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VOLUME 74 NUMBER 9 SEPTEMBER 1991

THE WITNESS

CONFESSION



FACING
THE
DEMONS
WITHIN
AND THE
DARKNESS
OF THE
HISTORICAL
MOMENT.

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Readers criticize moving *The Witness*

I GET *THE WITNESS* courtesy of friends since my income barely covers groceries and rent. But a comment:

I was appalled to read the names of the committee of the Board who decided to move the mag to Detroit, ending faithful employment of Philly staff. The Board Committee was ALL MEN. The Staff affected were ALL WOMEN!! Known as liberals in the Church these men (appointed by a faithful liberal MAN) fell into the trap of male chauvinism and patriarchal control, failed to involve the staff or the former editor in the process, and defended themselves claiming "irrevocable"!!!! If it were not such a valuable journal, I'd cancel in protest. I am appalled, and would like to read an acknowledgment by THOSE MEN of their blindness to the issues they promote in this mag.

Volume 74, Number 6, June 1991, is the most valuable single contribution to the Church as it prepares for "Phoenix." Thanks and Congratulations.

Everett Waldo
San Diego, CA

BELIEVING FIRMLY that injustice must be denounced, even, and perhaps especially, when it occurs within an organization which itself usually struggles against injustices, I am writing to express how disappointed and outraged I am at the precipitous and unfair move of *The Witness*

to Detroit and the consequent unemployment of four staff members. Though I have become well aware over the

years that no organization, no matter how altruistic in intent, ever lives up to its ideals, I had not thought that *The Witness* could ever act in such an irresponsible and destructive manner.

It seems to be no coincidence that all

four of the staff persons affected adversely by this move are women, while all four of the persons making the decision are men. You have apparently acquiesced, if not actively supported, this decision, which gives me no hope for the continuation of the prophetic voice which I have come to count on from *The Witness* on matters of gender equity.

Today I received a letter from you asking for an additional contribution. My first reaction was, "Not on your life." My second reaction was to dump the whole mailing into the trash. I will not at this time cancel my subscription, but will take a wait-and-see attitude. I strongly urge you to find some way quickly to repair the severe damage that your decision has caused, first as to the lives of the women affected, and second as to the trust of your readers.

Marian L. Shatto
Lititz, PA

THIS IS IN RESPONSE to your recent request for a contribution and in lieu of my usual gift.

I was quite appalled by your decision to uproot your organization and strand your loyal staff in your move to Detroit. I am unable to understand any benefit to come from the move, other than the convenience of the new editor.

Surely if you can afford to absorb the costs of the move, including recruiting and training new staff, the loss of my small contribution will not be noticed. I do wish you well in spite of your apparent bad judgment. The voice of *The Witness* is too important not to be heard.

Richard E. Bunyan
Alexandria, VA

I WAS MOST DISTRESSED to read of the manipulatory closing of *The Witness's* Ambler office, done without the knowledge or participation of long-term staff. I am certain that Mary Lou Suhor told the story not only accurately but gently in your June issue. Though the process may

have been masterminded and driven by the board, surely it did not occur without your knowledge and complicity.

Your treatment of people who have given so much to produce *The Witness* and to keep its practices true to its teaching is a most inauspicious beginning to your tenure. Not trust, openness and participation but back-room deals with other people's lives -- indeed true to industry's worst plant-closing practices. It does not move me to contribute.

V. Powell Woodward
Cambridge, MA

MY REASON for writing you is twofold. First, your father and I were friends for many years; second, I worked in Ambler for *The Witness* for two years or so just after its rebirth.

I must be honest with you. I feel very badly that the board acted without much communicating with the staff in any significant detail. The move to Detroit I feel is a very bad mistake. Detroit isn't exactly in the mainstream as is the Philadelphia area between New York and Washington.

While you yourself will receive all the good wishes of people like myself, you will be operating under quite a handicap with this unfortunate and perhaps ruthless action behind your election and removal to Detroit.

I do wish you well and will look forward to the first issue under your management.

E. Lawrence Carter
Sierra Madre, CA

ON THE OCCASION of Mary Lou Suhor's retirement, may I express my deep appreciation for all she has given us, the Episcopal Church and beyond, in her prophetic, visionary role as *Witness* editor. She and her staff have been channels of God's grace lighting our way into a more inclusive, just and peaceful future. Thank you, dear sister in Christ!

May Mary Lou's mantle, with double her spirit, pass to Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann. She'll need it!

Mary Eunice Oliver
La Jolla, CA

THE WITNESS

Letters

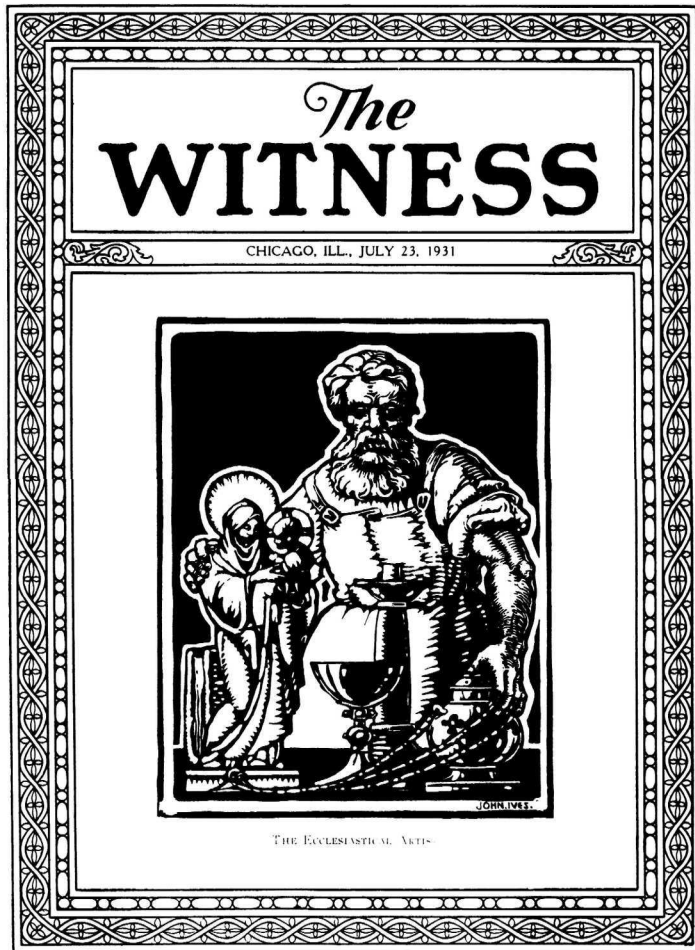
ECPC responds

We have received a number of inquiries concerning the board's decision to move our office to Detroit. These warrant our providing additional information, as follows. The board had been contemplating a move to another location for about a year and a half prior to its final decision -- this was connected to the recognized need to find a new editor/publisher and the conviction of some board members that the magazine belonged in an inner-city location. The impact of the move upon the incumbent staff was carefully considered by the board, and the staff were given one-half year's advance notice, offered full moving expenses, plus three month's extra salary as a positive encouragement to move with the magazine; if the staff chose not to move they would receive two month's severance pay.

The ultimate hiring of a Detroit-based editor/publisher led to the Detroit move. Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann indicated a willingness to consider moving to Ambler, PA. However, the full ECPC board, which includes women, people of color, clergy and lay members voted without dissent to move to Detroit.

There were two chief reasons for making the Detroit decision: 1) The symbol of locating our office at the hub of the rust belt, in the heart of an impoverished, racially-mixed city. This would add authenticity to our endeavor and enable us to capitalize upon the Christian base community already rooted there, of which our new editor, her clergy-husband and their two children are members. 2) A projected reduction in our publishing costs, and the prospect of finally ending a many-years-long erosion of the magazine's endowment. The board carefully weighed the alternatives in making a tough decision it feels holds real promise for the magazine's future.

William W. Rankin
Board Chairperson



THERE WAS A TIME when I was delighted to find *The Witness* in my mail! I felt it was a strong addition to the Church -- especially against Racism -- and with emphasis upon sharing the love of God with each other.

When Bishop Barbara Harris became a featured writer, I read *her* articles before anything else.

But the June issue really sickened me. God had vanished. Of course I know He is still there and stronger than those who seek to corrupt His teachings, but my grief is *real* about the Church magazine I formerly admired so much.

Please do remember that you have older readers -- like me -- who are disappointed and looking for your former great spiritual uplift, as well as those whose lives are in a mess in which they seem to rejoice.

Doris L. Boyd
Beverly, MA

I AM A ROMAN CATHOLIC reader of *The Witness* and agree with the editorial stance except on the issue of abortion -- to which I am opposed except for the life of the mother. In the Roman Church I am a

member of Women's Ordination Conference, CORPUS, Dignity, and Priests for Equality. It must not be assumed that all who support a progressive agenda are pro-choice. Abortion has more and more become another form of contraception with terrible consequences for "babies-in-process" and adoption agencies that have tens of thousands of unmet applications and the buying of babies from poor Mexican women for resale in the United States.

Prayer and best wishes as you begin the editorship.

William G. Poole
Lexington, KY

THE WITNESS

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THE WITNESS

CONFESSION

FACING THE DEMONS WITHIN AND THE DARKNESS OF THE HISTORICAL MOMENT.

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It is the policy of **The Witness** to use inclusive language whenever possible.

Confessing sin, confessing faith

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

I have always been drawn to apocalyptic literature. My heart rises to promises that *God will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood*

... And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Act 2: 19-21

For someone of my temperament it is a relief that my will may be trounced, bent, forced, subjugated. And in that process, the responsibility that I seem to incrementally assume for the world itself can slide from me -- leaving me no longer larger than life, humbled. I have John Donne's poem *Batter my heart, three person'd God* taped to my office wall.

There is in the act of confession, I believe, a heart-stopping, quickened vulnerability -- a sense that once begun, you cannot turn back and a sobering certainty that you will arrive in a quiet and humbled posture, relieved of the weight of the persona you draw around you and inflate.

It is a relief to offer your sin back to God and neighbor -- you understand

that you are not elect, not a visible saint. Merely human. Merely loved in your humanity by a strong and forceful God who calls forth the storm and the stillness. To be right-ordered. To respond to the calling of one's name. To understand who is God (and who is



credit: Sr. Helen David

not). To be a creature of God. To give thanks.

There is, I believe, a similar and related experience in defining your allegiance -- in confessing your faith, in uttering the name of Jesus in an arena where Caesar appears to rule.

There is the same searing vulnera-

bility. The same feeling that you cannot turn back. The same quickened sense of name and call and identity. There is a deafening realization that you are *not* Caesar -- and those pieces of yourself that have given dominion to the powers of the age are exposed and chastened. In the remains, you find simply yourself -- neither hero, nor warrior. Simply an element of the Word, a part of the creation that like the rocks and trees must cry out the dominion and sovereignty of God.

I was challenged several times on proposing a magazine issue on confession of sin and confession of faith -- they were, I was told, separate theological concepts.

I brooded on this. At a minimum, I felt it would be good to hold the two together, side by side. Instinctually, I felt a link. And a necessity for all of us to experience both.

I was familiar with the concept of *projection*: Our own torments and unconscious needs can splash across the universe driving us to obsessive and compulsive relationships with people and things.

I searched for a word that could represent the reverse -- the tendency to see evil and threat in the world and to *introject* those, painting them as per-

sonal phobias and sins.

Both tendencies are apparent in our culture.

We give Saddam Hussein the names we might better call ourselves -- greedy, arrogant, brutal. We transfer our own loneliness and uncertainty into a yellow ribbon conformity that

promises hell fire out of sight and a pretense of solidarity and goodness closer to home.

Similarly, there are real dangers on the loose -- but the confusion over whether we will have a future, whether we will let other nations starve, whether our cities are already outside the scope of repair, can all be *introjected* into pious concerns about whether we've been mean-spirited to

and social calamities can be ignored; We can stay home and needlepoint the Golden Rule.

Closer to home for many of us, I would guess, is the *introjection* of real world evils into a driven discipline of eating yogurt and jogging. We feel something evil lurking and we too respond by trying to perfect ourselves.

In reverse, we may *project* our own fears and needs into the world in a

way that seems to give us license to do *battle*. Instead of decimating Iraq, we may join social crusades with an almost unthinking anger.

It's for this reason that most nonviolent action groups ask participants to name their fears and bad motivations for high-risk political action in order to help foreclose the possibility that a marital dispute or de-

sire for public recognition might compel one into political protest.

Confession of sin and confession of faith offer us an opportunity to "face the demons within and the darkness of the historical moment," to surrender delusions, to move into right order and proportion with God and creation.

Ched Myers (from whom I lifted the preceding quote) writes about this in this issue. While he never uses the world confession, it is precisely the topic he is addressing.

At its best, the Church offers us a forum where we can speak clearly who we are and be claimed (if humbled) by God. It also corporately calls us to question and declare where our heart and allegiances are, which master we serve.

I learned toward the end of preparing this issue that there was a direct link between confession of sin and confession of faith in the Early Church.

During times of persecution, the early Church concluded that testifying faith in Christ, in a situation of risk, cleansed you of your sins. What's more, those who survived persecution were invited to hear confessions and to participate in rites of reconciliation -- at least until a turf struggle between the ordained and the martyrs ended in Cyprian's edict for the ordained.

The connection, I think, is that both forms of confession have everything to do with recognizing that you are not God. The very act smacks of mortality. To confess one's sins or to confront the powers and call the name of Jesus is to surrender and to know yourself again as free, as who you were uttered to be. **TW**

tion, the magazine has had an awareness of the spiritual journeys of wage earners. There was something unpretentious and gritty about the early *Witness*.

I look forward to readers' responses to the changes at the magazine. If something is omitted, please don't assume that the omission reflects an editorial decision. It may well be an oversight. Please feel free, at any, time to write or call.

--J.W-K.

Batter my heart, three personed God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new.
I like an usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived and proves weak or untrue.

Yet dearly I love you and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy:
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

-- John Donne

our parents or scrupulously honest with our employer. Feeling the desperate waves of impending disaster, we can interpret them as something within ourselves, something that will go away if only we can learn to be kind. The Church has all too often loaned its voice to this approach. The national

The Witness is changing. It's in Detroit. It has a new staff. New sections have been added.

I know the excitement and challenge I feel setting out to edit *The Witness* comes in large part from its history and the award-winning work of the people who have preceded me.

I am grateful to Mary Lou Suhor and to Susan Pierce for their vision and to all the Ambler staff for their work, their tenacity and their spirit. *The Witness* will miss these women.

During restless nights, I have wondered about the changes. The initiative to move the magazine to Detroit was mine. The momentum was the ECPC Board's. I am trusting the Board's stewardship and my own sense that the voice of *The Witness* will be strengthened by moving away from the coasts.

I was surprised to learn that *The Witness* originated in the Midwest. A province meeting resulted in a conviction that a different kind of Episcopal journal was needed. From its incep-

Witness Poetry Editor

Gloria House, also known by her African name, Aneb Kgositsile, is a poet and essayist who has been active for many years in the African-American liberation movement. She won the Levi Strauss Scholarship and earned bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of California, Berkeley, in French and Comparative Literature, respectively. She took her doctorate in American Culture and History at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her research focuses on the cultures of Third World communities in the United States.

House taught at the University of California, Berkeley, and San Francisco State College, and also worked as a *Detroit Free Press* editor before joining the faculty at Wayne State University, where she is associate professor of humanities.

Her work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *City Arts Quarterly*, *Solid Ground*, *Moving to Antarctica*, *Green River Review*, *The Black Arts Anthology*, and *The Black Aesthetic*. Broadside Press published her first collection of poems, *Blood River*, in 1983, and released her second volume, *Rainrituals*, in 1990.

At Wayne State University, House has pioneered projects in Third World and Women's Studies, developed a humanities curriculum for a prison degree program, and created an educational television series which has been purchased and used by 12 U.S. universities and community colleges.

Since 1965, when she worked as a field secretary for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in Alabama, House has been committed to the African-American freedom struggle. She continues to work with human rights organizations in the

Detroit area in solidarity with Third World liberation movements. She has traveled widely in Africa, Europe, Central America, and the Caribbean.

She has a son, Uri Stuart House, 24.



Gloria House

O Children of no childhood,
claiming freedom over fear,
carrying your fallen
on rivers of trotting and chants....
(for Nelson and Winnie Mandela;
Hana Khadafy and the children
on frontlines everywhere)

Caskets are floating
on rivers of children;
caskets are bobbing
on waves of children,
caskets of children carried
by children
on rivers
of trotting and chants.

Their fists reach high
like oars on the rivers,
and their voices soar
as from one great heart,
Mandela! Mandela!
They drape their buddies
in black, green, gold,
make every funeral
a fighter's call,
Amandla! Amandla!

The river runs
through occupied Palestine,
where teenagers' rocks
meet Israeli tanks.
There the children's shoulders
hoist their martyrs' coffins,
coffins of children
carried by children,
in fighters' ranks,
trotting and chanting
with fists high like hope.

Though they hobble on crutches,
they've put horror behind.
Uprooted and hungry, they hang on
from Angola to L.A.,
from Guatemala to the Nicaraguan hills.
Child contras abroad,
our cocaine kids at home -- with
buckets of bucks and dollar-sign-souls,
kill their cousins and die
for gangsters in government places.

O Children of no childhood
murdered as a policy of state,
we bury your slender coffins in lakes of tears,
but our fists pound the air like oaths.

South Africa Poem by Gloria House

Poetry

Resisting civil religion

From Pax Romana to the New World Order

An interview with Dorothee Sölle

Q: *There are Christians in the United States who feel that this is a pivotal moment in our history. Do you believe this is an exceptional time?*

A: The thing which concerns me most is the fact that we're now living in a one-world culture -- the capitalist culture. Nation number one is the United States. That's the essential part of this new world order.

This means that there is not an alternative any longer. With the breakdown in state socialism in eastern Europe, a whole dimension of another idea about life has collapsed. That is what frightens me most.

If you think about the substance of this new world order, the human being is seen as the *homo economicus* -- the economic agent whose interest is in making money and that is it. That's the basic definition. It's not one of a relational being who fulfills her or his need through interrelatedness as the Jews and the Christians have taught us to think.

Capitalist culture sees the meaning of life as production or consumption. All the other -- being the dreaming animal or being creative without any idea of selling, anything you do without a purpose -- is obsolete now. This form of world-wide capitalism doesn't

need other forms of life. That has terrible consequences for the third world with all the different cultures that people still have there.

In the third world, the poor are not simply capitalists that didn't make it. That is the idea that the World Bank has about them -- but the truth is that people in old cultures have very different values. In Peru and Bolivia, they value shared life. In those communities, communal leaders are respected not because of their income but because of their involvement in the liberating process. It's a very different

form of evaluation. The cash value is not the only value in the world.

Q: *What must Christians in the U.S. do?*

A: I loved what the Churches did during the Gulf War in the U.S. Both Catholics and the National Council of Churches protested the war in a clear manner -- much better than some of the Church groups here in Europe. I thought it was powerful. At the same time I was aware how much the Churches have lost power and influence and presence among the people.

The prevailing religion of George Bush and Saddam Hussein is the same. They both kneel down before a powerful, male violence -- being Number One -- which they claim is God. The innermost heart of patriarchy is the lust for power. The greatest value is power, not love. Love is a Christian



credit: Robert McGovern

Dorothee Sölle is a German theologian, peace activist and visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary.

Robert McGovern's work is featured frequently in *The Witness* and in other religious social concerns books and periodicals. He teaches at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

protest against obsession with power, and this culture is obsessed with power. I think that the Churches have to prepare themselves for a new role of resistance.

cause he declared that there was only an Aryan Christ.

Today we are sliding into a system which claims to be democratic. The government will tell us, we are not

means. But with the [absence of coverage of casualties] the soldiers were loved and honored by everyone. No one was able to criticize the soldiers for what they did -- which was to murder.

It's a *kairos* when you have to stand up and clarify this. There is now a cheap reconciliation between Church and State -- the Churches are not persecuted, they are respected and honored but only when they play the game of the victors, when they don't resist organized murder as war.

The prevailing religion of George Bush and Saddam Hussein is the same. They both kneel down before a powerful, male violence -- which they claim is God. Love is a Christian protest against obsession with power, and this culture is obsessed with power.

Q: What kind of resistance are we looking toward?

A: The Christian Church inside of the *Pax Romana* -- inside of a whole economic/political/social system which was based on militarism -- distinguished itself through lifestyle: not going to the theater when Christians were being devoured; not being amused by those public games which were the cultural expression of the power cult. That already took quite a bit of courage. People were expected to show at public events like the crucifixion. When the women went to weep at the tomb of Jesus it was an act of resistance.

The Christians were different, not believing in violence and not believing in money. These two values were the ones that Christians refused to adore. Instead they embraced the poor, the old, the weak, the handicapped.

Q: Is this a *status confessionis*, a moment in which the very meaning of the Gospel may be betrayed and lost, if the Church does not act?

A: I would say so, yes. *Status confessionis* was sort of renewed in 1933 and 1934, against a clear-cut tyranny (which was National Socialism) and a clear-cut tyrant. Hitler made it easier to understand that he was wrong be-

against the Church and religious freedom. There is a liberal sense; the Romans called it "licensed religion." They were pretty tolerant, the Romans -- they were not dumb. You could talk about Christ or Krishna or whatever. But as soon as this transcended the realm of religious freedom into the real world of business, of hunger, of disease, then the problems started.

But the economic world order we support is an order which is concerned with the wealth and well-being of one-third of the human family, and soon three-quarters of the human family will be condemned to die. And there is no political will to change that. When-

Q: Are there lessons we can take from the German Confessing Church?

A: Women and men in the Confessing Church gave their lives to the process of protecting victims of the system -- Jewish people. Today it is undocumented foreigners. Sanctuary and refugee problems will be one of the worst things in Europe. Will we build a fortress or will we have the *European house* -- a place with many doors and windows where other people could get in? We will have millions of refugees from other continents who just want to survive. What will happen to them? How do we as the Church deal with those questions?

I think that the Churches have to prepare themselves for a new role of resistance. There is now a cheap reconciliation between Church and State -- the Churches are not persecuted, they are respected and honored but only when they play the game of the victors, when they don't resist organized murder as war.

ever a problem comes up it is solved by war.

The media suffocates any form of resistance. The whole difference between the Vietnam War and this war came home to me. People who see the blood and destruction know what war

What we learn from the Confessing Church is to speak to power, to clarify what we mean by human rights. To discover Christ daily again and again in the poorest who are amongst us, live with us, die with us. This is the legacy of the Confessing Church. **TV**

Free by grace

experiences of confession

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Personal confession, for many of us, elicits images of Roman Catholic choir boys and school girls

forced to practice an overly scrupulous faith.

But, I would wager, on the heels of that image is an inarticulate longing to confess our hearts and hear the words of absolution.

It's not easy to practice confession in the Episcopal Church. We can't presume that Friday afternoon the confessional box will be staffed. There has not been, until 1979, a formula for the recitation of sins. Few priests seem at ease with the rite and many seminarians are not trained in it.

Many of us are suspicious of a tradition that can be and has been abused. We worry that confession may be a self-preoccupation. We struggle even to define sin. And we meet a seeming void in the institutional structure. There almost seems to be a tacit preference in the Church for people to work things out in therapy and accept

the general absolution during the eucharist as sufficient.

Yet, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a father of the Confessing Church in Germany

who was executed by the Third Reich, urges Christians to confess their sins concretely, saying that this frees people from bondage and initiates discipleship.

Bonhoeffer writes:

Those who are alone with their sins are utterly alone.

It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer,

and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness.

In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have persons by themselves . . . Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother or sister, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned.

As the first disciples left all and followed when Jesus called, so in confession the Christian gives up all and follows. Confession is discipleship.

In an effort to begin a conversation about confession, I asked several Episcopalians to recount their experiences of confession and reconciliation.



credit: Jenorah Patterson

Obsession With a Married Man

When her colleague's son died, Catherine Wilson [name changed] felt an urge to reopen an affair with him. Wilson had ended the relationship three years earlier after starting therapy. At that time, she concluded that the relationship was stealing her life. Her schedule had to wrap around his; he had obligations to his wife and child.

She finally broke the relationship, because it did not constitute "choosing life." Subsequently, she joined an Episcopal church, discovered an active faith life within herself and became a member of the vestry.

But the death of her former lover's child roused a confusion of feelings and a compelling desire to resume sleeping with her colleague.

"I was feeling in a state of turmoil, a state of compulsion. I felt sympathy. I felt mortal. I had this sense that if you don't trust in the future -- and loss of a child is a form of loss of future -- it's pointless to worry about your behavior on any given day."

Wilson went to her therapist and found it helpful but nondirective. She was thrown back on her own resources.

"I read my Bible and various prayers which were helpful but only temporarily. They didn't take away the feeling of dread, the feeling that I didn't have any power to say no which was terrifying because I thought I was over that kind of craziness. I couldn't sleep well. I was feeling close to tears most of the time. In tears a fair amount of the time."

Finally, Wilson made an appointment with her parish priest. Despite her friendship with him, she says she worried that he would be judgmental. She was afraid of being rejected or punished like a child. She arrived late

Jenorah Patterson, 34, is a Philadelphia artist who is legally blind.

for her appointment.

During their conversation, Wilson was relieved by two things. First, her confessor was unafraid to name her compulsion, even when she couldn't. Secondly, he was not rigid. He gave her permission to think through all options, acknowledging that "there would be pain in either choice."

He drew a parallel between her obsession and his experience quitting cigarettes. But maybe most importantly, Wilson says he *was* directive, but not in a morally high-handed way.

"He said, 'I'm not telling you anything that you don't already know,' which was true. 'I could put it in moral terms, but it's more heart break for you and I don't want to see you have more heart break. I wish for you someone who could be committed to you just as I would wish for anyone in my family.'"

Knowing that he would pray for her, she left.

"I felt like I was restored to myself. I felt like, in fact, I do have power to

choose and in a strange way I felt that even if I chose to sin again -- to put it in that term -- I could still come back. But I don't think I would choose that. I had the sense that the compassion and the love were there anytime I sought it. I felt that if I didn't have the power I could still come back. It took away the sense of powerlessness and the sense that I was lost."

Making Amends

Carter Heyward, a *Witness* contributing editor and one of the first women ordained in the Episcopal Church, says her understanding of confession has changed over time. When she was a teenager in North Carolina, she believed she had a



Carter Heyward: Making amends.

religious vocation and went to mass daily. "I asked the Episcopal priest if I could make my confession. I would guess he had never participated in sacramental confession. He had a makeshift arrangement at the altar. I would go once a month and rattle off what I considered in those days to be sins -- not doing what my parents had told me, telling a lie, having sexual feelings."

Since then, Heyward said, "What I have found very helpful in the 12-Step process, as a recovering alcoholic, is the business of making amends.

The experience that it is amongst friends that we experience the inpouring of the grace of God when sharing our vulnerability and looking at ways that our lives have been duplicitous or somehow fragmented."

Asked for specifics, Heyward described a relationship with a student at the Episcopal Divinity School that had gone awry.

"It was one of those relationships where everything that got said seemed to up the ante of the pain."

Finally, Heyward says she went to her student and said "If I am wounding you (and I am capable of this), I do not to mean to be. And if I have hurt you, I hope you will forgive me."

Subsequently, they had to work through the student's distrust of the confession. (It was the first time someone in authority had apologized to her.) But, with the help of a mediator who happened to be a priest, they were able to finish their academic work together.

"The most salient dimension of that for me was that even if I haven't

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's perspective

The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner.

Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother or sister? God is holy and sinless. But brothers and sisters are sinful as we are. We must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution. Self-forgiveness can never lead to a breach with sin; this can be accomplished only by the judging and pardoning Word of God itself.

To whom shall we make confession?

Anybody who has once been horrified by the dreadfulness of his or her

own sin that nailed Jesus to the Cross will no longer be horrified by even the rankest sins of a brother or sister. Only the brother or sister under the Cross can hear a confession . . . In the presence of a psychiatrist I can only be a sick person; in the presence of a Christian brother or sister I can dare to be a sinner.

What brought upon Jesus the accusation of blasphemy, namely, that he forgave sinners, is what now takes place in the Christian community in the power of the presence of Jesus Christ. One forgives the other in the name of the triune God. And there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over the sinner who repents.

[Excerpted from Chapter 5 of *Life Together*, Harper and Row, 1954.]

meant to do something wrong, it may be that it has come out that way.”

Making amends with people she has known in the past has been particularly important to Heyward.

“Alcoholism was a way to be out of control of what I was doing relationally, so to keep going back to some of those relationships is to recognize that people are very important to me.”

Heyward added that there is a flip side to confession.

“I have been in a couple of relationships where I have been deeply wounded and there has been no recognition on the part of the other person that anything was wrong. I have wrestled with how you forgive in that situation. What I have come to is that the readiness to forgive those who wound us is all we can do and that readiness is itself a release. In no way does it wipe away memory but it takes away resentment.”

The readiness of many in the Black Church and the Church in Latin America to forgive their oppressors is striking to Heyward, particularly in their willingness to break the cycle of violence.

“We really do take on the sins of the world and sufferings of others which in turn makes me realize how much we have to repent for. I may not have voted for George Bush and I may despise the Gulf War, but I am not above that war.” Heyward added that when she needs to confess something that “doesn’t involve people, like harming the earth, I incorporate into corporate prayer.”

“I don’t think the dominant powers that we live among know much about

this. We live in an ethic of violence and muscle flexing. The Churches have one primary mission: to help people embody an ethic of compassion and forgiveness with justice and to help them believe that we are created in the image of a good and creative God.”

Facing Fear

Jim Lewis, a *Witness* contributing editor who is probably best known to readers for his decisive political action, says the primary thing he has to confess is his own “all-encompassing fear.”

Lewis says he spent his ninth year confined to bed, listening to his own heart.



Jim Lewis: Confessing an “all-encompassing fear.”

credit: ENS

“I had rheumatic fever. I was isolated. The fears were awful. The doctor made me very much aware of my own heart. I listened to my heartbeat and thought this is something that could stop.”

Lewis’ sense of his own mortality merged with a sense of isolation. He felt abandoned by the friends with whom he had played sports.

In his tenth year, Lewis opted to change schools, because he felt

changed and isolated, afraid to be perceived as odd.

To enter Baltimore’s Episcopal boys’ school, he had to take an entry exam.

“I was very fearful that I wouldn’t be able to take that test. I ran out of the room in tears. A teacher came out and put his arm around me and took me back into the room. He gave me absolution.”

In adulthood the fear that he would be isolated or mocked continued. With it grew a distrust of community. “I had a fear of being part of a community or of being left behind.”

So it was unsettling to Lewis on several counts when he felt a call to the priesthood.

“I looked at the priests I had known in my life. I saw the collar, the separation from people, the loneliness of that.”

Lewis says he fled to the Marines for three years before deciding to consent to ordination. “Fear surrounding a deep sense of awe took me into the Church.

“I look self-possessed, but the fear is there in stepping out front or taking a spot in the back row of the church. There’s always a sort of fundamental fear there.

“Part of the absolution is coming to understand that that fear is a lack of faith which, at the same time, is moving you into action. Without it, there’s no sense of making a commitment. It’s almost like a conversion experience. Awe and fear come together. I think the spirit moves us in directions where we come up against something in ourselves.”

TV

Restored to community:

A short history of sacramental confession

From its early days, the Church has been faced with the problem of sin, not only in the world beyond it, but within the Body itself.

In the first three centuries of Christianity, conversions were dramatic, often involving major life changes and heroic risks, according to Roman Catholic theologian Monika Hellwig.

Baptism was the great rite of repentance, welcoming new converts into a community whose values stood in stark contrast to those of the surrounding culture. It was understood that ongoing conversion and reconciliation were mediated through the life of the community and the celebration of the Eucharist.

But the early Church was also faced with the question of how to reconcile members who might seriously betray the community and its way of life. The custom arose of readmitting such persons to the Church through a formal process of public repentance, which included fasting, the wearing of special penitential garb, and kneeling before the congregation to ask for prayer.

A general consensus developed that confession of Christ under persecution was sufficient to restore a sinner to the Church without the need for any formal ritual, and some claimed that the confession of the martyrs also restored others.

Since penance came to include severe, life-long restrictions -- such as

the prohibition of marriage, or permanent abstinence for those already married -- its use was reserved for the gravest of offenses, and often postponed until death seemed imminent.

By the fifth century, public penance was rare. At the same time, however, a form of private confession arose among the monks in Egypt. The confessor's role was to help discern the movement of the Spirit, and to discern remedies for areas of life where healing was needed. Often a fast was prescribed, which the confessor would undertake along with the penitent.

Gradually, confession as a means of spiritual growth was encouraged for all Christians, not only monks, and not only in extreme situations. Fasts were usually assigned, but almsgiving to the poor, the ransom of captives, or donations to the Church were sometimes substituted.

Penitentials, or manuals listing sins and appropriate penances, had become popular throughout Europe by the seventh century, furthering the spread of private confession but also giving rise to abuses and controversy.

"So heavy was the emphasis on measurement and on comparative severity of penances that the issue had in practice become one of punishment and expiation rather than one of implementing or realizing the turning back to God in the transformation of external dimensions of life expressing the inner conversion of heart," Hellwig writes.

The acceptance of money in place of fasting was abused by corrupt churchmen and the system tilted in favor of the rich. Also, the role of the Church -- and particularly ordained

clergy -- in dispensing absolution, had come to be regarded as essential.

Objection to these developments came to a head in the Reformation.

In his recent book *Confidentiality and Clergy*, William Rankin writes that the English reformers sided with the Protestants in rejecting the obligation of private confession to priests:

"Accepting that forgiveness of sins was accomplished by God once and for all in Christ, the English Reformers established general confession in public worship... Anglicans were chiefly to live their lives based on a lively faith in God, who nurtures and liberates, rather than on the private confession to a priest and the slavishness either to priest or to the scrupulosity that might imply."

Yet, Anglicanism has also preserved the tradition of individual confession, said Louis Weil, professor of Liturgies at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. It is not regarded as vital for salvation, but it has been lifted up by Anglican theologians as an aid to growth in holiness.

The inclusion of a full rite for individual confession in the 1979 Prayerbook of the Episcopal Church "shows there had been a significant growth of the practice in general Episcopal use," Weil said. "There are a number of Episcopalians for whom it is part of an ongoing spiritual commitment."

Weil stressed the importance of acknowledging a variety of valid approaches to reconciliation, including individual confession. "Private confession potentially offers a deeper focus on what is going on in our lives," Weil said. "It is potentially a greater challenge to honesty, and opens the door to a deeper maturity of insight." It also offers "the wisdom and counsel of a trusted listener, who can then assure me in spoken word that God's love is greater than my sin -- which all of us need to hear."

TV

This report was prepared by **Marianne Arbogast**. Material from Monika Hellwig is found in her book, *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion*, Michael Glazier, Inc., 1984.



credit: Dierdre Luzwick

Unmasking our pain

Therapeutic politics: A way to confront collective violence
by Ched Myers

"Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that has silenced him; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes withered; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they were not strong enough."

Mark 9:16

What if they held a war and everybody came? This, it seems, is what we have just witnessed. Those who tried to raise their voices against Desert Storm were officially *silenced*, and the rest were officially *silent*, successfully manipulated yet again by opportunistic politicians. Silent in the face of the most horrific unleashing of aerial bombing in history. Silent still.

We have seen in Desert Storm the genius of the system in bold relief. Minority dissent is tolerated, marginalized or squashed, depending on the necessities of the political moment. But the system is *predicated* upon a "silent majority."

In our efforts to stop the Gulf War, we learned, like the disciples in Mark, that we are not strong enough. The discipline is to learn why.

"How long has he been this way?" asks Jesus. The demon-possessed boy's father replies: "Since childhood" (9:21). Ancient wisdom indeed! It is rearticulated in the modern psycho-therapeutic axiom that the seeds of adult pathologies are sown in early childhood trauma. And it may hold a key to our efforts to get at why

Ched Myers is West Coast program director for the AFSC and author of a commentary on Mark, *Binding the Strong Man*. This article was excerpted from *Who Will Roll This Stone Away? Discipleship Queries for North American Christians*, Orbis Press, 1992.

Dierdre Luzwick is a Wisconsin graphics artist specializing in charcoal drawings. Her book *Endangered Species* is to be released by Harper & Row this year.

we have been unable to cast out our national demons that again rampaged across the earth in Desert Storm.

Alice Miller, a Swiss psychotherapist and philosopher, sees the roots of human violence in what she calls the "silent drama" of the child. Children, she argues, are utterly dependent

If the roots of the individual's complicity in the cycle of violence lie in childhood trauma, could it not follow that the seeds of our destructive national/cultural character lie deep in the shadow side of our collective story?

on adult love and acceptance, and therefore unable to consciously process anger resulting from experiences of hurt or domination. Their sole means of survival is to internalize their sense of betrayal while rationalizing or idealizing the adult's "good intentions." The child must eventually repress the trauma, even to the point of forgetting altogether (that is, banishing it to the realm of the unconscious). It is only later, as an adult, that the true emotions associated with the trauma are discharged, but then indirectly, because of the "unconscious imperative" to "split off the disquieting parts of the inner self and project them onto an available object."

While this drama is most clearly played out in the family, Miller reminds us that its impact is socio-political as well. When the unconscious store of pain and anger is *introjected* its cost is intrapsychic, manifested through *depression* and various forms

of despair. When it is *projected*, the cost is social, taking the form of *oppression*, the reproduction of the trauma in the public theater. If the target in the former case is the self, in the latter it is inevitably other vulnerable persons or groups. In the family this means the next generation of children. In the context of society, it usually means projection of anger/vengeance upon those already oppressed or disenfranchised. What else can explain our uncanny, vicious national habit of "blaming the victims" for social violence, regardless of whether it is rape, poverty or insurrection?

But let us take Miller's model of the "vicious circle of contempt" one step further. If the roots of the *individual's* complicity in the cycle lie in childhood trauma, could it not follow that the seeds of our destructive national/cultural character lie deep in the shadow side of our *collective* story? *Imagine* for a moment the psychic health of a people who pass on, from generation to generation, a mystified heritage such as the one communicated in our American history books! Here the incalculable traumas of conquest and dis-possession, enslavement and genocide, economic exploitation and objectification, militarism and ecocide, *are all repressed*, masked instead by grandiose founding myths and idealized portraits of our "fathers."

Historical honesty, if we in the dominant culture had the courage to practice it, would compel us to admit that our "prosperity" and privilege are predicated upon a legacy characterized as much by racism and greed as by liberty and democracy. But of course we do *not* face the shadow side of our own story, because we are shame-bound. So we unconsciously harbor its suppressed traumas, and pass on its myths (thinking them essentially benign). So we consolidate and extend our national pathologies,

finding new victims to blame and new enemies toward whom we may split off our insecure rage.

This collective psychic substructure functions to create and maintain the mutually reinforcing family and social patterns of domination intergenerationally. It is, I believe, as much responsible for keeping the dominant culture silenced and domesticated as is any superstructure of law, state or military. It helps explain why North Americans *essentially police themselves*, why social contradictions are so ignored, and why the process of social change is so difficult here.

"It is part of the tragic nature of the repetition-compulsion that someone who hopes eventually to find a better world than the one he or she experienced as a child in fact keeps creating instead the same undesired state of affairs," writes Miller. This simply restates Freud's dictum that "What is unconscious is bound to be reproduced." We are facing in this country much more than bad politics. The pathology is deep, structural, and we must face it squarely.

As activists we have exhausted ourselves trying to *conscientize* and *organize* people politically. Why do we have so little success in this country? I suspect it is in part because our standard means of educating and exhorting have no power to transform silenced, shamed people. *Paternalism* (doing it *for* the masses, as in *vanguard*) prevents people from becoming their own cultural, social, political and economic subjects, and only reinforces the silence and powerlessness. *Prophecy* (*Just do it!*, the politics of moral imperative) by itself will not suffice since as Miller warns, "what is unconscious cannot be abolished by proclamation or prohibition".

Nor will *political education* alone: "Since one's use and abuse of power over others usually have the function

of holding one's own feelings of helplessness in check -- which means the exercise of power is often unconsciously motivated -- rational arguments can do nothing to impede this process."

We must unsilence the past, and understand that the ideology of "progress" has been a mask for the deadly ambitions of European expansionism for two centuries.

What is needed is a way of political organizing that enables people to identify and struggle through the social lattice of dysfunction (family/group/institution/class/race/gender/nation). Do we have the compassion, as feminist therapy puts it, to "listen the silenced into speech"? Can we redefine solidarity as *radical empathy*? Do we have the courage or the discipline to engage ourselves and each other in that long process of *dis-illusionment* that is at once personal and political?

If the Church wished to stand in true empathy/solidarity with its people but preserve its own discourse, it seems to me, we should have more firmly and publicly invited the American people to prayer. But by prayer, as I have contended above, I mean that long and difficult task of *dis-illusionment*, the only process whereby the silenced can find their true voice.

Repentance is at the heart of Jesus' Gospel, but sadly its potency has been lost in the labyrinth of American pietism and shame culture, where it has come to mean *feeling bad*. Perhaps however we may find a modern paraphrase in the popular wisdom of Twelve Step practice. Here the first step toward recovery, as essential as it is uncomfortable, is to acknowledge

both that I am part of the problem, and in my *illusioned* state impotent to resolve it. Beginning with my own pain ensures that I am the *subject* of the struggle for liberation -- an essential component of transformative politics. At the same time, the therapeutic notion of recovery recognizes better than privatized religion did that the problem is the complicity of persons in a *system* of addiction, and that only with the support of a community of *resistance* (in this case, the Twelve-Step group) can behavior begin to change and remain changed.

But for *therapeutic politics* repentance and resistance mean something more: the dysfunctional social system cannot be reformed, and must be confronted at its roots. In this sense it is apocalyptic, in that it recognizes fundamental contradictions in the dominant order and settles only for the revolutionary transformation. To make sense of this we can use the example of an alcoholic breaking with a dysfunctional family system in order to draw political analogies.

When the alcoholic *repents* s/he calls the whole family system into question, especially its myths, secrets, and other addictions. Those who hold power or prestige in the family are invariably the ones who, while perhaps glad that the alcoholic is on the wagon, refuse to acknowledge their complicity, or fundamental structural problems in the family system. This *conservatism* is often legitimized by the myth that *we are a good family*. The flip side of this is of course the fear of public acknowledgement of family problems; grandiosity and depression conspire fiercely against liberation and the shame system. The process of recovery is thus a long and often frustrating process of standing one's own ground and refusing to cooperate with old family patterns (*resistance*) while at the same time inviting other family

members to *dis-illusionment*, so that the system may be changed through cooperative recovery.

Similarly, in the North American context we must face the truth of our "society of origin." This is difficult because ours is such a highly mystified culture. For example, those in power (the true *conservatives*, regardless of political party) trade heavily in mythological stock concerning our collective nobility. These myths fuse the essential goodness (and innocence!) of our civilization with the divine imperative of *progress*, from the Puritan's *city on a hill* to *Manifest Destiny*, from the *Monroe Doctrine* to Reagan's *America is back and walking tall*. Movements of social reform are sooner or later embraced and coopted in the name of progress and *working within the system to make the system work*. But any dissenting movement that goes further, advocating that we *dis-illusion* ourselves of these myths, much less suggesting that there are fundamental problems with the system, is immediately and necessarily marginalized.

This is, however, *exactly* what we must do. Our process will involve helping each other look deeply and critically at our roots as a dominant civilization. We must *unsilence* the past, and understand that the ideology of *progress* has been a mask for the deadly ambitions of European expansionism for two centuries. And we must mourn *the sins of our fathers*, not because we can change their behavior, but because we cannot change our own if we continue to carry the suppressed trauma in our bones. We must give each other permission to acknowledge that we have become deeply dysfunctional as a society, that we are at a spiritual and historical dead-end. And then we must help each other *turn away* (the meaning of *metanoia*, the Greek word for *repentance*) toward a new social vision. TW

Sanctions on Iraq condemned

Economic sanctions against Iraq must be lifted immediately to avert widespread catastrophe, according to three international relief organizations.

"All but the wealthiest and most powerful of Iraq's 18 million people are certain to experience new epidemics of disease, other fatal health problems, and increasingly severe malnutrition culminating in a major famine," they warned in a late-July Interagency Statement.

The American Friends Service Committee, Quaker Peace and Service (London), and Mennonite Central Committee staff in Baghdad said that countries holding Iraqi assets should unfreeze them, and that Iraq should be allowed to export oil in order to buy essential goods, food and medicine.

*American Friends Service
Committee News Release 7/91*

U.N. Protests Palestinian Deportations

The United Nations Security Council has unanimously called on Israel to stop deporting Palestinians from the occupied territories, and "to insure the safe and immediate return of all those deported." The resolution, issued in response to the deportation of four Palestinians from the Gaza Strip in May, cited the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which makes it illegal to deport inhabitants of territories occupied by another country. Israel contends that the convention refers only to mass deportations.

Fellowship 7-8/91

Subtle Censorship

"Every year, there are dozens of important stories that the mass media ignore. These would expose shady conduct by high officials, by the military, by the C.I.A., by the press itself. They uncover hidden dangers and warn of crises to come. Knowing about these stories could change our lives or maybe even save them.

"There are many reasons for this neglect. Editors think some issues are just too dull to sustain public interest or will offend the high and mighty or require too much money, time and space to explain.

"A subtle form of censorship takes over when significant stories are buried or ignored by the mainstream press."

Bill Moyers
*Convergence, The Christic
Institute, Summer 91*

Anheuser-Bush Boycott

The Dolphin Project and Sea Shepherd Conservation Project have called for a boycott of Anheuser-Bush products, according to *Animal's Agenda*. Anheuser-Bush owns Sea World, where another orca whale died of unknown causes last Fall. This is the 14th orca whale to die since 1965. Sea World has "petting pools" for dolphins, exposing them to human germs and high levels of chlorine. Think what it would be like to live in a highly chlorinated pool all your days and you can understand the irritation to skin, eyes, and breathing passages caused to the dolphins. Until the "petting pools" stop, consider joining the boycott of Anheuser-Bush.

Creation Spirituality 3-4/91

Twelve Indian chiefs signed an agreement with Ontario Premier Bob Rae that recognizes the rights of native Canadians to self-government. Under the accord, the first of its kind, all negotiations between Ontario and the province's Indians will be conducted on a government-to-government basis.

--Detroit Free Press, 8/7/91

shoot takes



credit: Northwest Passage

1992 *Kairos* U.S.A.

A call for
action

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The kairos is fulfilled, the realm of God has come near; Repent and believe in the good news.' " (Mark 1:14-15)

What is the time? Where is the place?

Something is happening. The Spirit is on the move. A decisive moment in a crucial place has arrived. And we are struggling to act in concert with it. Here and now.

We believe we are living in what the New Testament writers call a *kairos*, a time when the Spirit of God shatters religious complicity with injustice. A *kairos* is a moment of truth, a time for decision, a crisis of judgment and grace; it is a God-given opportunity for conversion and hope.

A *kairos* has come in this place, now called North America, now called United States, but a place more ancient with history and peoples: shores, mountains, plains, deserts, and forests long ago named sacred.

We see the geography of this moment exposed for us in high-relief by the forthcoming anniversary (the 500 year *quincentenary*) of Columbus' voyage to the Americas. That voyage marked the beginning of a new world order of European domination built on Native American resources, the violation of the land, and slave labor.

We understand the official celebration of the quincentenary (and its commercial variants) as an imperial liturgy not only retelling lies of the past, but building a consensus for more of the same: a two-tiered system of global and domestic economic apartheid.

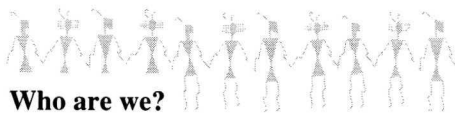
This is the time and place for resistance and hopeful action. We are called to join Native Americans, African Americans, and so many others who have for 500 years refused to cooperate with oppression.

It is the time and place for repentance and conversion. The Church *ecumenically* has been complicit in this history. Not merely silent before violence and injustice, it has been an active participant, often mistaking cultural imperialism for evangelization. Frankly, our Churches in the United States have succumbed to national

Our Churches in the United States have succumbed to national myths and idols which compromise the very meaning of the Gospel before the world. We are now called by our love for the Church to confront it with its own good news.

myths and idols which compromise the very meaning of the Gospel before the world.

We are now called by our love for the Church to confront it with its own good news. Building on the spirit of 500 years of resistance we also say a clear Yes to new priorities and new ways of being Church as we prepare to enter the 21st century.



Who are we?

We are local groups, organizations, and churches yearning to become a faith-based partnership movement, one which acts for deep and real social transformation in this moment of our common history.

We take heart, indeed we see it as a confirmation of the Spirit, that many groups and communities in the United States are recognizing this moment independently and in conversation. Energetic organizing is happening within Native American, Latino, Chicano, and African American communities in response to the quincentenary. Small groups spring up to study Scripture

and the various Third World "*kairos* documents." Christian peacemakers re-examine their work. Theologians are calling for reflection and action.

Congregations completely re-evaluate their ministries in the light of economic justice. Denominations resolve to consider the meaning of 1492 and their own role in the subjugation

and destruction of whole cultures and peoples.

To embrace and nourish these many uprisings of the Spirit, we call ourselves "1992/*Kairos* USA" and issue this call.

Kairos, as we are using it, is an openly Christian term and we anticipate being expressly Christian in our theological reflection. We know that to address the Churches in the United States (both Protestant and Catholic) about idolatry, about confusion, about captivity to the faith of imperial culture, we need to speak freely from within the very Gospel we claim to announce.

We are, however, excluding no one from our efforts. Indeed we welcome challenges and input from people of many faith perspectives as we find the language and spiritual power to discover in this place, at this moment, the way toward justice and peace for humans and for the planet of which we're part.



What are we committed to?

Our commitment is to the work of

repentance, conversion, and concrete actions. U.S. Christians stand in need of confession for corporate sins continuing unabated now 500 years. The soul of America yearns for redress, reparation, and reconciliation with Native Americans, African Americans, and other ethnic peoples.

True repentance, we understand, is far more than feeling sorry, more than acts of public apology. Repentance is change. It will surely require a complete transformation of the dominating culture, beginning with ourselves in the Church. It goes without saying, that it is the Eurocentric white community in our movement which bears special responsibility for this particular work of transformation.

Concretely, we have committed ourselves to work toward a common movement through several goals in the short term: 1) Develop and distribute educational materials on the truth of 1492; 2) Develop liturgical materials and actions; 3) Encourage intercession and political solidarity now for the initiatives of Native, African American, and racial-ethnic communities; 4) Plan culminating events, both local and national, for October 1992; 5) Facilitate a theological process which might result in a USA *Kairos* document.

Toward these goals we are calling for the identification and formation of small, faith-based, grass roots communities to discern the signs of the *kairos*, and to undertake the work of action and reflection.

Join us. Let us intercede, in heart and deed, for one another and for this process of movement building.

This call was prepared by Kairos USA, a group which includes the National Council of Churches. For further information write to: 1992 Kairos USA, Sandy Toineeta, 475 Riverside Drive, N.Y., N.Y. 10115-0050. TW

Christian art: Concern for the world

by Blaise Tobia and Virginia Maksymowicz

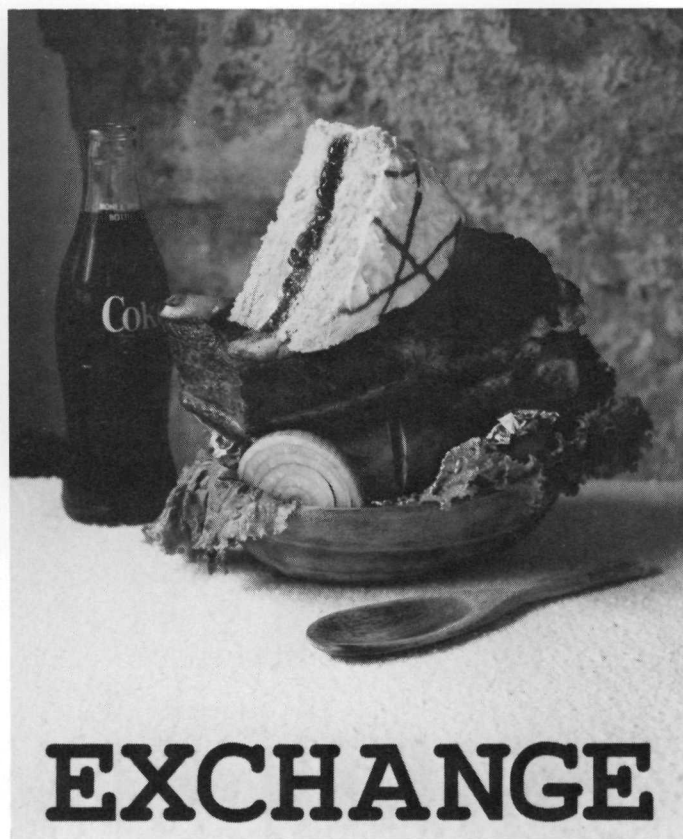
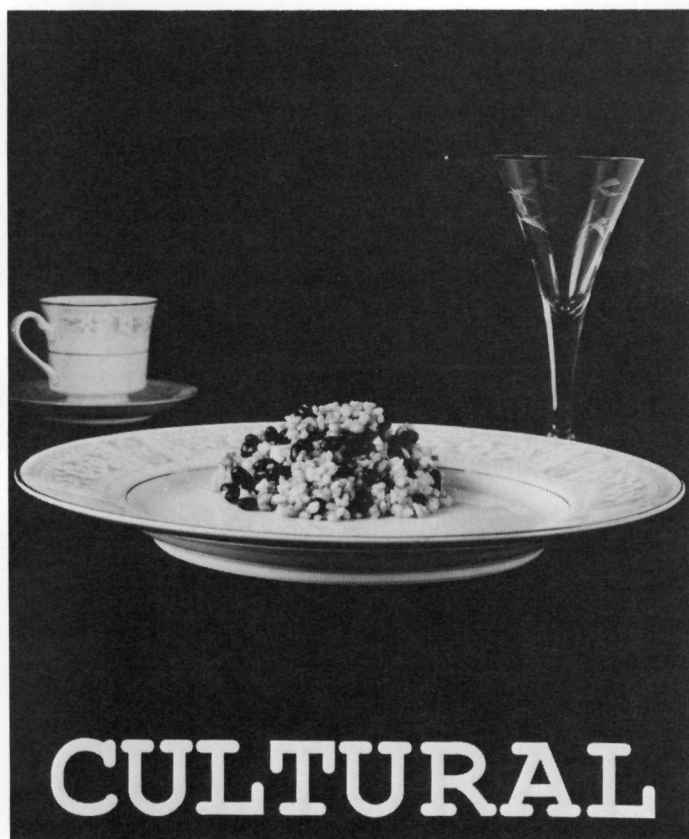
During the Middle Ages, when Christianity exerted great influence throughout Europe as a political, social and economic system as well as a religion, almost all art was *Christian art*. Using themes derived from the Bible and the history of the Church, artists decorated cathedrals, helped to instruct a nonliterate populace, affirmed clerical and royal hierarchies, and even occasionally made critical comments -- through symbolic and indirect means --

about contemporary life.

In today's secular society, however, where Christianity is usually seen as a matter of private spirituality, *Christian art* has come to be regarded solely as an adjunct to religious practice, seen most commonly in the form of scriptural illustrations, liturgically related images and objects, and perhaps as aids to prayer or meditation. There are many with this kind of artistic vision working in the service of the Church, and their work is important. Much of

it has been reproduced and discussed in a variety of religious publications.

But, there is a great deal of other art being made today that does not look like *Christian art*, yet does, we believe, fit within the larger context of Christianity that could be called the *Church in the world*. Some of this work is being produced by artists who, like ourselves, are motivated by a faith-based perspective, but who believe that such art need not look *religious* in order to deal with Gospel imperatives. Much of the other work we consider Christian in spirit, however, is being produced by artists who have no affiliation with any organized religion, some of whom, at times, might even express outright hostility towards the institutional Church. Nevertheless, their artwork embraces issues of human compassion, social justice and



credit: Blaise Tobia

peace in a way that is fully compatible with our day-to-day struggle to live out our lives as Christians.

We intend to use these pages over the next months to present the work of a wide range of artists whose efforts, in our estimation, have an importance beyond the domains of the fashionable, the tasteful, even the esthetic... We also believe their efforts to have a special resonance for Christians conscious of social-justice issues, even though the work might not be specifically Christian in subject or approach. We hope you will agree. We look forward to your comments, criticisms and suggestions.

V.M. & B.T.

Virginia Maksymowicz and Blaise Tobia are visual artists, Roman Catholics, social activists and a married couple. They each earned a BA in Fine Arts from Brooklyn College, C.U.N.Y., and an MFA in Visual Arts from the University of California, San Diego. Maksymowicz has taught at Oberlin College, Wayne State University and the Minneapolis College of Art and Design; she is presently a visiting assisting professor at Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania. Tobia taught at Wayne State University and at U.C. San Diego, and is now an associate professor at Drexel University in Philadelphia. Maksymowicz also spent three years as the director of a SoHo gallery. They both worked as editors of *Art & Artists* magazine, and their writings about art have appeared in publications ranging from *The Other Side*, *Sojourners*, and *The National Catholic Reporter* to art magazines like *The New Art Examiner*, *Artpapers*, *Afterimage* and *High Performance*. Their artworks have been shown across the country in galleries and museums, storefront windows, union halls and city buses.

Individually and collaboratively,



credit: Virginia Maksymowicz

Tobia and Maksymowicz try to integrate their esthetics, social/political and religious concerns into their art. Tobia's *Cultural Exchange* uses advertisement-like images to underscore the hollowness of foreign policies that

favor the exchange of *culture* with the third world but do little to rectify the vast imbalance between first- and third-world economies. Maksymowicz's *The South African People Shall Rise*, shown here in detail, was origi-



Blaise Tobia and Virginia Maksymowicz



nally made for an exhibit organized by the artists' group Art Against Apartheid. It combines figures reminiscent of the body print on the Shroud of Turin with quotes from the South African Freedom Charter, and a variation on an old religious maxim (*The Blood of Martyrs/The Seed of Faith*). **TW**

Telling the truth about our lives

by Melanie Morrison

For too many years, I tried to live out my ministry in the Church without acknowledging my identity as a lesbian. Until the duplicity grew so thick it threatened to choke me. Until I realized that I had lost my voice and was in danger of losing any sense of integrity.

Now that I am out of the Church's closet, I find myself tempted to hide in a new one. As I become more involved in working with other lesbians to advocate change, I am hesitant to acknowledge my identity as a Christian. Many lesbians that I respect have left the Church, having experienced double jeopardy at the hands of an institution that has often proclaimed bad news rather than good for women in general and lesbian women in particular.

I find that my ordination can be an initial barrier as these women meet me and I am frequently asked how I can possibly remain identified with Christianity. Being a minority within a minority has pushed me to articulate why Christianity continues to engage me. I share many of the questions my post-christian lesbian sisters raise about the Christian tradition, and ask myself,

Melanie Morrison is an ordained United Church of Christ minister, serving as co-pastor of Phoenix Community Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. She is also co-director of Leaven, Inc., in Lansing, Michigan, which offers resources, workshops, and retreats in the areas of spiritual development, feminism, and sexual justice.

"What is it in this tradition that is liberating and life-giving for me and what can I not find elsewhere, outside the Church?"

The first thing I name out loud when pressed to "give account for the hope that is within me" is confession. If I were no longer part of a worshipping community, I would miss many aspects of worship, but I would miss most the invitation to confession and the announcement of forgiveness. Nowhere else am I weekly confronted with this discipline of honestly acknowledging individual and collective complicity in the sin I daily encounter. Nowhere else am I confronted with the promise that I am free, and the reminder that I am obliged, to begin anew.

The liturgical practice of confession is different from the personal discipline of being scrupulous and honest with oneself. Confession in the midst of a community opens doors into

myself that self-denial had kept locked. When I hear another person put words to her confession, it can startle me into new, initially painful, self-revelation. As Adrienne Rich says, *When someone tells me a piece of the truth which has been withheld from me, and which I needed in order to see my life more clearly, it may bring acute pain, but it can also flood me with a cold, sea-sharp wash of relief.* ("Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying")

The congregation I serve is three years old. We formed out of the conviction that a church was needed in southwest Michigan that would be truly welcoming and liberating for all people, including lesbians and gay men. We chose the name Phoenix as a symbol of our belief that resurrection

is possible out of the ashes of fear, self-hatred, and oppression. The prayer of confession and the words of assurance are listed in our bulletin under the heading "Telling The Truth About Our Lives."

When I say that I have not found any other place or context where I am called to tell the truth about my life and to hear the promise of forgiveness, I mean that I have not found any other place or

context outside the Church where *both* things are set before me simultane-



credit: Nicole Drovín, Gloria Mark

If I were no longer part of a worshipping community, I would miss most the invitation to confession and the announcement of forgiveness.

ously. And one without the other can become either oppressive or trivial. Confession without the promise of forgiveness cannot long be borne. Forgiveness without the discipline of confession is cheap grace.

In the lesbian community (sometimes more thoroughly than in the Church), I have encountered people who are willing to be very confessional, although they might not call it that. I have found women who are willing to examine the ways that they (we) participate in maintaining racism, ableism, classism, and other systemic forms of oppression. I have witnessed honest dialogue and painstaking efforts to eliminate these systemic sins in the lesbian community. When we fail, however, as we inevitably do, and we are brought face to face with the fact that we have once again been guilty of perpetuating racism, for example, I have longed for us to be able to speak a word of forgiveness aloud. Without forgiveness, the weight of complicity can drive us into despair or self-righteousness ("I am more politically correct than thou").

On the other hand, there are places or contexts where I have heard forgiveness proclaimed in a way that bypasses the hard work of truth-telling. There is, for example, a misuse of some contemporary therapeutic concepts that would have us believe that all shame is dysfunctional. The capacity to feel shame for behavior that has been harmful is, I believe, a sign of our humanity. The poet Julia de Burgos wrote,

That my grandfather was a slave is my grief;

had he been a master that would have been my shame.

During the Gulf War, I needed a community of people with whom I could confess my shame as an American citizen. I needed a community of people with whom I could be truthful

about the fact that there were bodies, not only buildings, being ripped apart. I needed a community of people with whom I could weep. I needed a confessing community.

That need is ongoing because, as Adrienne Rich says, *Truthfulness, honor, is not something which springs ablaze of itself; it has to be created between people.* Adrienne Rich was not writing about liturgical confession when she wrote these words about truthfulness, but they bespeak what I experience when, as a congregation, we are invited to tell the truth about our lives. Rich is not romantic about

the process of truth-telling. She names it "delicate, often terrifying" to the persons involved. Yet she affirms the process of truth-telling for the same reasons I affirm that I need a confessing and forgiving community, when she says,

It is important to do this because it breaks down human self-delusion and isolation.

It is important to do this because in so doing we do justice to our own complexity.

It is important to do this because we can count on so few people to go that hard way with us. **TW**

The Detroit Witness staff:

Marietta Jaeger is responsible for circulation and for promotion. Jaeger comes to *The Witness* from the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights, where she served as interim director.



Jaeger also has a ministry of reconciliation based on her experience of God's faithfulness when her seven-year-old daughter was kidnapped from a Montana campsite and killed 18 years ago. Jaeger is author of *The Lost Child* and recently travelled to South Korea and Japan on an Amnesty International speaking tour opposing the death penalty.

Marianne Arbogast works mornings at the Catholic Worker soup kitchen. She edits the Detroit Worker paper, *On The Edge*. She is the part-time, assistant editor of *The Witness*.



She comes to *The Witness* from *The Record* where she and I worked together to produce the Diocese of Michigan's newspaper.

Bill Wylie-Kellermann is a United Methodist pastor and author of *Seasons of Faith and Conscience*, Orbis, 1991. He is a contributing editor for *Sojourners*, my husband and the new (unpaid) book review editor for *The Witness*.

Maria Catalfo does the computer keylining for *The Witness* on a part-time basis. She is active in Irish Solidarity work. She is co-author of *How to Do Leaflets, Newsletters & Newspapers*.

The Witness' list of contributing editors has expanded. **Coleman McGehee**, eighth bishop of Michigan and long-time member of the ECPC board, has agreed to serve. McGehee is on the boards of Bread for the World, the ACLU and the Poverty and Social Reform Institute. **Walter Wink** is the author of a ground-breaking trilogy of books on the principalities and powers. Wink teaches at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York.

Germany's confession

by Victoria J. Barnett

In Germany, perspectives on the Confessing Church -- that group of German Protestants who fought to keep their Church independent of Nazism during the Third Reich -- have been revised several times since 1945. In the years immediately following the fall of Nazi Germany, the Confessing Church was viewed as the one stronghold of morality, decency and courage in a nation demonically devoid of all three. Many Allied denazification courts recognized it as a resistance group, and the early memoirs of the "*Kirchenkampf*" (the Church struggle) were heroic accounts of the battle against Nazism. Throughout the world, the Confessing Church story became identified particularly with the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the theologian executed for his role in the plot to kill Hitler. Survivors like Pastor Martin Niemöller, who spent six years in concentration camps, embodied a living political Christian witness.

Perhaps it was necessary for a while to stress the heroism of the Confessing Church. Otherwise, the challenge that Nazi history and the Holocaust addressed to Christianity could not have been addressed at all. But, with the passage of time and as more facts have

come to light, a more differentiated portrait of the Confessing Church has developed. Not coincidentally, this has occurred simultaneously with a deeper examination of the Nazi era as a whole. In Germany, city archives have been scoured, oral histories collected, and the role of German institutions in the Third Reich examined openly and critically. These investigations reveal the troubled ambivalence, tragic compromise and fatal caution that characterized most of those Germans who

tried to oppose Nazism.

This was true in the Confessing Church as well. It is generally acknowledged, for example, that most Protestant pastors, including those who joined the Confessing Church, were deeply nationalistic, and that most either welcomed Hitler's rise to power or viewed it as the lesser of several evils. Most, too, were anti-Semitic, offering little support for Protestants affected by the Nazi racial laws and virtually no help at all for Jews caught in Nazism's web. Such sentiments paralyzed the Protestant Church. Even within the Confessing Church, the clear-sighted decisiveness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer remained a lonely exception.

It has taken years for such aspects to be addressed openly. The most



credit: Robert McGovern

THE WITNESS

Victoria J. Barnett grew up in the Episcopal Church, and has an M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary in New York. She has lived in Germany since 1979. Barnett has authored a book on the Confessing Church, based on oral histories, which will be published by Oxford University Press in the spring of 1992.

complete work on the Confessing Church's failure to oppose Nazi persecution of the Jews, Wolfgang Gerlach's *Als die Zeugen schwiegen*, written in the early 1970s, was not published until 1988. After all, it is painful to admit that there are few heroes, and that even they have flawed records, and to recognize that even compromises made in good faith may prove to be fatal moral errors. To be reminded of this while we seek to define our own political witness is to be reminded both of our own fallibility and history's treachery. Neither are comforting notions.

But our deeper understanding of the Confessing Church does not necessarily challenge what it, at its best, tried to do. In fact, it gives us deeper insights into the Christian struggle to define its witness in the world. The radical potential of the Confessing Church, as stated in the 1934 Barmen Confession, committed Christians to place obedience to God above obedience to a state's demands. This radical vision, though not always fulfilled, moved some Christians to resist Nazism in ways they might not have oth-

erwise. After 1945, it continued to move many of them to confront, with genuine remorse and guilt, the enormity of what had happened to them, their Church and their country.

What do we make, then, of this troubling history? How does the Confessing Church help us to understand our own Christian witness? What *is* a confessing Church? What is it called to be? What can Christians around the world, including the United States, learn from the German Confessing Church's experience?

One of the most succinct, thoughtful responses to these questions came from Hans Iwand, a Confessing Church theologian. During the Third Reich, Iwand declared that "a confessing Church is always in the opposition, in every system, under every government, against every party." To some, Iwand's remark repeats the injunction to be in the world, but not of it. For others, these words are problematic precisely because they seem to stress the *otherworldliness* of faith. The conclusion that many drew from the Church's experience under Nazism

is that a Church must politically commit itself, not just against something, but for something. From this perspective, solidarity with the victims of evil means not just opposing the oppressors, but working together with those seeking to overcome systemic evil. After all, was not one of the Confessing Church's problems during the Nazi era its naive, futile attempt to remain *apolitical* in a system that defined everything and everyone politically?

But Iwand's remarks are worth pondering, particularly in light of the recent developments in the socialist world. What he was saying is that a confessing Church, whatever short-term alliances it makes, is called, ultimately, to witness in the world to that which is not yet fulfilled in the world. It is a call to discipleship that, in every system, makes Christianity a radical possibility and gives Christians the status (*confessionis*!) of outsiders. There is no system in which injustice is not present, in which people do not suffer, in which there is not much for us to do. Iwand does not call us to be *apolitical*, but to be ever critical of our own compromises and alliances. **TW**

Confessing in Japan

George Gish, a missionary to Japan, recently made these comments to the United Methodist Detroit Annual Conference:

"In 1967, the Church in Japan issued a confession of its responsibility during the Second World War, saying it had not been a watchman. They asked for forgiveness, first from Christians in Asia, and then Christian brothers and sisters around the world, as well as their own fellow nationals in Japan; to forgive the Church for having become so much a part of that period of Japanese nationalism as a national Church.



credit: Watanabe Sadao

"I have learned a lot from being with this small minority of Christians in Japan -- less than one percent of the population. In the recent change of emperors, the Church has been at the forefront of saying the nation must never come under dominance of a nationalistic religion.

"As I come back to the United States at this particular moment, my heart is very heavy. I would hope and pray that in our enthusiasm as Americans, we don't get carried away, that we realize we are Christians first, and Christ is at the center of everything we do. And with this, I think we can join with Christians around the world, and rejoice in what that Pentecost experience means for us."

Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989) paperback 175 pages.

The project, begun in the time of Constantine, to enable Christians to share power without being a problem for the powerful, had reached its most impressive fruition. If Caesar can get Christians there to swallow the "Ultimate Solution," and Christians here to embrace the bomb, there is no limit to what we will not do for the modern world. Alas, in leaning over to speak to the modern world, we had fallen in. We had lost the theological resources to resist, lost the resources even to see that there was something worth resisting. (p. 27)

On the lips of neo-conservative theologians the cry, "Let the Church be the Church" has been employed in an assault on the left-leaning political agenda they cannot abide. In the pages of *Resident Aliens*, however, a similar appeal is for the Church to be the revolutionary, countercultural commu-

selling its seductive presumptions to the Church. It is the time, they argue, for us to reclaim our confessional identity.

Willimon and Hauerwas are not identifying a particular confessional moment in our common history (except insofar as they celebrate an historical demise of American christendom which reinstates the minority,

Resident Aliens is an unapologetically Christocentric work. The gospel, they say, is not a set of ideas or principles, but an ethic, a vision of reality, summed up and embodied "in a Jew from Nazareth." The Church is about discipleship, about the willingness to die in the adventure of following Jesus. Moreover, the ethics of Jesus are invariably communal, odd, and incarnational.

alien status of the Christian community). Admittedly, their book only just predates the recent wave of nationalist hysteria. They hadn't yet seen Generals Powell and Schwartzkopf mount the pulpit at St. John the Divine, nor tickertape military triumphs, nor crosses tied with yellow ribbons. Still this book may serve as a popular and quite readable contribution to the current discussion of whether this is a decisive *kairos/confessional* moment for the Church.

Resident Aliens is an unapologetically Christocentric work. The gospel, they say, is not a set of ideas or principles, but an ethic, a vision of reality, summed up and embodied "in a Jew from Nazareth." The Church is about discipleship, about the willingness to die in the adventure of following Jesus. Moreover, the ethics of Jesus are invariably communal, odd, and incarnational. Biblical ethics are only possible in community, and invariably learned from the lives and witness of the local communion of saints. The

Sermon on the Mount, for example, rendered all but irrelevant by the Niebuhrian realists, is urged as neither a foreign policy agenda nor a program for individual piety nor an impossible messianic ethic accessible only for the divine Lord, but an honest ethic for a revolutionary discipleship community.

This book is made for study and discussion in the local congregation. It will practically gather them of its own accord. The gifts of lay people are expressly honored and examples abound garnered from Sunday School and confirmation classes, board meetings, anniversary reunion sermons and the like. The signs of the times may be read on the marquis of a small town movie house. On the other hand these same examples sneak up on a reader with substantial critiques of first world economic materialism, the technical reductionism of seminary training, or spiritual bankruptcy of much Christian social activism.

As a theological polemic it is somewhat scattershot, but then the design is essentially to provoke discussion. Its major weakness is an apparent naivete about the militancy of the principalities and powers. *Resident Aliens* concludes rightly with an appeal to Ephesians 6. The image of combat with the powers is fitting and to the point, yet one is left with the impression that these powers are little more than the paganism of an unbelieving culture. In fact, the planet and her peoples are being consumed by aggressive and predatory forces. A new world order is being imposed. The issue is not merely *de facto* atheism, but blasphemy. The struggle, as they say, is life and death, but perhaps more than our friends know or tell.

Nevertheless, this book yearns in its heart for an American confessing Church. Faithful and discerning, it may be the very book to start a confessional movement rolling in the local church.

TW

book review

by

Bill Wylie-Kellermann

nity which is its birthright, one unabashedly at odds with the assumptions of prevailing culture.

This collaboration between an ethicist and a preacher contends that in the apologetic effort to translate the gospel into modern categories (be they psychological, philosophical, political) the Church, and specifically some bigtime European-American theologians, have built a bridge in which the traffic has been predominantly one way: the world setting the agenda and

Pastor outrages Nazis *and* Confessing Church

By Victoria J. Barnett

Like other public officials in Nazi Germany, Protestant pastors, religion teachers and other Church officials were required to swear a loyalty oath. While most Protestants were willing to affirm their national loyalty, the wording of the Nazi oath ("I will be loyal and obedient to the Führer of the German Reich and nation, Adolf Hitler...") made clear that the oath was more than a declaration of patriotic feeling.

Particularly in the Confessing Church, the question of whether Christians could take such an oath was controversial. A pastor's refusal to swear it, of course, meant additional pressure from Nazi officials and the Gestapo. During the 1930s, hundreds of Confessing Church pastors had been harassed, interrogated or arrested. As such pressures on the Churches increased, Church leaders began to choose their battles -- and they decided to avoid an outright confrontation with the state over the loyalty oath. They reasoned that since (as the Barmen Declaration had stated) the Christian faith implicitly put obedience to God above the demands of earthly rulers, Christians remained by definition loyal, above all, to God, whether they took a national oath or not. In 1938, the Prussian Confessing Church Synod decided that those pastors who still had reservations could append a statement giving their own interpretation when they took the oath. Under these conditions, most Confessing Church pastors took the oath.

One who did not was Ilse Härter, a

member of the first generation of German women to take the Church's theological exams and seek ordination. Like most of these women, Härter became active in the Confessing Church.



Ilse Härter

The women were needed, particularly after war began in 1939, when most male Confessing pastors became soldiers and were sent to the front.

In 1941, Härter was sent to a non-Confessing parish in Berlin-Wannsee. The Berlin Confessing Church wanted her to establish and serve a group of Confessing Christians within that parish. Härter began her daily rounds, giving religion classes to children and visiting parish members. After three months, the parish presbytery and the Berlin Consistory (the official Church government, not the Confessing Church) summoned her. She was told to show her Aryan pass (the Nazi proof of "racial purity") and take the loyalty oath. Härter refused.

The Berlin Confessing Church, concerned that they would lose their foothold in Wannsee, desperately wanted Härter to keep her position there. They

tried to convince her to take the oath, using the 1938 Prussian Synod's solution by attaching her own qualifications to it. Härter still refused. "I told them it didn't matter how *we* saw it, but how the Nazis saw it," she says today.

The Consistory forced her to leave Wannsee five months after beginning her work.

Härter says it was not initially clear to members of the Confessing Church that "a theological decision has political consequences."

"Within the Confessing Church, it was fine, when one was arrested for *Church* reasons!" Härter explained. "But it was somehow suspicious, when one was arrested for *political* reasons. There was the debate, for example, about Bonhoeffer's arrest. The question arose: should he be on the Fürbittenliste (the list of those imprisoned or arrested, read aloud in Confessing parishes every Sunday)? Today, one is dumbfounded that such a thing was debated at all.

"We haven't finished discussing this entire question, up to today. For

*Witnesses,
the quick and the dead*

me, it is utterly clear. During the course of the Third Reich, I grasped it more and more . . . it became ever clearer that theological decisions have political consequences. For me, today, that is irrefutable. Whoever in the Church maintains that one can't speak out politically has, through silence, practically made a political decision. With that, s/he lets the political situation of the status quo remain as it is -- and doesn't figure that the Christian Church must stand for change, when it is called to."

TW



Detroit Youth, oil on linen by Lin Baum.

photo: Thomas Sutton

Lin Baum is a Detroit artist who has focussed her work on the world's children who are in distress.

Why Detroit?

*The decision to move **The Witness** to Detroit was controversial. See the Letters section in this issue for details. See the October issue for more about Detroit!*



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