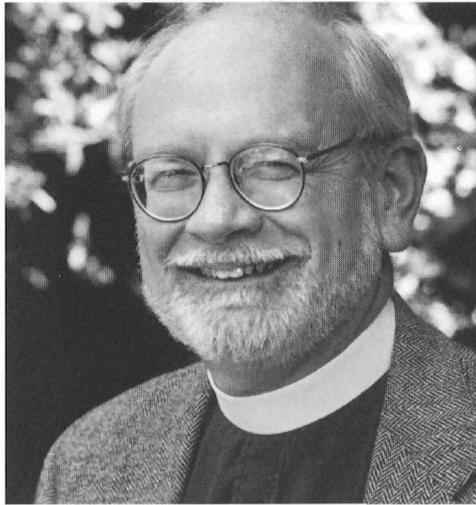
In the process, we make complacency impossible. In the process, we are changing the world. ●

— Julie A. Wortman, editor/publisher

Thanks to Brooks Jensen and LensWork for help in obtaining much of the fine art photography in this issue (www.lenswork.com).

Rediscovering a passionate,

by L. William Countryman



PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY in our time has emerged through two related but distinct processes. One is a process of paring away: Christians, over the last couple of centuries, have realized that many elements of our Western culture are not essential to — or even compatible with — Christian life and belief, and we have sought to shed them. We have looked hard at the false claims of government absolutism, of slavery, of racism, misogyny and homophobia and have rejected them.

The other process has been one of refocusing. Here the question isn’t, “What is extraneous to our faith?” but, “Where is its center?” Our answers take different forms, but, eventually, they come back to the way Jesus united, in both his life and teaching, the two commandments to love God and to love neighbor.

The two processes may produce related results, but they are not identical. One prunes the excess at the peripheries; the other is looking for the root or fountainhead of our faith. Many of us who claim the name of progressive Christians are probably more comfortable with the pruning shears than with the dowsing rod, clearer about what we

don’t believe than about what we do.

Therein, I suspect, lies much of the sense of uncertainty that has hovered over progressive Christianity for the past generation. We have seen how establishments, whether medieval aristocracy or contemporary plutocracy, whether patriarchy or a dominant race or class, have repeatedly invoked Christianity to justify their sins. We are clear that we need to reject this entanglement of Christian faith with the *status quo*. But simply to reject is not enough. Rejection does not inspire hope or love or delight or even intellectual coherence.

The real reason why progressive Christianity exists is not to prune away archaisms and false accretions. It exists — the Spirit calls it into being — to be an authentic gospel voice, to proclaim the good news of Jesus’ life and teaching. Why do we resist the marginalizing effects of racism or sexism or heterosexism? Because they are no longer necessary in our enlightened age? No. Our “enlightened” age has been the bloodiest in history. We reject them because Jesus has given us a vision of a humanity united to God and to one another in the profound respect and sense of kinship we call by the name of love!

This insight and conviction is what guides us even as we enter more deeply into inter-faith dialogue and cooperation. We become engaged with people of other faiths not because we suppose that Christian faith is unimportant, but precisely because our Christian faith requires us to act out the good news of Jesus by loving and respecting all our neighbors. To do so does not relativize our faith or make it generic and colorless. To the contrary, by expressing our faith, it adds new energy to it.

Sometimes progressive Christians shy away from clear and strong statements of faith for fear of falling back into the old, smug exclusivism that so long allowed the

converted Christian faith

pious of the Western world to look down on everyone else. Perhaps we are afraid of having a passionate, converted Christian faith because we worry that it will turn out just as strident and exclusivist as earlier versions of our tradition.

Well, it may. There is no human way to guarantee against it. But for progressive Christians, the future lies with our willingness to own up to the depth of our own convictions, to proclaim the good news without fear, to live as people deeply touched by the Spirit's power for change — even as we insist on shedding the oppressive distortions that our religious predecessors have sometimes fallen into. Progressive Christianity isn't about indif-

ference or bland tolerance. It's about the rediscovery of the fountainhead, the center. In Jesus' teaching and practice of love, humanity is called to a love affair with God and a new kind of community with one another.

Whenever Christians rediscover this center, they produce not mere revisions or readjustments of Christianity, but reformations. What the great saints of the past did out of the depth of their experience and convictions, we are called to do today. Not that our reformation will look exactly like those of Benedict or Francis or the Beguines — or of Martin Luther or Martin Luther King, Jr. Every reformation has to address the time and place of its own occurrence.

Our challenge and our calling is to discover the Spirit's gifts of reformation in our own time. If progressive Christianity is to fulfill its vocation from God, we will do it by opening up about our faith and joining together to live it out. The faith God has awakened in us is a gift for the world. It makes possible a life of love and hope, of trust and justice; and we will be happy to invite (never to command!) all humanity to join in as the Spirit calls them and makes it possible. ●

L. William Countryman is Professor of Old Testament at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, Calif.



Timothy Whelan

With dreadful Rift: from the mid-Deep, appears,
 Surge after Surge, the rising, wat'ry, War.
 Whitening, the angry Billows rowl immense,
 And roar their Terrors, thro' the shuddering Soul
 Of feeble Man, amidst their Fury caught,
 And, dash'd upon his Fate: Then, o'er the Cliff
 Where dwells the *Sea-Mew*, unconfin'd, they
 And, hurrying, swallow up the steril Shore

THE Mountain growls; and all its sturdy Sons
 Stoop to the Bottom of the Rocks they shade
 Lone, on its Midnight-Side, and all aghast
 The dark, way-faring, *Strangers*,
 And climbs against the Blast
 Low, waves the rooted Forest, vex'd, and
 What of its leafy Honours yet remains.
 Thus, struggling thro' the dissipat'd Grove,
 The whirling Tempest raves along the Plain;
 And, on the Cottage thacht, or lordly Dome,
 Keen-fastening, shakes 'em to the solid Base.
Sleep, frighted, flies; the hollow Chimney howls,
 The Windows rattle, and the Hinges creak.

THEN, too, they say, thro' all the burthen'd Air,
 Long Groans are heard, shrill Sounds, and distant Sighs,
 That, murmur'd by the *Demon* of the Night
 Warn the devoted *Wretch*. of Woe, and
 Wild Up roar lords it wide: the Cloud

With Stars, swift-gliding, sweep along the Sky.
 All Nature's — But hark! the *Almighty* speaks:
 In Nature, the hidden Storm begins to pant,
 And die away, into a noiseless Calm.

As 'tis Midnight's Reign; the weary Clouds,
 meeting, mingle into solid Gloom:
 Now, while the dreary World lies lost in Sleep,
 yet to associate with the low-brow'd *Night*,
 in *contemplation*, her fedate Compeer;
 shake off th' intrusive Cares of Day,
 and lay the meddling senses all aside.

And now, ye lying *Vanities* of Life!
 You ever-tempting, ever-cheating Train!
 Where are you now! and what is your Amount?
 Vexation, Disappointment, and Remorse.
 Sad, sickening, Thought! and yet, deluded Man,
 A Scene of wild, disjointed, Visions past,
 And broken Slumbers, rises, still resolv'd,
 With new-flush'd Hopes, to run your giddy Round.

FATHER of Light, and Life! Thou *Good Supreme*!
 O! teach me what is Good! teach me thy self!
 Save me from Folly, Vanity and Vice,
 From every low Pursuit! and feed my Soul,
 With Knowledge, conscious Peace, and Vertue pure,
 Sacred, substantial, never-fading Blifs!

D

Lo!



COMING INTO POWER

Taking theology to the streets

by Irene Monroe

In the 1960s and 1970s, we African Americans got our news concerning black people from three main sources: the black church, the black newspapers and the streets. Believed to be much more reliable than television's ABC evening news and white newspapers like the *New York Post* and the *New York Times*, the streets were usually where we heard or saw the news first. In my home of segregated Brooklyn, N.Y., in fact, the streets functioned as a multi-layered site where African Americans transacted their business, interacted socially and were mobilized for action. So, coming from a black urban tradition, I grew up on the streets and was educated by them.

In African-American urban communities the streets have always been the site for radical change and the stage for subversive public discourse. Weekly, in the protest era of the 1960s, African Americans from all the five boroughs in New York City would travel to Harlem to hear street ministers, street intellectuals, street politicians and African-American *griots* (oral historians) give their public addresses at the well-known street site of UCLA, the University on the Corner at Lennox Avenue. With no walls to lean on, no chairs to sit in and, oftentimes, with no podium for the speakers to speak from, UCLA served as our public institution of higher education. The street, UCLA, provided a rich public discourse of black intellectual thought.

In African-American religious life, the streets have also been the stage for Christian social protest and public theology. The black civil rights movement picked up its momentum and received worldwide attention when African-American preachers moved their members from their church pews to the picket lines. The world not only got to see an African-American Christian social ethic in practice, but it also got to hear a black public theology espoused by Martin Luther King, Jr. On the first day of the Montgomery Bus Boycott on December 5, 1955, King espoused his views on the requisite conditions for black activism: "Freedom is never given to anybody! For the oppressor has you in domination because he plans to keep you there! And he never voluntarily gives it up. We've got to keep on keepin' on in order to gain freedom. It is not done voluntarily. It is done through the pressure that comes about from people who are oppressed. Privileged classes never give up their privilege without strong resistance."

To the general public, the streets are commonly thought of as the site for rioting. Demonized for much of the violence that does take place there, marginal-



ized people's street riots are organic revolutionary forms of social justice where they come into their own power. New York City's Greenwich Village LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgendered) community learned that on the night of June 27, 1969. Little would the patrons of the Stonewall Inn, a predominately African-American and Latino LGBT working-class bar, know that those two nights of rioting — June 27–29 — would spark the advent of our queer liberation movement. On the last day of the street riots, crowds gathered outside the Stonewall Inn to assess the damage and to read the graffiti sprawled on its bricks — “Legalize Gay Bars” and “Support Gay Power.” Such were the earliest expressions of Queer public theology.

Theologies of the dispossessed

Public theologies emerge from street people. Public theologies are also liberating theologies, because they emerge from those people at the bottom and at the fringes of life. Theologian Robert McAfee Brown in *Liberation Theology* (1993) points out that “the starting point for liberation theology is not at all the topics theologians write about, but [it is] the here-and-nowness of what is happening on street corners or at soup kitchens.” These theologies are about the dispossessed, the disinherited, the disrespected and the damned. They are expressions of the life of God's people. And, while not all street people are people of faith and many live secular lives, theology is not restricted or privatized to only those in seminaries, churches or who acknowledge a living God. Theology is about the whole of life and the whole of life encompasses both its sacred and public spheres. As Massachusetts' Episcopal bishop, M. Thomas Shaw, has pointed out, “our public life is very much a part of our [religious] journey.” (See “Walking the God-talk in politics today: resurrecting a public theology,” *TW* 9/00.) Street people may have been forced to the public margins of society — the streets — but their social loca-

tion and lived experiences as individuals and as communities bump up against existing structures and systems of domination and call into question the dominant culture's presumptions about the wholeness of life and the theological underpinnings upon which they rest.

A prophetic call

Clearly, public theologies often emerge from a place of inhospitality and parochialism. Having neither a home in the church nor a place in the academy, these theologies emerge from the activism of indigenous people of and on the streets. Public theologies have a prophetic call in that they call attention to the present-day social injustices and institutional ills that bring about a particular people's forced eviction from the Kingdom of God. These public theologies are nagging reminders to the privileged that their churches and seminaries not only choke the spiritual lives of the oppressed, but also limit their theological view in seeing and knowing the various faces of God. These public theologies are, indeed, the authentic expressions of the life of God's people. And, while these public theologies reflect the unending struggle to give voice and visibility to those relegated to the margins of society, these theologies also reflect the joy and celebration in the daily lives of its people of and on the streets.

When churches work, they ground the spiritual wanderer. They embrace the ecclesiastically shy. They bring in the unchurched and they uphold the Christian mission to welcome in all of God's children.

However, when churches lose their prophetic call, they open themselves not only to the charge of inhospitality, but also to the charge of parochialism. Theology in these churches, unfortunately, becomes ecclesiastical articulations of the *status quo*, where the Bible functions as their legitimating talking-book. Religious intolerance masks spiritual abuse and patriarchal clericalism masks structural oppressions, so that these holy places of worship actually

become sites of ritualized violence.

Seminaries lose their prophetic call when they address only the academy, or only the institutional interests of their denominational churches. These seminaries may occasionally glance at the world, but they never fully engage themselves in it. Their efforts to teach cultural and ethnic diversity — a diversity which is seldom reflected in their faculties or student bodies — mask, at best, their anemic attempt to be politically correct and, at worse, their academic arrogance to exclude from their folds the very people theological education ought to be about. Theologies emerging out of these seminaries, unfortunately, become inauthentic expressions of the life of God's people.

While it is easy to see how the economic disadvantage based on structural racial bias leads peoples of color to the streets, it is less obvious how many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are forced to become street people. Abandoned by family and friends because of our sexual orientation, many of us have only the streets. And many religious lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are spiritually homeless in that we have been evicted from our faith communities. Oftentimes we find ourselves on the streets of gay enclaves searching for the spiritual community we lost since being excommunicated by our faith communities. And, while many of us have found spiritual refuge in queer alternative churches like Metropolitan Community Church, Dignity, and Unity Fellowship, many of us nonetheless miss our home churches.

Because the streets are the harsh reality of both homelessness and joblessness, many of us LGBT people who are in seminaries or in schools of theological study reside in the closet until after tenure or ordination. However, even once out of the closet, many of us do not necessarily preach, teach, write or advocate from the social location of being queer because the streets can still be a place where we end up if we do so.

Coming out as a public theologian

Because I am an open lesbian, I have not found a home church in my faith tradition of the black church from which to do AIDS ministry. Nor have I located an academic base where I can do queer theology because it is not yet, in the eyes of many academicians, a legitimate theology. So I have found a home and my ministry/life's work on the streets, with Boston's LGBT communities. The foundation for my life's work is in what Jesus said in Matthew 25:45: "In truth I tell you, in so far as you failed to do it for the least of these, however insignificant, you failed to do it for me." Therefore, in wanting to be a practitioner of applied Christianity and to do a "theology-in-praxis," I realized my work would be primarily a public theology.

As I came out as a lesbian to myself and to my church, my theological voice shifted. Where as a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York I was just focused on black church women, as a doctoral student at Harvard Divinity School my attention was drawn to the civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. At Harvard, too, I combined journalism with my area of study, enabling me to develop a strong focus on religion in the news. As a result, in this era of the Christian Right, one of my outreach ministries is my two religion columns — "The Religion Thang," for *In Newsweekly*, a LGBT newspaper that circulates widely throughout the New England states, and a monthly column online, "Queer Take," for *The Witness* (see www.thewitness.org).

Because homophobia is both a hatred of LGBT people and a stance that is usually taken "in the name of religion," my reporting has been about exposing how Christianity has shaped the theological and moral view of us LGBT people. Also, because Christianity impacts both our secular and religious lives, my columns try to inform my audience of the role religion plays in all forms of discrimination — in

racism, sexism, anti-semitism and homophobia. My advocacy approach is to inform and to inspire my LGBT readers in a way that will bring them to the full understanding of the enormity religion plays in our lives, whether we are practicing atheists or recovering Christians, and how both religious intolerance and fundamentalism not only shatter the goal of American democracy, but also foster a climate of spiritual abuse that restrains the authentic expressions of the life of God's people.

By reporting religion in the news, I aim to bring theological discourse outside the restricted confines of the classroom and the church and into the streets. In the process, I am making this theological discourse accountable to a population of people. Liberation theology can only have integrity if it is done in tandem with a struggling community.

Writing: public theology activism

Writing has always been associated with the work of academicians, theologians and journalists, not activists. But writing to right a wrong, and writing for social justice is also the work of a public theology.

Much that is written about LGBT people is by heterosexuals. And whether it is in newspapers, magazines, movies or on television, that writing cannot escape misinformation or stereotypes. Much of who we are is seen and written through a complicated prism of homophobia that projects and condones lies, fears and violence perpetrated upon us for the holy sake of moral virtue and family values.

For my African ancestors, writing became a subversive tool, particularly in a Western culture that did not value the veracity of their lives told in an oral tradition. Writing allowed my ancestors to tell and to compile the stories of their lives as a sacred text. Hence, writing also makes visible, at least in print, those lives that are too often, with intent, omitted — especially the lives of street people. Therefore, writing is a political necessity.

For LGBT people, writing from their

social location is not only a radically queer act, but also a subversive tool to de-center the centrality of the traditional theological canon in this society that values and lauds the writings by and about heterosexuals as normative. By our writings we create a counter voice — a text and knowledge that becomes a tool that not only gives us a voice, but also gives us power.

LGBT writers, journalists, theologians and activists *should* write because our lives depend on it. We should write because not to write would cause us to participate in our own death. We should write because those behind us, our progeny, will need it. We should write because our opuses become a canon for survival, and our holy bible. And we should write because we know our lives are sacred texts. Writing in this sense becomes both an act of liberation and of social activism which is the work of a public theology.

Bringing the street into the fold

In order for our churches and seminaries to step into the new millennium with a prophetic call, they must include in their folds those of us who are out on the streets. Their theologies must become "theologies-in-praxis," applied Christianity that reaches the academy, the church and the public. The church and the academy must have an on-going relationship with each other and with the public that looks at reality from an involved, committed stance in light of a faith that does justice. Only then will the charges of inhospitality and parochialism be dropped from many of our churches and seminaries, and only then can both accurately reflect the authentic expressions of the lives of all of God's people. ●

Irene Monroe is a Ford Foundation Fellow and doctoral candidate at Harvard Divinity School where she is the head teaching fellow for The Rev. Peter Gomes. Her 'Queer Take' columns are a regular feature at <www.thewitness.org>.

'FAITH IS A WORK



Pamela Ellis Hawkes

OF IMAGINATION'

An interview with Alan Jones

by Julie A. Wortman

ALAN JONES is Dean of Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco, a place of wide-ranging and creative spiritual and theological exploration. The Forum at Grace provides “civil conversation on critical issues,” often tapping the views and gifts of high-profile scholars, authors, activists and performers like Mickey Hart (former drummer with The Grateful Dead), Huston Smith and Jane Goodall (www.GraceCathedral.org/webcast/forum/). Jones’ many books include *Living the Truth*, *Exploring Spiritual Direction*, *The Soul’s Journey*, *Passion for Pilgrimage*, *Journey into Christ* and *Soul-making: The Desert Way*.

Julie Wortman: You’ve been engaged in a project of “re-imagining Christianity.” I’m wondering if that has anything to do with the future direction of “progressive” Christianity? I’m thinking here of the brand of Christianity that is rooted in liberation theology and a justice orientation.

Alan Jones: Well, when the revolution comes, I will be with the progressives. But I will be very reluctant in that, I think. My quarrel with some progressives or liberals is that there’s an absence of astonishment or wonder in their approach to faith. I know that’s a blanket statement, but, in general, progressivism is a rationalist, we-know-what-justice-is approach. But faith is a work of imagination before it is a set of beliefs.

I’ll give you an example. People come in and say to me, “I really can’t believe in the virgin birth,” and I have to suppress a yawn, because that doesn’t interest me, even as a conversation. I want to say, “Let me show you a picture.” And I would get an icon of Mary and Jesus. And I’d say, “Now, just forget that that’s Mary. Forget that’s Jesus. Just look at a woman and a baby. Forget about Christianity, if you can. Just look at a woman with a baby — any woman,

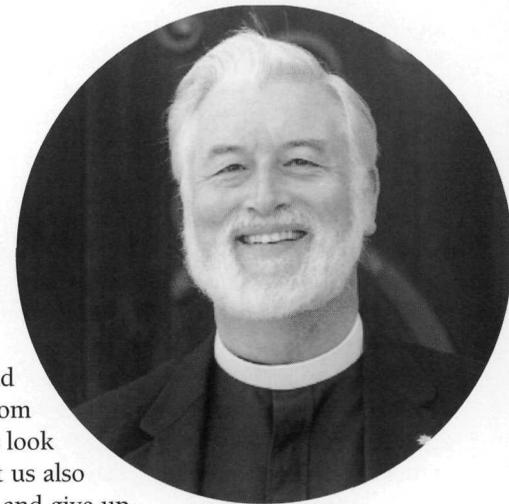
any baby, anywhere. A woman with a baby at the breast. Then ask yourself, ‘In light of that image, how should I behave? How should I be in the world?’”

I think it is important to try and get to a way of looking at things from an imaginative point of view. Let us look at the primordial images again. Let us also acknowledge that history is messy and give up the utopian vision that somehow we’re going to usher in a perfect church. Liberals and conservatives tend to want to be in the right, but in a messy history we often only have a choice between two evils.

For example, take the thorny issue of abortion. I find myself trying to be in conversation across the board. I am reluctantly for a liberal abortion law, but I would maintain that abortion is always wrong. Abortion isn’t the way it’s meant to be. But it’s the better of the two options under certain circumstances. Still, when feminists say a woman has a total right over her own body, I think that isn’t true. I don’t think anybody does. There’s no such thing as a private act. That is, totally private. Obviously, I’d say that in most circumstances like this the person may have 80 percent of the choice. But society has an interest in how we behave. All our choices have implications for other people. But I rarely see that as part of the conversation.

JW: It’s the difficulty of embracing ambiguity?

AJ: And sitting with it, because it’s human nature just to want to be totally in the right rather than saying, “This is where I stand now, and I’m going to choose this, and take the consequences, and repent as well.”



JW: You've said that Christians can't go forward in their spiritual journeys without the help of other religious traditions. What do you mean by that?

AJ: The split is not between the great traditions, but within them. Last night my wife and I had dinner with some leading Buddhists in California. We were talking about the emergence of, not American Buddhism, but American Buddhisms. They're going through all the upheavals that the churches are. But, at the same time, I could say that they're my church, because they're people I can trust, I feel safe with and we speak the same language. I feel I have more in common with a lot of my Buddhist and Jewish friends in San Francisco than I do with people who call themselves Christians.

I think the real question for us is: Do we really believe what we say we believe? For example, if we say that Jesus — and I'm going to say it as broadly as I can, to include as many people — shows us who God is, or what God is like, or what God does, then how would the Christian claims be pressed? In other words, if Jesus shows us that the divine is a self-emptying center, a self-giving love, how would Christians press their claims? Would they kill people? Would they lock people up? Would they consign people to hell? If in the beginning was the word, and that word is in every soul, what is the word from other religions to us?

It wouldn't hurt to try to tease out the political and social implications of what we say we believe about God. If we say that the Trinity is the celebration of radical unity and radical identity — that is, the unity of persons, but also with distinct identity — and that we're made after the image of this God, that is saying an awful lot. It says an awful lot about civil rights, about every human being having the right to a place at the table. It says that it isn't a kind of collectivism of Marxist communism, where you are sucked into the collective. And it isn't radical individualism, where we're all autonomous selves. But it is the struggle toward true communion, where every individual is celebrated in a community which is just and provides

the maximum opportunities for human flourishing. You could argue for all sorts of things, such as not cutting out arts programs in schools, when you begin by saying, "We are on the side of human flourishing."

But people say, "Oh, I can't believe in the Trinity." They won't do the hard work. And that's one of my quarrels with some progressives, that they chuck out everything without actually having thought about what it could mean, in a dynamic way, if you responded to it as a work of the imagination. If you took the Trinity as a work of the imagination, rather than clobbering people with a dogma that they can't even begin to talk about, you would come up with a very different kind of conversation.

JW: I like the way in which you talk about Christianity: "Christianity isn't an argument; it's a story."

AJ: It's not an argument. And God is not an idea. Not even a good one. God is not a concept. In other words, my first thing is wanting to talk to people not about God, but about their passions and their enthusiasms, about their fears, their moral imagination and their emotional life. I don't mean emotionalism, but I mean their life of affect in the world. And then we can give the word "God" some content. But sometimes we jump into God language far too prematurely.

JW: I recently read an essay by Hal Crowther in which he says that Annie Dillard's book, *For the Time Being*, offers a new theology for thinking Christians. He says, "The Book of Job is a rock that breaks all but the toughest Christians. Dillard's modest proposals, there's no hectoring or proselytizing in either of these books, offer the rest of us the way to steer around it. Acquit God of all charges. Strip him of the terror and testosterone of the Old Testament and the improbable tenderness of the New. Relieve poor God of the thankless task of loving, judging, rewarding and punishing the incorrigible race of men. Remove God from the center of the human dilemma and build him up along its edges with holy things we can feel and sense for ourselves. 'God,' Dillard writes, 'is

the awareness of the infinite in each of us.' 'Pantheism' is her word for it and she quotes a theologian who calls it 'the private view' of most Christian intellectuals today. It's the opposite of atheism because its successful practice requires constant spiritual vigilance: an eye peeled, an ear to the ground to detect the divine."

AJ: That's very good. God is not a project of the ego. Iris Murdoch, in one of her novels, says, "Everything we concoct about God is an illusion."

JW: Well, that makes me think about all the "orthodoxy" talk that has been occurring in Anglican Communion circles, especially on the part of certain conservative church leaders.

AJ: My test for somebody's orthodoxy is, "If you were in charge, would I be safe?" Or, "If you were in charge, would there be room for me?" For me, epistemology is not first about what can I know, in an intellectual sense; it's about who can I trust? What can I trust? And then, within a community of trust, we can argue and fight and scrap like mad about all sorts of issues because we are rescued from having to be in the right.

I would also say that we are struggling with a church that is largely unconscious. That is very painful for those of us who have crept a little bit — or stumbled — into consciousness. Bill Swing, our bishop here in the Diocese of California, preached a beautifully moving sermon this past Maundy Thursday for the clergy at what we call a Chrism Mass. He talked about his sympathy for Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, having to keep engaging other primates about gay and lesbian issues again and again, issues which some of us have left behind 20 or even 30 years ago. But there are people for whom this is raw material, where the Bible seems clear-cut. I no longer argue with them. I say, "You're talking about my friends. You're talking about people I know and work with every day. You're not talking about monsters. You're talking about my colleagues. And what you say simply isn't so."

But it must be so wearying for somebody like the presiding bishop — and God bless

him for it — to have to go over the same ground again and again with people whose consciousness is somewhere else, in a place we find both puzzling and unacceptable.

We must realize that the church becomes the playground for different levels of consciousness. And a person on one level cannot talk to people at another level. Huston Smith puts it well in *Why Religion Matters*. He says there's some merit in the traditional view, there's a merit in the modernist view, there's merit in the post-modernist view — and there are also weaknesses in each point of view. He pleads for a new conversation between all the levels at their positive points.

JW: Do you think that that's possible? What would that look like?

AJ: I think that's probably very, very difficult. I see it sometimes at Grace Cathedral, in that we will have a lot of traditional things going on. We have a traditional Eucharist on Sundays, with incense and great music. And on Sunday afternoon, we'll have Mickey Hart from the Grateful Dead doing a performance for Earth Day. And so we try and say, "Look, we don't want to trash history and say everything in the past is junk. We believe we're historical beings on the one hand, and yet we also believe in the openness of the spirit, God calling us into the future."

So I'm in a totally different world than Jack Spong [the retired Bishop of Newark]. And I don't find his Christianity very compelling or exciting. But he's obviously right about gay issues. He's obviously right, largely, about the New Testament. So here I am, wanting to get Jack Spong to appreciate High Mass, wanting him to appreciate that the medieval Christians weren't all stupid and that Thomas Aquinas actually had quite an intellect. And I'm wanting those things at the same time as I acknowledge the good things that Jack Spong has done to rescue some people from fundamentalism.

JW: You're dean of a cathedral and probably no one would disagree that Grace Cathedral is one of the liveliest cathedrals in the country, and maybe in the world, in terms of the

Spirituality in an age of consumerism

David Steindl-Rast, in one of his books on prayer, quotes from a poem by D.H. Lawrence: "All that matters is to be at one with the living God. To be a creature in the house of the God of Life."

This poem came to mind as I read *Witness* contributing editor Jay McDaniel's new book, *Living from the Center: Spirituality in an Age of Consumerism* (Chalice Press, St. Louis, 2000) — partly, perhaps, because McDaniel's book itself draws frequently on poetry; partly because McDaniel's worldview situates human beings firmly in relationship with all the creatures in the earth-household (a theme he has explored thoroughly in other works on ecotheology); but also, I think, because McDaniel has written a book about "all that matters."

What matters, McDaniel proposes, is to "live from the center," available to the creative, healing energies of "God's Breathing" in us, around us and through us. To do this, he believes, it is not necessary to call God by any particular name or affirm any particular set of doctrines. A worldview is important only in its capacity "to point beyond itself to a world beyond words in which the Spirit is present," and to enable us to live in greater wisdom, compassion and freedom.

Much of this work is given to examining traditional spiritual themes — sacramental awareness, openness to grace, living-by-dying, faith — against the backdrop of the consumer culture which surrounds us. McDaniel's intended audience is widely inclusive and the book contains a special welcome to the skeptic.

McDaniel offers a clear and accessible introduction to the key ideas of process theology that undergird his approach. I suspect that others who, like myself, have little knowledge of this field would be surprised by how many of its tenets have emerged in our collective religious consciousness and ring both familiar and true: "The universe is an interconnected web of life." "All creatures in the universe have their own inner aliveness and each living being has its own intrinsic value." "All creatures are immanent within one another, even as they transcend one another." "God feels the feelings of all creatures, sharing in their sufferings and joys."

Process theology, according to McDaniel, views God as the Lure toward fullness of life for each creature at every moment. *Living from the Center* reads more like a lure than a sermon. It is not a raging denunciation of consumerism; even McDaniel's imaginative portrayal of "Jesus at the Mall" portrays a Christ who is broken-hearted rather than angry. But in its gentle invitation to consider, in Mary Oliver's words, what each of us will do with our "one wild and precious life," it is a book that can offer support and encouragement on the spiritual path, even to those who find themselves outside traditional religious frameworks.

— Marianne Arbogast, Associate Editor

Living from the Center



Spirituality
In an Age of
Consumerism

JAY MCDANIEL

sheer variety of things going on and the kinds of conversations happening at all different levels. I think about that, and then I think about this current drive in the church, or this current obsession in the church, around something called “20/20,” a resolution that came out of the Episcopal Church’s General Convention last year committing the church to double its baptized membership by the year 2020. It’s been estimated that this would require the so-called “planting” of 2,500 new congregations during the next 20 years. So this would be a massive effort. I personally can’t think of anything more unappealing. I find the church’s congregational focus generally unappealing. When I think in terms of the kind of church life I *would* find appealing, it’s something that’s more like a cathedral, or the potential of a cathedral like Grace and other places where they allow themselves to be many different things.

AJ: What worries me about this 20/20 project is that there isn’t an understanding that there’s got to be a revolution in the whole life of the church if it’s to expand. The parochial model, as currently understood, is unworkable. It’s unworkable financially as well as spiritually. I like a cathedral because it is a community of communities. It is a 10-ring circus. And it is meant to be, with room for the traditional and room for the innovative, and room for all sorts of experimentation. What I try to do is first build trust so that we can risk things. Then we can make mistakes, and say, “Well, we won’t do that again; it didn’t work.” But it is important to be able to risk.

Another aspect of this is that the evidence is that denominational loyalty is weakening. Not just with us, but with everybody. I recently read that 80 percent of Australian Roman Catholics don’t practice their religion. So, thinking of this 20/20 effort, how would you expand an institutional church where the denominational loyalty is weak? There’s an old adage: Pursue integrity and identity will follow. That is, let us do what we think is right as humbly as we can. Then we’ll find out who we are. Then we either grow or we don’t. But who cares?

As I’ve traveled around the church, I’ve found that a lot of clergy are in a low-grade depression. And they interpret that as faithfulness, which is very, very sad. There is also an absence of passion. There’s an absence of passion around the intellectual life, too. When I talk about the recovery of the life of the imagination, I’m also pleading for what we used to call the feeling intellect, not cold rationalism, but the feeling intellect, where ideas matter and we can argue. I’d love to be in a church where we could argue more rather than demonize each other.

In England, when I taught in theological college, we had a discipline of Morning Prayer and the Eucharist. It was a small faculty and our theological arguments were passionate and fiery and yet we knew we’d show up together the next morning for that expression of solidarity and silence. But we would be able to argue and enjoy each other in a way that I haven’t experienced in this country for a long time.

JW: To which of the communities at Grace do you belong?

AJ: I don’t look to the church for community, though I know that a lot of people do. My community was at dinner last night, with my Buddhist friends. It could be people who support the Museum of Modern Art. My community — my intellectual and spiritual community — transcends the church. What I look for in the church is the connection with my symbolic and imaginative life and the rituals and sacraments to maintain a rich symbolic connection to things. A lot of people, I think, look to the church for that as well.

JW: It sounds to me like you are saying that you’re looking to the church to help you keep your focus?

AJ: That’s right.

JW: To keep your sense of ...

AJ: ... my sense of what really matters. And to help me with a sense of the transcendent. A lot of churches are warm, fuzzy places of community with no sense of the mystery — back to my issue of astonishment. We have one fixed altar at Grace Cathedral and it’s wonderful for me once a week to celebrate the Eucharist not facing the people. A lot of my liturgical friends would say, “Just as we suspected, Jones, you really are a reactionary.” But it’s very good, occasionally, for all of us to be facing one way, looking up at something above and beyond us, as well as inside us. The community gathered around the table is an important image, but another important image is the community actually transcending itself and becoming more than the sum of its parts. And then that should be an inspiration for action in the world. I think the old transcendence is not going to do, either, but whenever you come up with a program of liturgical practice you’ve got to be careful of what you’re throwing out. ●

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

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A declaration of conscience ... to end poverty for workers

by Dick Gillett

AN INTERFAITH INITIATIVE directed to elected officials in the city of Los Angeles is calling for a fundamental reordering of the city's economic development priorities toward benefiting the working poor. Titled "To Fulfill the Dream: An End to Poverty for Workers," the Declaration of Conscience, as it is called, proposes six policy recommendations to be required of developers when they come to the city seeking financial subsidies.

Such exhortations by the religious community are, of course, not uncommon; but they are frequently treated as well-intended, but ineffective, religious pronouncements. But the context of the L.A. Declaration, and a concerted moral and political strategy to put the policy principles into effect, make the Declaration worth watching closely here.

Like most large urban centers in the U.S., Los Angeles is a city of stark contrasts in wealth and poverty. But, for various reasons, including L.A.'s fast-growing and vulnerable immigrant population, the rich-poor gap here is extreme. A comprehensive study last August by the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy found that the number of working poor in L.A. County increased over the last decade by 34 percent (in roughly the same period, Los Angeles added about 2,100 new millionaires).

Nonetheless, several very hopeful developments have been occurring in L.A. over the last five years. First, a reinvigorated labor movement has been successfully organizing low-wage workers (overwhelmingly minorities and women). A strike last year by about 8,000 janitors tied up the city for three weeks. Receiving widespread religious and public support, the janitors won their strike overwhelmingly.

Secondly, organized labor, community groups and the religious community, having

first worked together back in 1997 to pass a landmark living-wage ordinance, now frequently strategize together.

Third, the originator of the Declaration of Conscience, Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), has become a prominent player in the push for dignity, respect and a living wage for low-wage workers. Formed back in 1996, CLUE, a group with strong Episcopal Church participation from the outset, cut its teeth in working for the 1997 ordinance. In early April of this year, CLUE turned out over 200 clergy and laity to march in support of hotel workers in Santa Monica.

Six recommendations

Each year the city gives hundreds of millions of dollars in public monies as incentives to corporations and developers to do business in Los Angeles. There are about 18 such large development projects pending over the next two to three years. When CLUE made the Declaration public in March, each of the city's mayoral candidates and those running for L.A. city council seats were asked to endorse it. Its six policy recommendations:

- Require full compliance by developers and their sub-contractors with all provisions of existing living-wage ordinances and commit to raising eventually the living-wage level to 200 percent of the current federal poverty level, or \$33,000/year for a family of four (the present L.A. ordinance sets a wage of \$8.97/hr.).
- In new projects, require local hiring, with a priority to hire low-wage workers.
- Strictly enforce the city's worker-retention ordinance, which mandates that workers be retained for 90 days when a city contract changes hands.
- Promote workers' rights to organize a

union and bargain effectively.

- Require that developers provide a licensed child-care facility at affordable cost for their workers near the development site.
- Offer job-training programs to upgrade worker skills for workers employed by their project.

In response to this letter to the politicians, the two runoff candidates for mayor of Los Angeles, plus 21 candidates for city council seats in the June municipal election endorsed the Declaration. In the coming months and beyond, when the developers come before the new mayor and city council to promise jobs and prosperity for Los Angeles — and ask for huge subsidies and contracts — we will be able to remind our elected officials that they signed the Declaration and that large numbers of religious leaders in Los Angeles and members of their congregations will, if necessary, come to City Hall to help these officials keep their promise. Over 180 religious leaders, including all three of Los Angeles' diocesan bishops and about 30 Episcopal clergy plus other Christian, Jewish and Muslim representatives, have thus far signed the document. ●

Dick Gillett is Minister for Social Justice in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles and a member of CLUE's board of directors.

See our website for a report
by Ethan Flad on April's
Progressive Religious
Partnership meeting in
Washington, D.C.
www.thewitness.org



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NATURAL RESOURCES

Tradition without orthodoxy

by J. Rebecca Lyman

LAST YEAR I bought a satisfyingly heavy tome by Cheryl Mendelson entitled, *Home Comforts: The Art and Science of Keeping House*. Mendelson confessed herself to be of rural background, and the keeper of many lost traditions of housewifery. A child of rural grandmothers myself, but feeling rather deficient in the area of household management, I bought a copy and spent an enjoyable hour reading. Never had I loved housework so much as when I found it rationalized, and marshaled into an authoritative and accessible text!

Housekeeping, of course, has everything to do with theology, which, as we know is the art and science of creating routine, order, pleasure and safety out of the dangerous, chaotic and delightful existence we share with God and each other. As Mendelson points out, “The way you experience life in your home is determined by how you do your housekeeping.” The way we experience our daily existence is equally determined by how we do our theology. Jesus may have used parables of sweeping and lamp-keeping to describe life in the reign of God, but until now most theologians have had either too little experience or interest in ordinary physical routines to repeat the metaphors.

Recovery of ordinary experience

Post-modernity, if you can still bear the phrase, has led to the rehabilitation of the material and concrete, our acceptance, if not expectation, of diversity — and our recovery, therefore, of neglected and silenced voices. To speak of ordinary experience is simply the only way to begin to understand who we may

be, both in ourselves and in relation to others.

So theology, it seems to me, has been delivered back into flesh and history, back into what, in her poem, “Natural Resources,” Adrienne Rich calls, “The enormity of the simplest things:\ — a universe of humble things,\ and without these, no memory\ no faithfulness, no purpose for the future\ no honor to the past.”

Such humble history has always been problematic for theological schemes. I don’t need to argue for the multiplicities of experience which history reveals: Quakers and Anglicans tell very different stories about the Restoration. I also don’t need to wax nostalgic about the retrieval of the ordinary. Most of the sources and voices have been ignored or suppressed. They do not need intellectuals to call them into existence to give their lives meaning. It is rather their daily living which has supported everything else.

Who, then, preserves the continuity of faith?

“Natural Resources” I define as this basic reality of human existence, our lives as embodied, individual creatures of God. This resource transcendent orthodoxy could not and cannot embrace. “There are words I cannot choose again,” writes Rich. “Such words have no shame in them, no diffidence\ before the raging stoic grandmothers: ... My heart is moved by all I cannot save\ So much has been destroyed\ I have to cast my lot with those\ who age after age, perversely,\ with no extraordinary power\ reconstitute the world.”

“Orthodoxy” is a word we cannot choose again as the current intellectual and social landslide brings the raging stoic grandmoth-

ers face-to-face with the Fathers of the Church.

In my complacent liberal piety, “orthodoxy” seemed to me for a long time to be a harmless artifact, rather like a chasuble, which reminded us of the past in aesthetically pleasing, but largely irrelevant, ways. Yet, my condescension and others’ rush to old norms are part of the same cognitive and emotional binary landscape of orthodoxy: To avoid extinction or dilution, we seek to define the one true faith — and how can our particular group still define itself as best of all? Often we Christians talk about ourselves and God as if we were the lead actors in a complex drama with badly behaved supporting actors, e.g., Jews, pagans, Hindus, Muslims and heretics. For the most part we have labeled others to identify what we are not: The Jews are the stubbornly “chosen people” — not us. The Muslims are violently exclusive — not us. Pagans are superstitious and syncretistic — not us. Heretics are systematic and overzealous — not us.

Tradition rendered transcendent

How did we get to this? As Daniel Boyarin suggests in his book, *A Radical Jew*, Paul’s vision of universality which included all people — Jews, Greeks, women, slaves — was based on transcending physical particularities in a new community. However, what could such radically inclusive universality rest on, if not singularity? Baptismal unity thus stood in stark contrast to the divided world, yet this transcendent universality naturally defined difference itself as opposition, especially in the context of persecution and apocalyptic

beliefs. By the time of Augustine, all humanity could be divided into two cities: “In the wide world inhabited by so many different peoples with divergent religions and manners, infinitely divided in their language and clothing, there have, nevertheless, always been no more than two kinds of groups of human beings, which we can call two cities.”

Contextually, Paul and Augustine are giving explanations for their religious practice: They are creating “tradition.” But their voices usually come to us out of context, as disembodied texts of a transcendent truth and we forget that, in reality, historical life and religious identity were a mess: The grandmothers went to synagogues for centuries, read all sorts of texts and led lives not entirely determined by official speech. Christians read a Hebrew bible, wear Late Roman vestments, argue in Greek metaphysics and preserve European goddess festivals. This is okay, but just don’t lie about it.

Ensuring identity and truth

As a Christian, I do believe that “We’ve a story to tell to the nations.” But there are historical and theological consequences of how we tell our story about our devotion to Jesus as the decisive revelation of God. In the discourse of transcendent orthodoxy our proclaimed singularity has for the most part hampered inter-faith dialogue, prompted us to lie about our origins, and made the reality of our own interior diversity hell.

Historically, “orthodoxy” emerged from the 2nd century to the 5th century as a powerful means of ensuring identity and truth in the midst of sectarian conflict and state persecution. Diversity is not denied in orthodoxy, but it is disciplined by hierarchy. “Orthodoxy” ordered the “traditions,” i.e., the oral and written stories about Jesus, and tested the “authority” of individuals who claimed to be “apostolic.” I am not sure the varied urban centers of Christian mission needed “orthodoxy” to survive. Orthodoxy flowered, I believe, because within Roman culture itself unity and diversity were threatening spiritual and political issues. The yearning for a unity on a human scale to match the transcendent God and the perfect peaceful order of the cosmos was shared by many. If tradition is the

“passing on” of faith or story, orthodoxy is the codification of a certain telling of the story — what may be included, what must be left out.

Thus, ancient “orthodoxy” thrived, I believe, not merely because of imperial power — it would be nice to blame it all on politics — but because its transcendent, hierarchical ordering mirrored the hopes of the urban patriarchal churches to stabilize human experience and mediate the divine mystery. Because everyone believed in an underlying Platonic unity, the few, fragile words of the creeds — themselves the products of compromise — were enforced as the necessary signifier of the higher One. Orthodoxy, defined as eternal and unchanging, ensured differing classes, races, places and even theological opinions held together on earth as it was held together in heaven. Heresy was rebellion against God and the community, a willful destruction of saving truth.

The problem with this theological picture, of course, is history — I have yet to find one willful heretic; most “wrong” people were struggling with new questions of belief and practice. Yet, to preserve the unchanging transcendent truth, “orthodoxy” must lie about motivation or content and create the “dead wrong” to highlight its “living truth.” As one scholar, now bishop, said to me, “It doesn’t matter historically what the heretics actually taught — it is all a foil to create orthodoxy.”

So our peace of Christ rests on constant policing of demonic error which may not have existed? The temptations of this sacred binary view coupled with institutional power can defeat even the best of our born-again saints: If Augustine of Hippo, the doctor of grace, can justify coercion to end controversy in the church, we are all in trouble.

Without the diverse, articulate voices of the urban Greek East, orthodoxy in the West soon became obedience to the sole apostolic church, Rome. We paraphrase Foucault that “orthodoxy became the prison of the church” as theologians and believers alike were warned of the ease of error: The unin-sulated wires of heaven can burn without ecclesiastical electricians.

True consensus fidelium

Wait, you say, what about all that stuff out on

the fringes, those monks in tubs, the mystics, or Gregory the Great using pagan sites for worship? Yes, contrary to the experts or the ideology, many voices, many ages, many people existed in active, faithful lives whose theology was probably as flawed as Arius or as perfectionist as Pelagius, but in the great inchoate center of “Christian mystery” as ordinary experience, this did not destroy anything.

This persistent faith in the face of everything is the true *consensus fidelium*. The Reformation finally broke open the ideology of a single Christendom and the Enlightenment completed the theological diaspora of Christianity. Individual reason, the printing press and the democratization of power challenged the old central view. Yet mutual persecution for doctrinal error was merciless. At the end of the religious wars of the 16th century, Christians knew themselves to be neither alone in the world nor one.

Exile to America and elsewhere offered opportunities to found New Jerusalems, but secular tolerance kept breaking in. Do you remember that diversity and the political rights of dissenters in England drove Newman into Catholicism? Infallibility emerged as a reaction to democracy and modern science. Orthodoxy as romanticism bloomed in the 19th century. Breaking up is hard to do.

Orthodoxy, therefore, as a social and spiritual discourse fulfilled a unifying, but ultimately deadening role: The complexity of categories and transcendent authority promoted either passivity or rebellion. The violent enforcement of orthodoxy in Christian history is the necessary consequence of seeing an institution as the agent and protector of transcendent truth. Let us be clear. This righteous violence is not merely unfortunate, it is a blasphemy, the replacing of God by the church.

“Everyone knows Christians are non-violent, except Christians,” commented Gandhi. The sins of ideological violence and genocide which are justly laid at the feet of modern secular states must also be traced back to our own religious passions. “Orthodoxy” was our failure in the desert: We didn’t mean to choose physical security, personal power and a divine insurance plan over the way of the servant Jesus. We did, indeed, think we could drink the same cup and bear the same cross. I judge

the ancestors no more harshly than they judged themselves. If, like Cranmer, Christians must recant our recantation, the struggle for integrity is worth the public humiliation.

Don't only blame the old white guys

"Orthodoxy" therefore is no mere chapter of our past, perpetrated by a lot of old white guys who have nothing to do with me or my Jesus, but in fact a living legacy of sacralized hegemonic speech, exclusive attitudes and minimal tolerance for those who disagree with us. We have paid in blood for our creeds, our liturgy, our vernacular Bible, our racial integration and the right of women to preach. We have burned each other, not "they" have burned "us." I am today heir of both persecutor and persecuted. Orthodoxy, therefore, cannot be the language for the stoic raging grandmothers. Even as "progressive," "dynamic," "radical" or "repentant" it cannot engender adequate humility, openness, renewal and surprise, for it must conceal its own historical humanity — out of anxiety, out of love, out of passion for the truth. This temptation to replace a living God by an enforceable code continues to violate the justice, the graciousness and the true mystery of the Holy.

Embracing our world as human beings means accepting our particular contingent being — imperfect and provisional as our theology must also be. It means respect and acceptance for eventual disagreement and the mess of negotiation which frees all voices to speak. "Tradition" is the art of human memory, renewal and continuity. Based in incarnate agents, "tradition" has fewer pretensions to divine transcendent power or singular authority. It is retrieved and renewed in the transmission of each human generation. The contextualized voices of Paul and Augustine reveal their Jewish and African heritage, their spiritual strengths and limitations. Add in Macrina, Hildegard and Absalom Jones: Have we lost authority or started to find true catholicity? Do we see the spectrum within light, the reality of the particle which is sometimes the wave?

To be followers of Jesus, Christians in the end must refuse the temptations of hegemonic speech and action. Coercion does not fit the teaching rabbi who dined with everyone and

accepted his death — nor the Word which emptied itself, not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped. The Syrophenician woman won the argument, the rich young man just walked away and the most consistent condemnation in the gospels is for those confident in righteousness, constant in self-serving prayer and smug in authority, who lay burdens on others they do not bear themselves. We can be passionate lovers of Jesus, but we can no longer be passionate haters. We cannot tell our stories as if there are no other stories of God to be heard.

Jesus: Venn diagram of attributes

To embrace plurality — social, religious, scientific, experiential — as a gift of God presents a daunting challenge. Daniel Boyarin has noted that history has given Jews only the gift of "perpetual, creative, diasporic tension." As our Reformation wears on, might we, too, learn that only our multiple theologies and histories will reveal the breadth of life in the Spirit? True catholicity lies ahead, not behind. Jesus must be a Venn diagram of attributes, with lovers and followers attached on many sides. If the faithful love and self-offering of Jesus were the theological norms, which stories would you tell me? Before the eyes of the raging stoic grandmothers, such tales could no longer be romantic or abstract. I do not know if our stories could bring us together yet, but what if the diversity of the stories was the point? "Peace is relation with another ... the inassimilable other, the irreducible other, the other unique. ... Peace is the incessant watch over this alterity," wrote the philosopher Levinas in light of the Holocaust. What if our catholicity was our protection of each other's conscience, our care of diversity as reflecting the will of a creative and good God and our acceptance of dissension based on renewed humility before a redeeming mystery? Our only security rests in this continual re-membering of our lives in God through the prism of Jesus' life and death, our contingent humanity always loved, never abandoned, infinitely wrong and forgiven as children of the risen Christ. Beyond orthodoxy is faith.

Let me end in my grandmother's kitchen. It is a hot and humid Michigan afternoon. My grandmother, my mother and I sit around the

kitchen table drinking lemonade. I am enjoying listening to my grandmother gossip. My mother, the minister's wife, never does and my teenage soul is weary of her spiritual foot on my neck. My grandmother tells of the Methodist Women's Society outing to visit a local African Methodist Episcopal Church. "But, you know, they didn't eat anything, because you know whose hands made the cookies ..."

"And whose hands," interrupted my mother in a voice I had never, ever, heard her use to her mother-in-law, "and whose hands do you think have always made the cookies in your town?" Silence. We were repressed Midwesterners; we just drank more lemonade. Perhaps my mother did not change my grandmother, but her interruption changed me. I went to integrated public schools, I didn't know anyone with a maid. Yet, my world cracked open at the passion in my mother's voice as she exposed this violation of divine and human hospitality, of what women offer to other women, what basic justice the children of God owe to each other.

"What were you doing?" she seemed to ask my grandmother. "Who did you think you were?"

What are we doing? Who do we think we are? This is how, around kitchen tables in otherwise forgettable afternoons, the Gospel is made flesh, how "age after age perversely" with no extraordinary power we reconstitute the world. ●

J. Rebecca Lyman is Samuel M. Garret Professor of Church History at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, Calif. This piece is an abridged version of a paper by the same title that she delivered at this year's Epiphany West conference, Beyond Orthodoxy: Embracing Christian Pluralism Past and Present.

The 2001 meeting of Anglican primates was to be a showdown on the "limits of diversity" in the Anglican Communion, but something else happened. Check out Ian Douglas' analysis at:
www.thewitness.org

CHURCH AND CULTURE

No simple pluralism

by Peter Selby

ONE OF THE GREAT GIFTS I received as a result of being asked to speak at *The Witness*' awards banquet at last year's General Convention was the chance to sit in on a meeting of the House of Bishops. The gift was not just an opportunity to hear interesting debates; it was also a time to observe different ways of doing things. To look at different provinces is to look at different cultures and to be made alert to the way in which, for all our high-powered theological arguments, culture and history make crucial differences to the way churches operate.

Obviously, U.S. Episcopalians' anti-monarchist origins affect the way authority is exercised in the U.S. church — specifically in terms of the expectations of bishops and those who hold other church offices. Here in England, even people who might profess to have their doubts about the monarchy are subtly influenced to find the monarchical traditions of episcopacy quite comfortable. We are inclined to think we have managed to give substance to the right of the church to choose its own bishops and that the historic rights of the British monarch in the matter are now just formalities. But, in reality, those historical formalities subtly condition the way we think about our bishops and those who choose them, and all kinds of unquestioned assumptions still obtain.

Similarly, I find it fascinating to see how the ideological assumptions behind the U.S. constitution profoundly affect the U.S. Episcopal Church's self-understanding. The commitment to allowing the People of God to govern their own life works itself out in

institutional behavior that looks very little different from the political elections that produce the President, members of Congress and holders of a host of local offices. For both our different churches, then, the arrangements we have evolved look simply to be the way in which God's people have worked out — and should work out — ways of regulating their life.

The same would of course be true of Anglican provinces throughout the world. As the Anglican Communion becomes, rightly, an association of provinces working out their life in very changed circumstances, putting behind their origins in the colonial thinking of a British ascendancy, we can expect to see patterns of church life that are recognizably American, African, Latin American, Australian, Asian and all the rest.

But that, in turn, mustn't lead to a simple pluralism: The ideology of "autonomous provinces" can simply mean everyone going their own way without making use of the potential to understand yourself better by seeing what you do in the mirror of what others do. It might be right to resist more centralization of authority; but not in favor of accepting that none of us has the right to question what another province does. Only such a process of mutual questioning enables us to get at our unquestioned assumptions, enabling us thereby to reconstitute ourselves according to the Spirit of Christ. There'll never be a church that bears no cultural marks; but all churches need to have the capacity and the humility to discern what it is about their life that is so historically conditioned that it gets in the way of the Gospel.

That seems to me to be particularly important for British and American Anglicans searching for an ecclesiology for our time. Our histories and present experience of military and financial power as nations means a constant temptation to think that the way we have come to do things represents, quite simply, the way for Christians to act and behave. I have huge sympathy with the difficulty many U.S. Episcopalians have had over the way many of the decisions of the 1999 Lambeth conference of Anglican bishops turned out [see *TW* 3/2000]. But underneath were real conflicts about the power of money and how to handle the globalization of issues that can no longer be left to each province to deal with just as it chooses.

The fact is that some of us are more powerful than others in an international assembly of that kind. Being more powerful doesn't mean you are bound to be wrong; but it does mean being pretty careful when you become quite certain that you are bound to be right! What looks like the radical demands of the Gospel to us becomes, as it crosses cultural barriers, simply another form of colonialism. God's project, a global and local community called after Christ and sharing Christ's mind, turns out to be mixed up with handling the movements of culture and power in our time. Nothing new in that; but as Tanzanian bishop Simon Chiwanga said in his opening sermon at Lambeth, the need is for "awareness, awareness, awareness."

And the awareness we most need is self-awareness. ●

Peter Selby is Bishop of Worcester, England.

The Witness Wins Associated Church Press Awards

Best in Class for a Special-Interest Magazine

"Displays the best layout out of all entries submitted in this sub-category. The content is very thought-provoking, well-written, and well-edited. The issue on Time and Freedom was especially praiseworthy. The graphics selection displays a good mix of photographs and artwork."

Award of Excellence for Theme Issue

"Creatively developed special issue is built around the concept of time, its limitations and opportunities, and the presence and absence of freedom. This joint theme is shaped through a variety of articles, some of which are highly personal and painful, while others are practical, theoretical and brimming with passionate advocacy for persons who are 'doing' time. A model for how to construct a special issue."

Award of Excellence for First-Person Account

Former editor of *The Witness*, Robert DeWitt, won the Award of Excellence for First Person Account: "Time Travel: When three hands bridge an abyss," published in the January-February 2000 issue.

"What new insight can someone offer about Alzheimer's disease? DeWitt offers a loving approach that doesn't focus on loss or grief but rather on the remarkable ability to accompany the loved one on the journey."

Award of Excellence for a Critical Review Section

The Award of Excellence for a Critical Review Section was bestowed on Bill Wylie-Kellermann for his review of Carter Heyward's *Saving Jesus from Those Who are Right*. The judges wrote: "This review is a model of critical engagement, a productive 'thinking out loud.' It can be read with profit not only by those who are broadly in sympathy with the author's viewpoint, but also by those who, like this reader, strongly disagree."

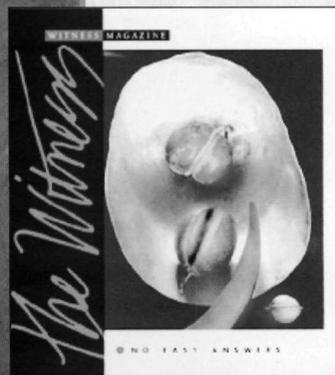
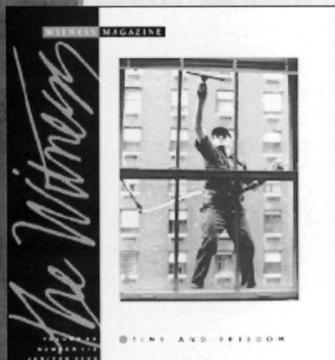
Award of Excellence for Magazine Cover

The final Award of Excellence was for Magazine Cover (1-, 2-, or 3-color) for the April 2000 cover. This was the "No easy answers: Gender and sexual ethics for a new age" issue. "This magazine has tremendous aesthetic and artistic appeal. The key for the design here is the balance and contrast of color, the creative two-part logo, and the photo used on the cover that beautifully matches the magazine's main subject. This cover is a great example of mixing a thought-provoking subject with an art piece that opens the readers' minds for many types of interpretation."

Honorable Mention for the Best Publication Redesign (Kat Stuart, designer)

Honorable Mention for Poetry ("Winter Fire" by Rose Berger, December 2000)

Thank you, *Witness* subscribers, for inspiring us to do the very best for you!



COMMON

A church community with no strings attached

by Carolyn S. Ellis

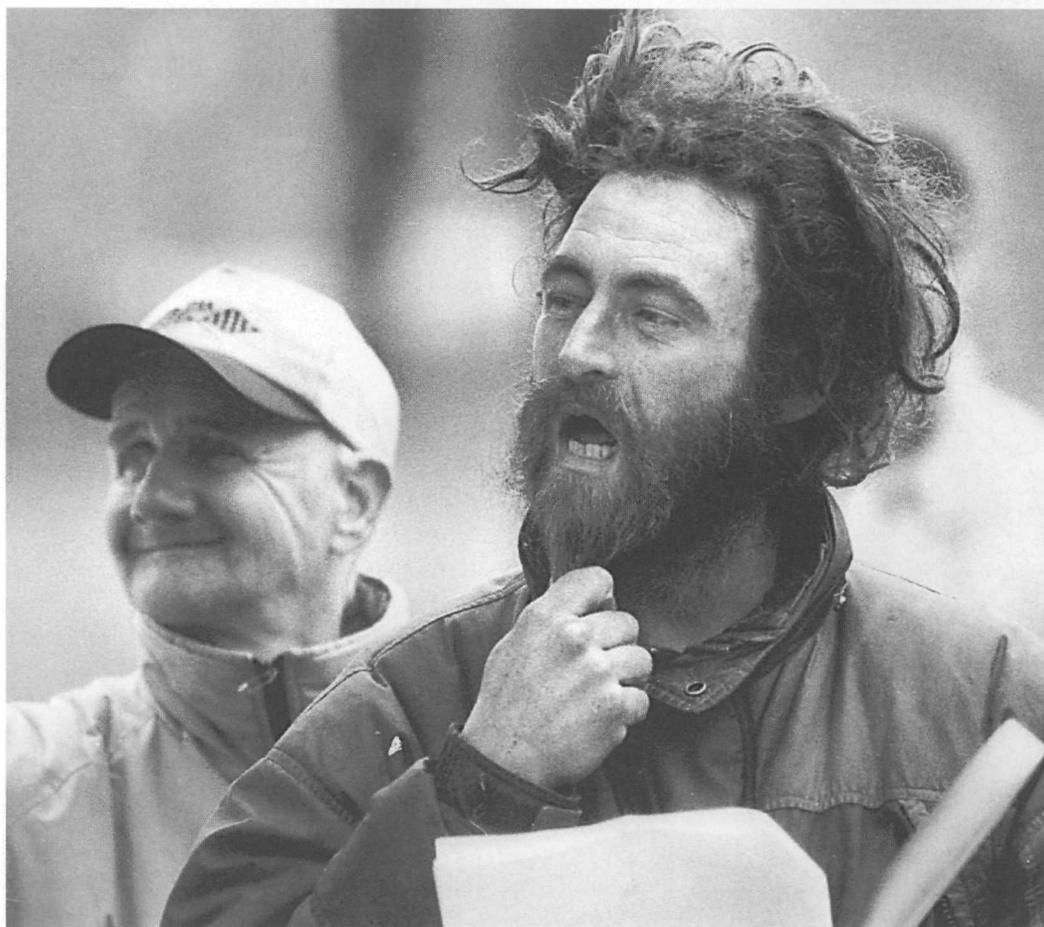
ON HISTORIC BOSTON COMMON, in the shadow of the State House and three bricks-and-mortar churches, Debbie Little, an Episcopal priest, offers Holy Communion on Sundays at 1 P.M. to anyone who comes by. On Easter 1996, a dozen homeless people hanging out in the area accepted Little's invitation to hear some Good News. Today as many as 200 people attend services, gathering in a circle by the triple-tiered Brewer Fountain. The location is convenient, just steps from the Park Street subway station and across Tremont Street from the Cathedral Church of St. Paul and the offices of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.

These people — homeless, formerly homeless, and domiciled — have given themselves the name Common Cathedral. They meet every Sunday regardless of the weather in what Little calls “the church under a tree.” Common Cathedral's facilities are a rough-hewn cross and a roll-away altar made by Gary, a member since Day 1. Gary, wearing denim overalls and a baseball cap, says, “This is the only church that has accepted me as I am.” They welcome neighbors from Beacon Hill and Back Bay, passers-by, often tourists on Boston's well-known Freedom Trail, and guests from affiliated churches who provide lunch. The free-form service follows the Book of Common Prayer with plenty of airtime for those who show up. There are always some surprises. Little says she finds this weekly newness energizing, since she is comfortable “flying by the seat of my pants.”

On a very cold Sunday in February, Little is hard to find among the 75 to 80 people gathered for worship. She is dressed in corduroy pants, hiking boots and parka, her clerical collar barely visible. Reaching out with bare, red hands, Little invites the congregation to speak. Gary, middle-aged with a youthful demeanor, tells the gathering, “Follow the cross and the cross will follow you.” Several others speak about their resurrection from a life of addiction and despair, their love of the Lord and their willingness to assist others.

Everyone is chilled to the bone well before Communion. “The weather is a great equalizer,” Little says. Being outdoors removes the hurdle many homeless persons face when it comes to going inside, especially into churches where they may have experienced rejection, abuse or discomfort. When a woman arrives without gloves, Little reaches into a stash she keeps handy to give her a pair.

CATHEDRAL



Little calls upon those present to read the Scripture lesson, pass communion and be the choir. She breaks bread from small, round loaves and chalicists pour grape juice into disposable communion cups. Communion is offered to several men and women sitting on park benches at the edge of the gathering. In future weeks, some may move into the circle and even take leadership roles.

Communication is one of the most important functions of Common Cathedral. Little announces the coming week's schedule of indoor activities at churches within blocks of the Common. The list includes meals, Bible study (including women-only and Spanish), healing services, recovery groups, Common Art (drop-in crafts with a hot meal) and Common Cinema (films on video with popcorn). Richard hands out a pocket-sized card listing meals and shelters in the area and coupons for the laundromat. Little urges everyone to get help for anyone at risk of freezing.

Many of the congregants wear a small cross designed for Common Cathedral around their necks. Little has conferred more than 900 of these distinctive symbols. "People recognize the cross or the brown shoelace under someone's collar," she says, "Often they then feel free to exchange information about shelters or just to reach out to someone new."

Common Cathedral provides emergency food and clothing, legal services and medical care in addition to instruction for baptism and confirmation, conversation and prayer. A wrap-around program, Ecclesia Ministries, includes a pastoral care team to visit hospitalized homeless persons. About 85 volunteers have been trained. Many are students from Greater Boston's nine divinity schools and seminaries

who complete field study in street ministry. The City Reach program introduces middle- and high-school students to homeless individuals. Students stay overnight on the floor of the Cathedral, take to the streets with sandwiches and chapsticks, distribute clothing — and explain what they have learned to their home churches.

Bill is a City Reach teacher. He is also a good example of Common Cathedral's magic at work. Bill arrived on Boston Common after spending a year at a shelter in Quincy, knocked down by a bout of depression and what he terms "an excess of pride." When he came, he reports, "I was a mess, yelling at God. People reached out to me, but I couldn't take it in." However, he watched others participate, and then he jumped right in. Bill now sings with the choir at St. Paul's Cathedral and has his own apartment.

When City Reach students ask Bill how to recognize who is home-



Jeff Loughlin/The Punnet Lines

less, he tells them he can't always be sure. But, he recommends, "Look at the eyes. With a regular person, they will sparkle. With a homeless person, there is an emptiness, a 1,000-yard stare." Bill also advises his students on how to approach someone on the street — introduce yourself first, first name only, and use a person's name if they give it. "When we don't have things, we have our pride and our names," he explains.

An ecumenical network of 100 churches provides Common Cathedral with financial support, meals, fellowship, volunteers and prayers. Little preaches in these churches, bringing them wisdom gained from street ministry. She networks with police, medical and housing specialists and advocates with government for the homeless. She helped to establish a shelter for homeless women in Back Bay and participates with downtown churches in the Doorbell Ministry. Clergy share information about resources and have identified unmet needs for storage, laundry facilities and over-the-counter medications.

Churches and Christian organizations provide many services for the homeless within blocks of Boston Common. Boston Rescue

Mission/Kingston House, founded in 1899 and located in the Financial District, has a 175-bed shelter and provides meals, clothing, training and service. St. Francis House provides shelter, meals, showers and lockers through the Long Island Shelter Annex on the fifth floor of its building on Boylston Street. Starlight Homeless Ministries has brought food and Christian counseling to the streets at night since 1990.

St. John's Episcopal Church on Bowdoin Street, Beacon Hill, has provided meals for decades. Lisbeth Hall, priest-in-charge and a sculptor, assists at Common Art, the fine arts and crafts program held on Wednesdays from 10 to 3 P.M. The Paulist Center on Park Street overlooking Boston Common provides a hot meal weekly, restrooms and groceries. The Park Street Church supports Starlight Ministries with meals and volunteers. St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral hosts several Common Cathedral programs, including Bible study and Common Cinema.

Street ministries in other cities around the country vary. They serve people on foot, in vans, and in trucks outfitted for hygiene or medical care. Facilities may be an undercroft

rented for a dollar a year, a storefront, a tent, or a fully staffed shelter for pregnant and parenting teens. Some provide a never-empty pot of coffee, Sunday dinner because there is no other meal available, or a full complement of meals prepared by formerly homeless people now at work. Some actively bring a Christian message to those they assist, and others give freely with no expectation of return.

The San Francisco Night Ministry (<http://www.nightministry.org/>), for example, founded in 1964 by Lutheran and United Presbyterian clergy, is there for "the terminally ignored" when churches and social service agencies are closed. Night Minister Donald Fox, an Episcopal priest, says that in this ministry, like that of Jesus, "everyone is equally loved, equally valued and entitled to care." Armed with cell phone and pager, Fox has been on the street between 10 P.M. and 4 A.M. for 10 years. The Night Ministry maintains the longest running crisis hotline in San Francisco. Fox encounters people in bars and coffee shops, in hotels and homes, and on the sidewalk and responds to referrals from the hotline, the telephone operator and the police.

In Chicago, Tom Behrens, a United Church of Christ minister and mortgage banker, was in 1974 asked by 18 Chicago churches to undertake a nighttime ministry. For 10 years Behrens worked on the street. When a runaway boy was murdered downtown, Behrens began fundraising to expand youth outreach services. The Chicago Night Ministry (<http://www.thenightministry.org/>) today has 400 volunteers and 50 staff and is a United Way agency. Behrens is frequently consulted about growing a ministry into a multi-faceted organization. He hopes to establish an institute to help others develop effective street ministry and be a forum for people working with persons who are hard to reach.

Some street ministries focus solely on worship. Keep it simple, you could say. In downtown Seattle, Episcopal priest Susan O'Shea offers Holy Communion every day at noon at the Chapel of St. Martha and St. Mary of Bethany in Seattle's Pike Place Public Market, the oldest operating farmers' market in America. Like chapel founder Carol Ludden, O'Shea offers a ministry of sanctuary and companionship.

"Many people downtown live in marginal

circumstances and they enjoy coming here," O'Shea says. The chapel began outdoors as "the church without walls," and today is open from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M. O'Shea estimates they serve 200 cups of coffee a day and have 1,600 members, many Spanish-speaking.

People of means who have felt marginalized at some point in their lives — through a struggle with depression or addiction and childhood rejection — also seem to be drawn to these churches. They also are people who value connecting. Sarah, who regularly worships at both Common Cathedral and a suburban parish, says of Common Cathedral, "If Jesus were here, walking on earth, that's where he would be." She acknowledges that for some people there isn't much we can do but be with them in fellowship and prayer.

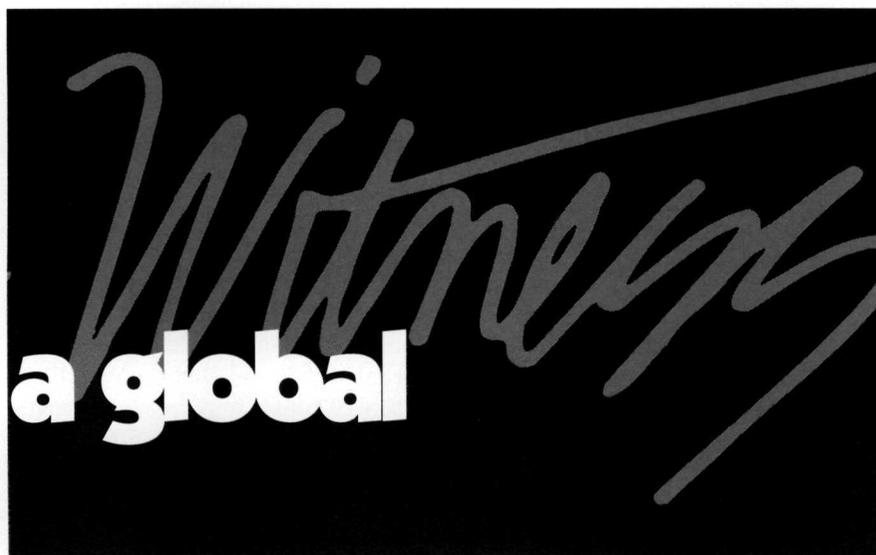
Traditional churches say they welcome everyone to worship, but the homeless get a different message from comments like, "You can't bring that in here," or, "How may I help you?" Common Cathedral and other such street ministries put the needs of the homeless first, whether that means not using the prayer book or letting people bring their belongings or their dog.

Still, Little hopes for the time when Common Cathedral isn't needed. The deeply spiritual homeless population craves regular worship at which they are welcome and a church community with no strings attached. Matthew, a man who has been coming to Common Cathedral for four years, agrees. His first reaction to Common Cathedral was, "This is beautiful. It's about time a minister from one of these churches came out to where the poor really are." His enthusiasm led him to become a spokesperson for the homeless and for a year he attended meetings with Little.

But now Matthew has mixed feelings. Real change hasn't occurred. Out of frustration, he's built a model church which he now carries with him. This cardboard edifice is precisely constructed and covered with protest slogans and scripture passages in Matthew's neat hand. The front doors are padlocked. The building is symbolic, but the lock is real.

"The church should be a refuge," Matthew says, "but I'm still locked out." ●

Carolyn S. Ellis is a writer who lives in the Boston metropolitan area.



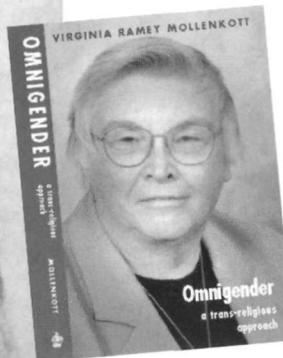
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Through this section of our website we are offering analysis and commentary from around the U.S. church and the global Anglican Communion. Our aim is to encourage a reclaiming of the Anglican vocation of "public theology" — and to expand awareness of the issues and struggles occupying the hearts and minds of progressive Anglicans and other persons of faith worldwide.

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'GRACE — is a

by Mary E. Hunt



Omnigender: A Trans-religious Approach,
by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott (Pilgrim Press, 2001)

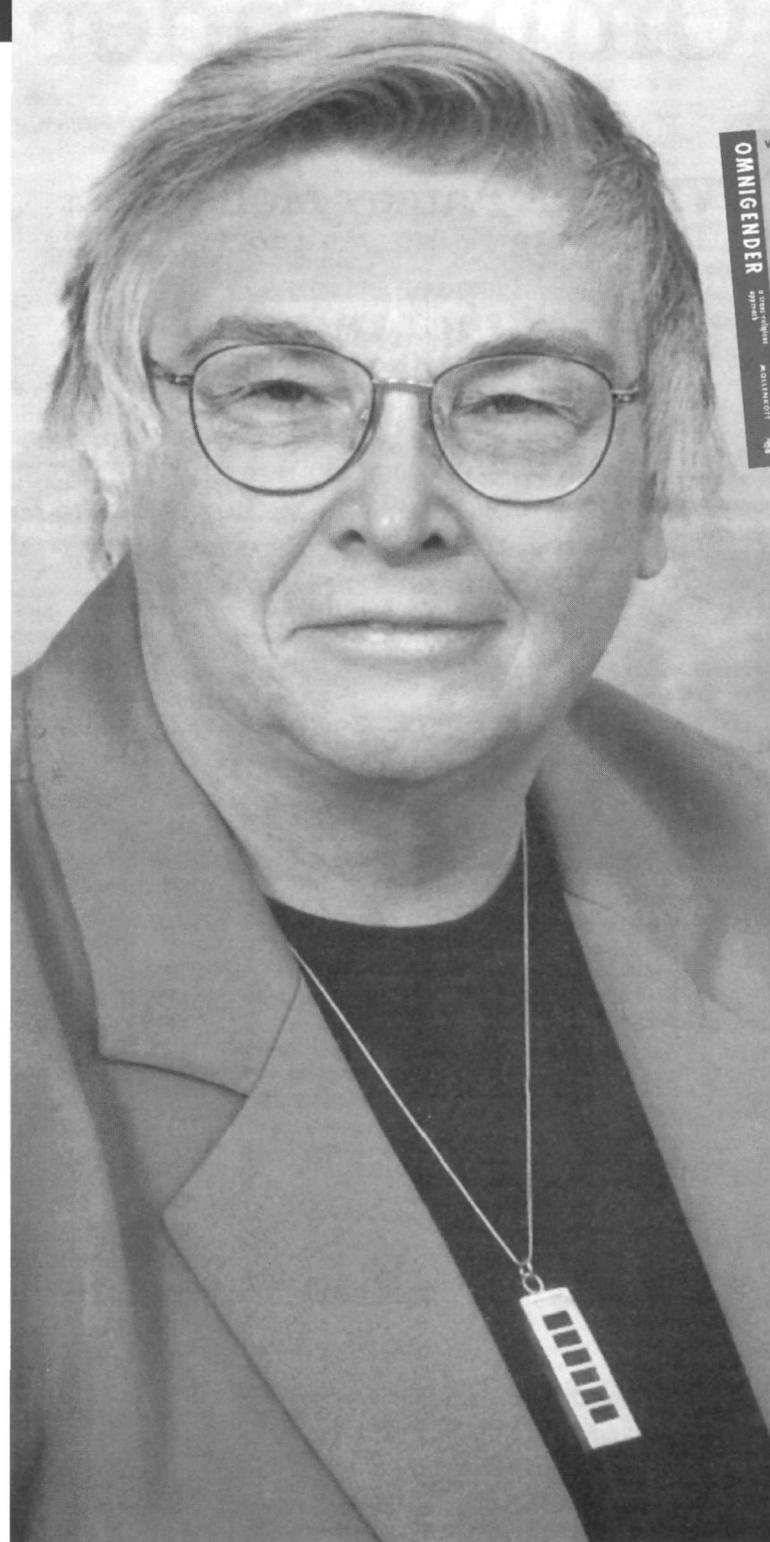
LEAVE IT TO THE WITNESS' OWN Virginia Ramey Mollenkott to push the theological envelope one more time in her marvelous new book, *Omnigender: A Trans-religious Approach*. Just as she did with *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* co-authored in 1978 with Letha Scanzoni, before Virginia admitted publicly that she was the neighbor in question, she has written what is known in the publishing business as “a big book.” In my view, this book ends one period in the epoch struggle of Christianity with homosexuality and opens another.

Virginia received a Lifetime Achievement award from SAGE, Senior Action in a Gay Environment, a direct-service and advocacy group for seniors in New York City in 1999. It was my privilege to make the presentation on an evening when the Broadway crowd was out in full feather to honor composer Jerry Herman, artist Paul Cadmus and entertainer Storme DeLarverie. I wondered what they would think of a feminist religious writer getting the award as well.

I began my remarks by suggesting that Virginia's impact on Christianity is enough to make the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence look like altar girls. The audience roared. We were home, with our people, people who have paid a price to sing, “I am what I am,” and mean it. I realized that oppressed people know the role religions can play to liberate or oppress. Here they were face-to-face with a Christian woman who has insisted that her community live up to its Word. I claimed that Dr. Mollenkott's contributions have resulted in some of the remarkable inroads that lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgender people have made into Christian institutions. I noted that she points helpfully toward a lot of work that still needs to be done. This book only reinforces my words.

For the past 30 years, lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgender people and our supporters have labored in the often unwelcoming vineyard of Christian churches as if people were female and male, gay and straight, here or in the country. What was once a gay-male movement for social and ecclesial justice, slowly and still to a limited degree, became a gay/lesbian movement with some sense that lesbian women's experiences were different from gay men's.

The relatively recent but welcome arrival of bisexual people on their own terms only reinforced the binaries, albeit by embracing them. However, the entrance of trans people in their many forms — intersexual or hermaphrodite persons, transsexuals, transves-



transgender person who loves women and men'

tites or cross-dressers, drag kings and queens or performance artists, transgenderists or bigenderists and androgynes, to name only some of the newly emerging categories — effectively changes the panorama forever. No longer can we tell players with or without a scorecard. No longer can we assume anything about anyone, or so it seems, with gender categories as fluid as warm honey and sexual orientations multiplying like dot-coms in the Silicon Valley. The point is that all must be made welcome, just as they are, in communities that call themselves Christian.

Gender is a complicated concept. I predict that the Human Genome Project and its descendents will settle most of the biological questions about sexual orientation. But I doubt that science will ever find the gene that causes discrimination, that triggers hatred and that sets up excluding hierarchies. Thus, Virginia's focus on the religious components is well-placed because it is there, where values are grounded, that the promise of justice lives.

Virginia is never one to ignore the elephant in the living room. In this book she goes about the systematic deconstruction of gender givens, relying on the latest social and biological scientific information. She spares neither progressives nor conservatives, arguing — and I agree — that we all need to shift our static categories because they simply do not work anymore.

Life is not split conveniently down the middle. There is much greater diversity than any of us dreamed. There is no purpose served in denying the obvious, even though it is convenient to do so. I can imagine that some LGBT activists may secretly wish she had left well enough alone. God knows we have enough problems on our hands with the old anthropology. We have not been very successful in changing religious institutions on gay/lesbian and bi terms. What makes us think we will do any better with trans and queer? But knowledge grows and with it our analysis. What remains static for Christians in this whirlwind is a commitment to love and justice. The rest, as the rabbis say, is commentary.

Almost everything changes if Virginia's analysis is correct. Texts like "neither male nor female" can mean just that when gender is in flux. Arguments against women's ordination need wholesale revamping since we do not know for sure now what a woman is. Even our own hard-wrought sexual identities are up for grabs when we take seriously the data from the sciences and listen to the stories of people who have lived painful lives because they could not check a box, use a rest room or get married, because they did not fit the mold. Virginia's honest Christian response is that the only thing we can throw out is the mold. She does so with courage, compassion and skill.

Virginia has done her homework in the trans community. She knows

the people, reads the literature, attends the events, loves with her generous heart and thinks with her scholarly head. She has found the people and the arguments persuasive, fascinating and compelling. We are the richer for it. How little we know about what makes any of us tick, much less what makes us love and feel sexually attracted. How dare we judge from our ignorance?

She models how to work as a Christian scholar and activist without apology and with attention to an increasingly pluralistic world. Virginia grew up as a fundamentalist's fundamentalist in the Plymouth Brethren Assemblies, a Christian group so parochial that she did not know Catholics were Christians. Nonetheless, she brings a welcome interreligious perspective to bear, making good on her subtitle. Not only is she looking at trans matters on the sexual front, but also in the religious realm. This attention to Hindu, Buddhist and other faith traditions signals that she has gone well beyond her evangelical roots, though she never leaves them entirely. They nurture her own generous spirit and ground her commitment to inclusivity.

Every summer she provides leadership for a weekend at Pennsylvania's KirkrIDGE conference center entitled "Gay, Lesbian and Christian." She has helped thousands of people over the decades make sense of that ecclesio-genic conundrum. I imagine that the group will slowly take on trans concerns and include more trans people because of her prophetic stance. It will not be a quick adding of the word "trans" to the title, but a thoughtful, perhaps painful grappling with how taking trans concerns seriously upsets all of our apple carts. The difference is Virginia will be there to pick up the fruit.

She continues to push the Evangelical Women's Caucus to greater inclusivity. Imagine their surprise when she came out as a lesbian. Now, through her tireless advocacy for trans folks she is inviting every group to push its parameters. The Caucus will feel it, too, as trans people move toward membership and any trans people who are in it come out. The movement for LGBT inclusion cannot simply add "t" and stir, but must confront the changes that taking new people seriously on their own terms demands. No cheap grace here.

The first time I met Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, she was preaching from the pulpit of a church in Washington, D.C. She began, "Grace — is a lesbian." My mouth dropped. Now, I suspect, she might begin something like this: "Grace — is a transgender person who loves women and men." The Holy Spirit may be surprised to hear her identity revealed and her message articulated with such brilliance.

We, luckily, have the book. ●

Witness contributing editor *Mary Hunt* is co-founder of *WATER, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual*, in Silver Spring, Md.

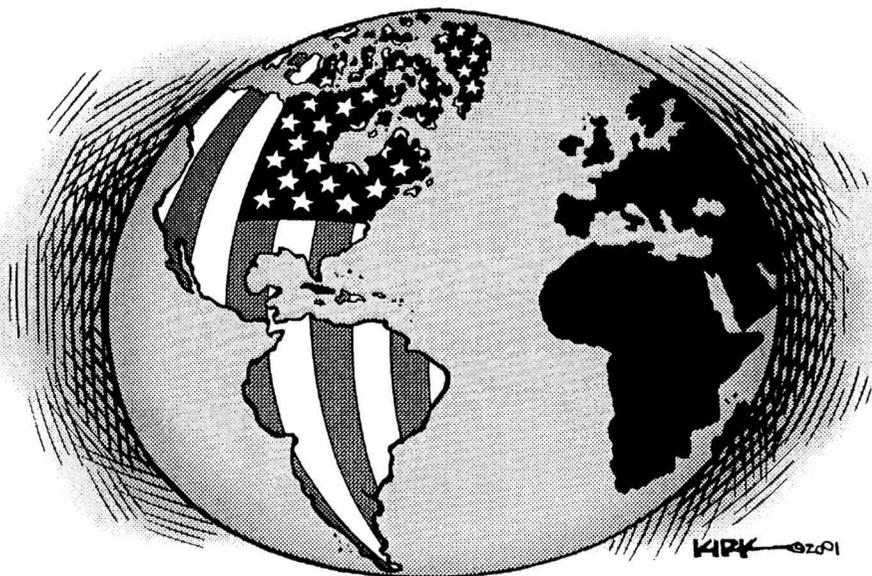
Project HIP-HOP

Each summer since 1993, groups of Boston-area high-school students have journeyed 5,000 miles to visit historic Civil Rights movement sites and meet with movement veterans. To date, 125 students have taken part in Project HIP-HOP (Highways Into the Past: History, Organizing and Power), which is based at the ACLU of Massachusetts' Bill of Rights Education Project. In 1996, a group of students who had made the journey south in previous years traveled to South Africa to learn about the struggle to overthrow apartheid. In a story in *Rethinking Schools* (Spring '01), project director Nancy Murray writes that by the end of each trip, students have felt "that the torch has been passed to them by movement veterans and with it the responsibility to make a better society."

"We were put in touch not just with the struggles of the past," wrote one student, "but with the urgent tasks of the present and future, and now see ourselves as critical pieces in the puzzle of how to achieve social justice."

Another student, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, wrote: "I no longer feel like an outcast in society. Through this summer, I have become more than just a 'kid.' I have broken out of the mold that society has put me in and have become a working part of society itself. Now I am part of 'we, the people,' the people the Constitution was created to serve and protect, and I refuse to let it be twisted up and used against me."

"On their return, the youth have made presentations to an estimated 25,000 of their peers in nearly 300 visits to schools, community centers and churches," Murray wrote. "They have helped create a Project HIP-HOP curriculum for high-school students, and now have their own newspaper, *Rising Times*. Started in 1998, the newspaper features articles about a variety of social and educational issues. It has a special focus called ACTION for Justice — "our campaign of telling the truth about racism and plain injustice in the criminal justice system, and of demanding decent education, not incarceration, for our generation."



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Chiapas setback

The peace process in Chiapas suffered a setback with the passage of an indigenous rights bill that is seen as too limited, according to a May report from SIPAZ.

"During the first five months of President Vicente Fox's term, important progress was made toward reinvigorating the stalled peace process in Chiapas," the report summary states. "However, the hopes raised were seriously challenged when the Mexican Congress approved a bill of constitutional reforms on indigenous rights and culture that was promptly and vehemently rejected by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). The law differs significantly from the bill drafted by the congressional Commission on Agreement and Pacification (COCOPA) and backed by the EZLN. The COCOPA bill sought to implement the San Andres Accords, signed in 1996 by the federal government and the EZLN. That was the bill President Fox submitted to Congress shortly after assuming office.

"The bill that was finally approved includes positive elements prohibiting discrimination of any kind and recognizing the autonomy of indigenous peoples in certain respects. However, as indigenous leaders, academic experts and others pointed out, it fails to grant a variety of legal rights to indigenous peoples without which, they argue, it would be difficult to

make autonomy meaningful in practice.

"In the end, it seems to reflect the historic gap between the reality of the indigenous peoples and that of the political class in Mexico. The bill was passed by a large majority in Congress, and legislators from the PRI and PAN parties have defended it as an important, albeit limited, step forward. However, the long-awaited passage of this bill was greeted as much by criticism from those it is supposed to benefit and their supporters as it was by praise from other quarters. Moreover, as the limitations of the bill became known, the criticism from key indigenous groups took the form of cries of outrage and betrayal. Some pledged to oppose ratification of the reforms by the state legislatures. Even President Fox, responding to the mounting criticism, was moved to state, 'Clearly more thorough work is required on central aspects, such as autonomy and self-determination.'

"The sense of disappointment and betrayal was perhaps greater as a result of the hopes raised by the remarkable events of the preceding months. In late February, 24 EZLN leaders undertook a two-week caravan through 12 states that culminated with a rally of approximately 200,000 people in Mexico City's main square. The central objective of the march was to lobby Congress on behalf of the COCOPA bill. While the Zapatistas delegates encountered some hos-

tility, they were generally received enthusiastically along their route. Moreover, the caravan propelled the Chiapas conflict back to the center of public attention. En route, they participated in the third National Indigenous Congress (CNI). The 5,000 representatives of 42 indigenous peoples accepted the COCOPA bill as their own and recognized the EZLN as fully representative of the CNI. Given the broad representation of the CNI, its action undermines efforts to cast the EZLN as an isolated group and the Chiapas conflict as a local matter.

“The Fox administration contributed to the positive climate by welcoming the Zapatista caravan, pledging to secure peace and prosperity in Chiapas, and partially addressing the three conditions set by the EZLN for the renewal of talks: closure of seven Mexican Army camps, release of EZLN prisoners, and approval of the COCOPA bill on indigenous rights and culture. A lengthy polemic over whether the EZLN would be allowed to address legislators from the floor of Congress led to an EZLN threat to return to Chiapas. At that point, President Fox intervened to take further steps to fulfill the EZLN’s conditions and to lean on Congress, where opposition had already been weakened by the growing momentum created by the Zapatista caravan. Finally the Chamber of Deputies voted to open its doors to the Zapatistas.

“On March 28, in an historic event, EZLN and CNI leaders spoke in Congress. The EZLN leaders seemed to mark the opening of a new stage when they affirmed the Zapatista option for political struggle and stated, ‘Now is no longer the time for arms.’ Once back in Chiapas, Subcommander Marcos summed up their hopeful assessment: ‘Today dialogue is closer and confrontation is more distant.’

“Meanwhile, events in Chiapas underscored the urgent need for progress in the peace process. Social and political killings continued. In one unresolved case, eight indigenous peasants were ambushed and killed. There were multiple incidents of violent confrontation between groups with rival

land claims. Ranchers and others marched in opposition to the Zapatistas and the COCOPA bill and demanded a role in peace talks. And the new governor, Pablo Salazar, continued to face a power struggle with the state legislature and judiciary while he was simultaneously besieged by sometimes competing demands from a wide variety of social groups.

“Hopes that progress in the peace process would alleviate tensions in Chiapas and establish the basis for dealing with their underlying causes were dashed by the negative reactions to the indigenous rights bill, which included a decision by the EZLN to suspend contact between its intermediary and the federal government.

“In this deteriorating environment, Chiapas governor Pablo Salazar called upon President Fox and the EZLN to maintain their commitment to peace and to rise above the interests and visions of those who place obstacles in the path of the measures needed to get the peace process back on track. Recommended Actions:

1. Write President Fox, COCOPA, the Subcommittee for Analysis of Indigenous Initiatives, and the EZLN, expressing: a) concern about this new obstacle to renewed peace talks whose prospects until recently had seemed to be improving; and b) the hope of the international community that the key participants will find the vision and the courage to meet this challenge that has put the entire peace process at risk.

2. Write to President Fox: Note that the bill approved by Congress dramatically limits the exercise of the right of self-determination of the indigenous peoples and its expression, indigenous autonomy, and that he himself stated, “Clearly more thorough work is required on central aspects, such as autonomy and self-determination.” Appeal to him to find the appropriate manner to use his executive power to ensure that, as soon as possible, Congress reconsiders the issue of indigenous rights and culture and approves the remaining elements of the COCOPA bill that he presented to Congress in December.

3. Circulate information, such as the contents of this Report, on the situation in Chiapas.

(The full text of the SIPAZ report can be found at: <<http://www.sipaz.org>>.) ●

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