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“What Holds a Church Together?”

by Henry H. Rightor

The question of what holds the Episcopal Church together has become more acute as a result of the controversial ordination of 11 women deacons to the priesthood on July 29, and the special meeting of the House of Bishops called in August to consider those ordinations. Because General Convention in 1970 and 1973 failed to approve the ordination of women to the priesthood, the bishops and standing committees of several dioceses who had favored such ordinations declined to proceed in the face of Convention's action. Because they failed to join the issue, there remains the constitutional question of whether a diocese and its officers retain sufficient autonomy to ordain a woman to the priesthood, Convention's disapproval notwithstanding.

There are now issues of polity and theology more pressing than the legal issues. Episcopalians who are concerned about holding our Church together might do well to shift their attention from what can we do under our constitution and canons to what *should* we be doing as agents of reconciliation in a pluralistic society. For, in our Church as well as our society, there are many black and brown people, many women and many young and old people of all backgrounds, who have become restive; they will no longer gladly accept the uniform rules set for them by some middle-aged white males (bishops, priests and laymen) who make effective use of the antiquated procedures of a non-representative General Convention that meets for only 10 days every three years. If a shift of interest is made to polity and the theology of reconciliation, we have something to learn and to share from our

own histories.

The authors of the Episcopal Church's original constitution and canons provided for a church that, in some respects, approximated “a network” more closely than it did the Episcopal Church of today. Take, for example the question of bishops, when the Episcopal Church got under way in 1798. Substantial mutations had developed in the churches of the various American states after the Declaration of Independence. South Carolina had become fearful of “prelacy” and came along in 1789 only when the original draft of the constitution was amended so as to permit a diocese to continue indefinitely without a bishop. (In fact, the Diocese of Georgia had no bishop for the first 35 years of its existence.) On the other hand, Episcopalians in Connecticut believed a bishop was indispensable to their mission and had already gone to unusual lengths to have Bishop Seabury consecrated in 1784.

These dioceses could enter into a fruitful life together because they had something besides uniformity to hold them together. They had a spirit like that described by St. Paul — a spirit which made the eye value the hand, the head value the feet — a spirit which united them all as diverse members of one body.

The Episcopal Church may be in trouble today because it has come to depend too much on a sterile kind of uniformity to hold it together — fearful that the only alternative to uniformity is anarchy. Meanwhile a lot of Episcopalians are beginning to think the problem of unity and diversity was handled better when South Carolina and Georgia and Connecticut each did its own thing with regard to having or not having a bishop. Such a polity could be translated into today's situation by encouraging dioceses which want women priests to affirm their historic autonomy by so ordaining women or regularizing the “Philadelphia ordinations.” These actions at this time would raise constitutional questions, but there are worse things than raising questions. It is suggested, however, that the solution to our problem still depends on identifying and cultivating the spirit that can again unite us as diverse members of the same body.

Excerpted from a longer article in **Leaven**, newsletter of the National Network of Episcopal Clergy Associations.

Cover illustration by Tom Jackson.

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The Hunger, The Thirst

by Robert L. DeWitt

This issue of *The Witness* contains articles by three ordained persons — William Coats, David Gracie and Alice Mann. We asked them to reflect, personally, on the social mission of the Church. Although one of them is younger than the other two, none is old. Yet there is little of the exuberant assurance of youth in their statements. Once burnt, twice shy?

Though not old, they are veterans. They have been where the Church intersects society, and a busy intersection that has been in recent years. The incidence of accidents has been high. There have been casualties both personal and social; and a deeply sobering tie-up of traffic remains. The unfinished business of amnesty is a sample. Many of that generation looked into the face of their parents, of their communities, of their nation and of their culture — and everywhere they saw the face of death. The intricate and torn fabric of institutional and social life, and the thin, fragile tissue of personal relationships, pose dilemmas which are the despair of many stout hearts.

The church's mission is one of hope, together with faith and love. That hope, however, must be in touch with reality, not ignorant of it. Hope is not born of carping, of condemning. Neither is hope real if it is not informed. So the Church (and therefore this publication) should not indulge in shaking a condemning finger, but in providing suggestive analysis. Not fault-finding, but fact-finding. And model designing.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Yes, and therefore blessings on all those today who stubbornly seek to relate the Gospel of love to the faltering structures and persons of our time. In so doing, they serve us all. For thereby they hold hope safely hostage until the day of the great ransom.

Urban Missioner/ Parish Priest

by David M. Gracie

Returning to the parish has been good for me after spending several years as diocesan urban missioner apart from an altar and a local congregation. Not that we haven't done a lot of praying these past years. There have been Quaker meetings in draft boards, mass on the courthouse steps at the Harrisburg trials, and hymn-singing in the paddywagon with welfare rights mothers and children: "Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand."

But such glorious diversity leaves something to be desired. It makes for a life and an offering to God that is broad and sometimes sparkling on the surface but of uneven depth. In my file cabinet are folders on every issue from the cause of political prisoners in Rhodesia to the gay movement in Philadelphia. When the prayer meetings are not in progress, I feel like a social concerns bureaucrat. What hurts is that I cannot do justice to all of the concerns; yet I know each is a pressing matter of justice for someone.

Let me describe some of my feelings at a recent demonstration. One evening we picketed a local retailer of Farah slacks. Farah, we believed, had engaged in unfair labor practices to prevent the unionization of Mexican-American workers in its Texas plants. Being the son of a factory worker, I can easily become identified with a struggle against the exploitation of non-union labor. A Roman Catholic bishop on the scene in the Southwest had sounded the call and many churchpeople joined in a boycott of Farah products.

Our own picket line was not impressive. Several members of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union

were there, a few priests and a nun. You did read about it in the newspapers. But Amalgamated hired a professional photographer to take our pictures on the line; these shots were edited into a film depicting the boycott effort around the world. Why not? But I felt less than happy about it. I guess it was the thought of being used and re-used in one cause after another. It flattens one out after a while ("Who is he?" "Oh, he's the priest who serves the causes.") The technological dimension bothered me, too. How many times have we cleverly magnified small actions, and smaller personalities, by holding them up to the camera in a certain way? Why not? — when the cause is just. Still, it does become alienating after a while. (Footnote: The Farah strike is over. Go out and buy all the Farah clothing you want; it is now union-made. Amalgamated asks us to boycott Van Heusen products now. Their shops have run away as far as Taiwan!)

After the demonstrations, or the food drive for victims of a welfare foul-up or the Washington lobbying to cut spending in Vietnam, everybody goes home. Where is home? Some go back to the daily work of the union or organization of the poor to which they belong. Some return to the ideological community from which they moved out to join the action — Marxist, Quaker, black nationalist.

A Sense of Proportion

Now, I am a parish priest as well as urban missioner for the diocese. Sometimes that compounds the confusion, but more often it makes for a certain wholeness.

A Teamster local was on the streets for five months demanding job security and pension rights for its members. One of the staunchest picketers was Ann, a member of our congregation. Ann is 62 years old and was due to retire from her job while the strike was in progress. She stayed on the line until they won. She did it not just for herself, she said, but for all the others who needed to be protected. I visited her on the line to chat and on Sundays we prayed for the strikers at the parish Eucharist.

Our parish is in the part of town where race relations are most strained now. Our white neighborhood surrounds a tiny black ghetto subject to raids and incursions by white youth. Black young people fight back. The result last summer was shootings, stabbings, arrest and much tension. I went to community meetings called to deal with the crisis not as a diocesan human relations agent (one of my Church House hats), but as a parish

priest. At the meetings I found a white family and a black family from our congregation among those willing to speak up and take some risks for racial understanding. I rediscovered a sense of proportion in my own ministry as I tried to understand and support these families.

What I knew to be true in the 1960s in an activist parish in Detroit I am finding again in a little bluecollar parish in Philadelphia: The Gospel, in its social dimension, must and can be heard as good news by each individual in the particular place where he or she is called to serve. I welcome the chance to go slower, to build more patiently and to recapture the relationship with individuals which we have sometimes lost through our necessary involvement with mass causes.



"Before Christ there is no aggregate, no mass; the innumerable are for him numbered — they are unmitigated individuals." Soren Kierkegaard said that, and we need not share his blindness to the socially-transforming power of the faith to affirm his main point.

The individual, the personal, the particular. That is what parish life provides. There is a labor movement and there is Ann on the picket line. There is the concept of racial justice and there are Babe and Bill and Woody at a neighborhood meeting. How personal everything becomes.

There are many generalizations that need to be corrected. We are in the heart of Kensington, advertised as the most bigoted part of town; yet there are whites here for whom racial equality is as obvious a need for their neighborhood as street lights and paving. There is a man in our congregation who wants George Wallace to be president but votes for the most liberal congressman in town. ("I know him. He has been to my home.")

I do not mean to imply there is no big picture: I just want to say it needs to be open to correction all the time.

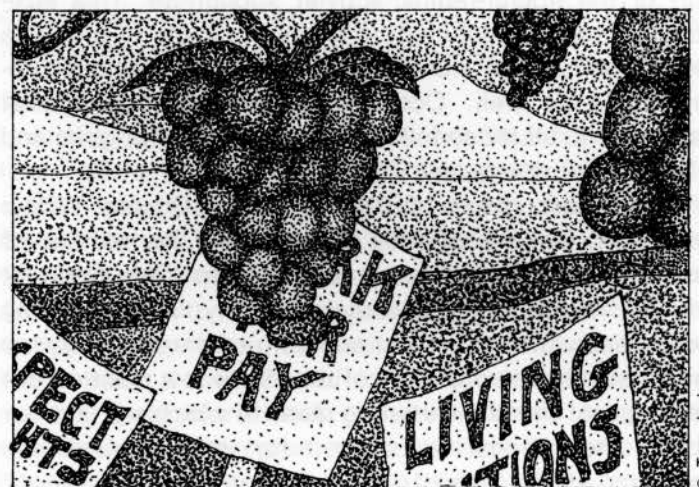
I find it interesting to come into the neighborhood for worship or other activities and think to myself about what

we did at headquarters this week that was at all relevant to the lives of people here. Sometimes we do well. A call for a diocesan-wide offering to help the people at Wounded Knee or for Vietnam reconstruction (North and South) can provide a link to other communities that might never have evolved from our parochial setting. The visit of the Episcopal Community Services prison chaplain and a return visit of men in our parish to the state prison is another link-up we would never have made alone. We found when we got to the prison a newly-confirmed member of the church who comes from our own neighborhood. So we introduced a new concept, prison reform, and gained a friend for whom it could make a difference.

Sometimes we fail. It is particularly hard to speak about war resistance to a congregation with so many connections to the military. If Cyprus or the Middle East heats up, at least one of our boys will be there with the fleet. Here the personal attachments militate against the social vision. I think that during the time of the Vietnam draft it might have been impossible in this parish to make the connections between the faith, and love and justice for the "enemies."

Sometimes I know I win no more than a friendly tolerance for some of my activities and concerns. But the door to involvement is open and some walk through it. I remember as a young man the first time I heard someone preach about the Kingdom of Christ as having something to do with a just and more loving social order here and now. It was a new word and I heard it gladly. And, come to think of it, the preacher was a denominational urban affairs man.

David M. Gracie: urban missionary, Diocese of Pennsylvania



Whatever Happened To All Those Radicals?

by Alice B. Mann

In our Labor Day move to a new apartment, my husband and I came across all sorts of things we forgot we had. One was a collection of old "cause" buttons, which came staring out of a box at me with a shorthand history of the 1960s. SNCC. CORE. FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY. THE RESISTANCE. BOYCOTT GRAPES. DICK GREGORY FOR PRESIDENT. THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN, PEOPLE AGAINST RACISM. STUDENT POWER. MOBILIZATION TO END THE MASS MURDER IN VIETNAM. CHANGE, NOT CHARITY. BOYCOTT LETTUCE. EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK.

I started college in the fall of 1966. Within a year, I was part of the liberal-radical-activist subculture. This sizeable sub-culture included, in addition to lots of students like myself, large numbers of clergy and young professionals as well. Occasionally, I think about what happened to all those folk, about where they've gone and what they're doing now.

In the last issue of *The Witness*, Gibson Winter suggested that we as a nation have fled the realities of institutions and politics by focusing on "the world of private values," particularly sexuality. Out of my experience with the activist sub-culture, I would say that this intensely personal bias of the 1970s is a reaction not only against the disheartening mess in which we find our public institutions, but also, for me, against the character of the activist sub-culture itself.

In my experience this sub-culture seemed to disparage the world of personal meaning. It tended to be hard-driving, perfectionistic, guilt-ridden, reactive (and often over-reactive), dogmatic, and exploitative of women (especially in the earlier years). One found relatively little empathy there with the bourgeois "enemy," nor much insight into the sources of opposition to change — especially the emotional ones. The atmosphere tended to be demanding and judgmental.

What were the satisfactions? One was the fabricated self-esteem of being able to count oneself "part of the solution" and not "part of the problem." A related one was the temporary escape from guilt which all our busyness provided. A third was a clear and simplistic ideology (which varied from group to group) about the source of evil and the means of salvation. And a fourth was the excitement of believing that major changes were on the way fast; one had to believe this in order to go around telling others that these changes were "imperative," and that this was a crisis like no other.

These are not, however, the sort of satisfactions that feed long-term commitment to a cause. Healthy personalities were bound to rebel against the dogmatism, the denial of a wide range of personal needs, the perfectionism, the impatience, and the judgmentalism. People were sure to go looking for a more humane plot of psychic space to live on.

The Camaraderie's Gone

This is, no doubt, escape. But some of it is the kind of escape that we would hail as "liberation" — as a step away from that wholeness if it involves an abdication of our responsibility for confronting the institutional problems, or a denial of their relevance to our "personal" lives. In a society like ours, there is no such thing as a "personal" sphere unaffected by institutional realities. Many of the "graduates" of the activist sub-culture of the 1960s threw out the baby with the bath-water: they plugged in to some more personalistic sub-culture and tuned out the rest.

But lots of us are still out there somewhere — trying to maintain commitments to social change and struggling to temper them with more patience, more tolerance of other points of view, more readiness to hang in with our institutions, imperfect as they are. And I believe that we're trying hard to accept more honestly our own needs to be fed, spiritually, sexually and interpersonally.

A major difference is that we're not an identifiable sub-culture any more. We don't have the same camaraderie, the same rallying points, the same visible support system of

ideas and relationships. We live a much more ambiguous life, in which the identity of the "goodies" and the "baddies" rarely can be proclaimed with any certainty. We're not always sure just how much we're "part of the problem" and how much "part of the solution," but we try to keep moving with whatever clues we've got. The cost is that it gets lonely and confusing sometimes. The payoff is that we get to honor more aspects of ourselves; we're also less obvious targets of stereotyping and resistance.

If I were to be given a magic wand and 20 years, what I would do is rebuild the social change sub-culture. I would mix together long-term commitments to institutional change, small and very personal support communities, a high tolerance for ambiguity and complexity, and a healthy sense that, whatever we attempt, God is making history out of our mistakes and successes alike, and is standing ready to forgive and accept us just as we are.

Alice B. Mann: associate minister, Church of St. Asaph, Bala Cynwyd, Pa.

A Calvinist Pilgrim's Progress

by William Coats

Each generation of Christian social activists recapitulates the Puritan heritage. This is because of that peculiar American notion that human destiny is bound up with the destiny of the American nation.

When I left seminary in 1964 to take my first job, I supposed I was not much different from others who linked the Christian Gospel with social activism. Many of us had taken to heart Dietrich Bonhoeffer's charge to be "wordly Christians." For my part, as an assistant to a black priest in a black congregation in southern Virginia, this meant a

commitment to the civil rights movement. Like many other white Christians my theology was heavily political; God willed the extension of equal opportunity, the guarantee of individual rights and integration. I wanted to build (or rebuild) the holy nation, the political substance of which was liberalism. And so we marched, sat in, registered voters, sponsored inter-racial conferences and lived together as if color did not matter.

It did not take long, however, before I realized that many black people, whatever their hopes for integration, did not accept the self-evident validity of the American liberal dream. I remember how shocked I was when a young black instructor from the University of California at Berkeley said to me she would rather send her children to a 'second rate' black college than to Berkeley. I could hardly fathom this rejection of one of the institutional embodiments of Western enlightenment. On another occasion, an official at the local black college, after assuring me of his support in matters arising out of some campus demonstrations, denounced me before the Board of Trustees. He was trying to save his institution. But I wondered how someone could place the survival of an institution (or even black culture) above those ideals of fairness, openness, progress and tolerance which I had associated with life itself, unless these ideals and the American dream they expressed were flawed. Or worse still, what if these ideals were a cover for exploitation? Heretofore I had assumed that racists and reactionaries were the main roadblock to progress, but now the prospect arose that the construction of social and political reality which we in the white world considered self-evidently just and humane was a way of pre-defining reality so that dominant groups within the white community could preserve their power. As this possibility dawned on me, sin took on Calvinistic dimensions. It was a seriously broken world in which we lived where even our ideals were idols.

American Dream Defective?

At the national level the Episcopal Church was wrestling with the same issue. In 1967 it embarked on a multi-million dollar grant program to aid minority groups in self-determination. The General Convention Special Program was both classical charity and an attempt to vindicate the American dream. If the helpless could be presented with an opportunity to help themselves, all would be well. But, if the white donors hoped to preserve their world, the minority, particularly black, recipients wanted to build one of their own. The program was a marriage of convenience doomed to fail. Truth was not the same for each side.

Soon this divergence, coupled with the inevitable white backlash, buried the program. But the minorities' critique of white pretensions persisted. Was the American dream itself defective? Was justice more than charity extended to the helpless? Does not charity presume, and hence reinforce, structural inequities?

By 1967 the American dream was turning into a nightmare. Cities burned at home and in Vietnam. In the meantime I had become a chaplain at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. An enchanting place with a liberal tradition, Chapel Hill, like many other American towns in the late 1960s, was in constant political turmoil. Nowhere was this more evident than among the left-leaning liberals with whom I worked in the Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy campaigns and numerous local projects. Upper-middle class, we assumed there was a basic harmony in American life which had been upset either by some quirk in the flawed personalities of national leaders or else by the selfishness and short-sightedness of labor and business interests. Left liberalism lived on the hope



that renewed commitment to progressive principles on key issues would right the ship of state. The 'issues,' however, were no longer industrial oppression, economic inequality or class division; instead they were war, poverty, racism, and equal opportunity for oppressed groups.

Utopia Now!

It became apparent we could not rally mass support to our banner. This caused me to question the whole enterprise. What if the issues outlined by left liberalism were only symptomatic and the traditional issues of class and economic life were more central? If this were so, an entirely different strategy and outlook would be required. It would mean, for example, not only dealing with the shape of the political economy, but also foregoing the naive notion that ideas establish themselves as political realities by means of moral zeal without the mediation of classes or social forces.

Developments within the Church further increased my doubts. Many of us tried desperately to get dioceses and other Church bodies to 'take a stand' against the war, the draft and misplaced national priorities. We wanted the Church to take moral leadership and restore integrity to American life. After years of such efforts, it was obvious the Church was going to do no such thing. At first this angered me, but then I wondered if we had asked the Church to be something it could not and should not be. Was it the job of the Church to give advice to the nation as if all the nation needed was some additional instruction to right itself? Further, even though it was understandable that political liberals would espouse the doctrine of the holy nation, I began to realize there was no scriptural warrant for Christians to do so. The Biblical writers, it seemed to me, believed as little in the idea of salvation by advice as they did in the notion of a secular holy nation. In the Bible loyalty to God did not mean loyalty (or disloyalty) to the nation, but critical distance from any idol. The Church's responsibility was to the Kingdom and not to the nation — two quite different things.

It was clear to me by 1969, as I assumed the chaplaincy to the University of California at San Diego, that some break with liberalism had to be made. In California one option immediately presented itself: the counter culture. I don't suppose this was ever a serious possibility for me, but it had its fascination. Indeed, what Christian, upon reading the Bible, could fail to draw some parallel between the New Testament Church and the American counter-culture? Did not the young Church hold to a set of values different from those of a hardened, cynical Roman Empire? Heedless, joyful, courageous, kind, often ecstatic, the early Christians had prompted Celsus in the Third Century to ask Origen if this was any way to run an empire? Origen, with his eye on another kingdom, had replied yes. The simplicity and innocence of the youth culture were its strengths. Like the liberalism to which it was related, it demanded the immediate implanting of virtue, except that the young wished to bypass the messy reality of politics altogether. Utopia now! I was just a bit too cynical for that. At any rate, by 1972 the counter culture was dead.

That left political radicalism. Both in North Carolina and in California I had worked with young political radicals in anti-war demonstrations, campus workers' strikes and political organizing. Isolated, bereft of a continuous, strong tradition, exceedingly young, the Left had a proclivity to sectarianism, irrationality and impatience. "If I can't produce the revolution in 20 years," a friend said to

me, "then fuck it." Nonetheless, the Left and only the Left, was critical of the holy nation tradition and at the same time delineated political reality in terms of those ineradicable features of class, economics and self-interest. Slowly I became aware I lived in a capitalist society (not just an evil one), that capitalism meant classes (not a harmony of interests momentarily upset), that the system necessitated that some get greater rewards than others (which is what equal opportunity amounts to) and that every aspect of society bears the traces of a market economy, being materialistic, hierarchic, 'thing-ified.' All that was needed was the actual material environment to which these ideas pointed and from which a lasting political movement might spring. Surely this would not be found in or around the elite campuses where radicalism flourished for so long.

God of the Future

In 1971 I accepted a job as chaplain to the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Milwaukee is a remarkably stable working class town with a long progressive history. The people are hard working, conventional in their social views, solid. Here is the stuff of America: no utopian dreams, no new world, only scaled-down visions and limited horizons. This is also the grim world of industrial America with its working class resentment — the anger of the trapped, the by-passed, the ignored (even if, economically, not the most oppressed). Here, too, one finds that awesome cynicism which, on the one hand, will uphold America in the face of dreamers (particularly affluent ones), and yet, on the other hand, will pierce the veil of hypocrisy and pretension. This is the urban soil in which radical analysis and a political movement can take root.

As I write in August, 1974, 15,000 workers are on strike in Milwaukee, 6 percent of our work force is unemployed and inflation is running at 12 percent per year. In the 1960s we forgot that for most people material concerns remain central to their existence. History is, after all, the struggle of contending classes for survival and power and not the unfolding drama of great issues or ideas. This lesson is a difficult one for those Christians who look upon politics as abjuring selfishness in the search for some harmonious ideal. Indeed, the monied class continually urges this course upon us, thereby diverting attention from the responsibility it bears for structural oppression. But self-interest is not the same thing as selfishness and working people have nothing to be ashamed of in fighting for their material interests. It is the beginning point of all

politics. Working people are free to fight for themselves (which is what the rich have always done albeit under the cover of promoting great ideals). Whether our actions are right or wrong will be judged by the God who is the power of the future.

Political theology means attending to the political consequences of theology and looking for signs of redemption beyond politics. The Church is called to be such a sign. Accordingly, many people expect the Church to speak out on key issues. If the Church today possessed the same position in society as did the 4th and 15th Century Church, there might be some point to public pronouncements. But this is not the case. We are witnessing a change in the Church's relation to society and cannot expect that public statements by the Church mean much, either to those outside the Church or to those inside. My hope, therefore, is that the Church will attend simply to the matters of preaching and celebration, which, in themselves, are radical enough and need no translation into moral crusades. Besides, what political slogan could possibly be more radical than the old confession made known in the breaking of the bread that 'Jesus is risen from the dead'?

God Mandates Politics

After 10 years as a priest I am aware of continuity and discontinuity in my thought. I remain convinced it is impossible to talk of God without at the same time speaking of politics. Yet I do not believe this is the same thing as saying that God is one who caps our human strivings or that He is a metaphor for the vocabulary of liberal ideals. I believe God stands over against all our ideals — the holy nation being the most prominent political one — and exposes our hopes as riddled with pretension and deceit. This means that one is continually driven to the brink of a kind of fundamentalist non-engagement. For it is at that point one realizes that only by breaking all apparently self-evident ties between man and God can God truly be man's God; and further, one discovers that politics is possible because God, in raising the accursed criminal, Jesus, has personally mandated politics. Politically, this means that only a radically transcendent God is free enough to create something new on the other side of our present stagnation and despair. Hence I am a radical only in faithfulness to the God of the other side, the God of the future.

William Coats: chaplain, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, author, *God in Public*.

Bishop Wilmer's "Schismatical Consecration"

by William Stringfellow

The gratitude and pride of Episcopalians because the unity and community of the Episcopal Church were not decisively impaired by the Civil War should not distort our recall of how near the Church came to schism, similar to that suffered by other churches at the time, based on race and geopolitics.

In 1861 the dioceses in the states which had seceded from the Union convened urgently, first in Montgomery, Ala., and then in Columbia, S.C. At the outset, there was no consensus. Some felt the war had separated, but not divided, the Church and that no ecclesiastical changes were necessary. Others, epitomized by Leonides Polk, the bishop of Louisiana (a West Point graduate who accepted a combat command as a general in the Confederate Army) asserted that "the Church must follow nationality" and that secession had rendered the dioceses of the South ecclesiastically isolated from the Episcopal Church in the United States and, indeed, from all of Christendom. Amid the passion and turbulence, a majority of the southern dioceses committed themselves to the organization of "The Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States." That was probably a political necessity, if the Episcopal Church was to survive at all in the Confederacy, but it raised a plethora of questions concerning the theological validity and ecclesiastical regularity of the "new" Church and of the southern dioceses.

The immediate issue of how civil authority affects

church polity represents a venerable and redundant problem in Anglicanism. In the days of Henry VIII, the denial of the right of any foreign power to exercise authority within England undid the Pope's claim to jurisdiction over the Church of England. If denominating the King as head of the Church spared Anglicanism from Papal corruption, it, in turn, occasioned the quandary of Anglicans in the American colonies who remained Loyalists during the Revolution because they supposed that to renounce the Crown would plunge them into ecclesiastical chaos. "No king, no bishops!" was the slogan of American Anglican Tories. When the Revolution prevailed, and Connecticut elected Samuel Seabury as bishop, Seabury loitered around London for months, unqualified to be duly consecrated by the English bishops because of prohibitions of Parliament, before resorting to the consecration by the Scottish bishops, who were free of such political restraint. It was not until 1789 that questions of the regularity and the validity of Seabury's episcopacy were cured by ratification of the General Convention.

An Audacious Election

While the Episcopal Church in the Confederate States was being constituted, a radically ambiguous case affecting church order occurred. Alabama had no bishop and it sought procedural instructions from the Council of Southern Dioceses which met in 1861. The Council affirmed the necessity of the episcopal office in historic succession but offered no counsel on how this might be attained in the circumstances for Alabama. In the exigency, though bereft of collegial authority or advice, Alabama elected Richard H. Wilmer as bishop and offered his election for the concurrence of the other southern dioceses.

It was an audacious and, some thought, impatient act. Though the southern dioceses had expressed a general intention to form a new Church, that had not yet happened. Indeed, the Civil War ended before the adoption of a Constitution and Canons for the Episcopal Church in the Confederate States. At the same time, not all of the southern dioceses withdrew from the Episcopal Church in the United States. Two dioceses maintained relations through the war, participating, among other things, in the certification of the elections of two northern bishops. The records are incomplete or lost as to diocesan action certifying Bishop Wilmer's election, though it is established that at least two did not consent to it.

Despite all this, Wilmer was consecrated by three southern bishops on March 6, 1862. "A schismatic con-

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secession" it was called. It is difficult, at least this side of Henry VIII, to imagine an ecclesiastical situation in which validity could be more controversial or regularity could be more questionable than in the Wilmer case. Yet Wilmer today is accorded full recognition in the historic succession of bishops in America. When the General Convention first met, after the war's end, the Presiding Bishop especially invited the southern bishops and delegations to attend. Fearing ridicule or rebuff, Wilmer refused the invitation. Nevertheless, when the matter of his ecclesiastical status reached the agenda, the two houses of the Convention enacted a joint resolution ratifying his election and duly recognizing him as the bishop of Alabama, thus obviating the vexsome problems of validity and regularity.

The ratification of Wilmer as a bishop was integral to the reconciliation of the Episcopal Church in the aftermath of secession and civil war, and near schism. It upheld the priority of conscientious intention over the letter of the law, and, I dare say, it acknowledged the impatience of the Holy Spirit, militant in history, superseding theological abstraction and ecclesiastical nicety.

Lately, in the House of Bishops, as elsewhere in the Episcopal Church, the terms "validity" and "regularity" have been much bandied in connection with the Philadelphia ordination of 11 priests who are women. One hopes that in the midst of this controversy, the case of Bishop Wilmer will be remembered for the precedent it offers for the ratification by the whole Church of these ordinations, and for a remedy to disputes about validity and regularity worthy of attribution to the Holy Spirit.

William Stringfellow: author, social critic, attorney and theologian.

Network Reports

Highlights of Executive Council Action

- Three "partnership consultations" held during August in Tanzania, Central Africa and Uganda reported that the most critical question asked and not answered in the meetings was: "What manner of need do church people in Germany, Canada, Britain and the United States have of African church people?" No longer will churches in Africa tolerate a donor-receiver relationship which means control by the West.

- The Council declared that President Ford's clemency and earned-reentry program falls short of the gospel's standards and urged local churches and individuals to work for a full reconciliation of these men with their families and country.

- The Council on Ministry urged major agencies of the Episcopal Church — the Church Pension Fund, Board for Clergy Deployment and the Board for Theological Education — to address themselves "to the issue of racism and sexism within their own programs and ministries" and to report back to the Council on "how they propose to confront these issues."

- The Council also defeated a resolution urging Bishop Allin to introduce into the October meeting of the House of Bishops a resolution to call for a special General Convention in 1975 to deal "with the issues of oppression, sexism and prejudice against women in the church and world."

- Granted \$8,000 to Bishop Francisco Reus-Froylan to cover the cost of legal and educational approaches to combat strip mining in Puerto Rico.

- Elected Mrs. Leona Bryant from St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, to replace Dr. Charles V. Willie who resigned from his Council membership in August.

Paul Washington: Member of Executive Council

Network Reports

Puerto Rican Independence

A national demonstration in support of Puerto Rican independence will be held at Madison Square Garden in New York at 1 p.m. Sunday, October 27. The demonstration, which has been six months in the making, is expecting 20,000 people from all regions of the country and Puerto Rico. Speaking at the event: Corky Gonzalez, head of Crusade for Justice, Congressman John Conyers, Jane Fonda, James Forman, Juan Maribras of Puerto Rico, and David Garcia of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in New York. United Nations delegates from Africa, Latin America and Asia have been invited to participate in the demonstration.

Equal Rights Amendment Still In Trouble

More than a hundred years ago, feminists and abolitionists split over the latter's refusal to press for women's rights and suffrage in the 14th and 15th amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Now a 26th amendment that would finally guarantee equal rights to women is making the rounds of the states for final ratification. The Equal Rights Amendment will become law if 38 states ratify it before 1979. So far 33 states have ratified, though two of those, Nebraska and Tennessee, have attempted to rescind their ratification.

The current fight for ratification has been unexpectedly stiff and there is a chance the amendment will fail. Conservative groups, notably the John Birch Society, are fighting it with money and influence. As usual, the

churches that have been heard from at all are against the amendment and are interested in keeping woman in her God-given place. The Episcopal Church has been silent, though here and there, as in North Carolina, a diocesan convention has gone on record as approving the amendment.

The amendment has not yet been ratified in the following states: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah and Virginia. That means that Episcopalians in at least 32 dioceses have time to speak out for the Gospel imperative of justice and equality for all.

Readers of *The Witness* are invited to submit reports on a wide variety of subjects and events looked at from many perspectives. Send reports to *The Witness/Network Reports*, 17187 Wildemere, Detroit, Michigan 48221.

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