

HOSPITALITY

Volume 5, No. 10

December 1986

Nonprofit
PAID
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Atlanta, Ga.
30304

Address
Correction
Requested

Providing hospitality to the homeless & to those in prison, through Christ's love
910 Ponce de Leon Ave. N.E. Atlanta, Ga. 30306-4212 • 404-874-9652



JESUS

Born of the Virgin in Bethlehem,
The Christ of God, an exquisite gem.

He sprang forth to life by the power of God,
With a purpose of heart, though the way would be hard.

Jesus walked as a person - yet perfect, sinless and
free,
The Lamb of God, who'd die, for the sins of you and me.

Upon the banks of Jordan the heavens were opened,
The Spirit of God descended upon God's Chosen.

He accomplished all that God sent him to do,
Culminating on Calvary, obtaining life to endue.

In the Gospel it's preached throughout the world,
Jesus has come to purchase a very great pearl.

Come unto him all ye weary who need his rest,
Jesus will give eternal life, if you repent and confess.

by Nathan Brown (on Georgia's Death Row)

Dec. 24, '85

Who are those searchers who wait, shivering, in the glow of jolly Christmas Eve streets?

See the five young men with bedrolls under their arms. Eyes alert, expectant. Faces impassive. Cigarettes cupped against the wind.

Are they shepherds looking for a star?

In the shadows leans a tall one. Matted grey hair forces against his cap. His Army blanket drapes over him like a vestment.

Is he a wise man looking for a king?

And there on the corner. Those two. He, desperate, protective. She bewildered, pregnant.

Is this a Holy Family looking for a manger?

by Buddy Gill



NEEDS

HAMS & TURKEYS - For our Christmas Dinner (as well as for freezing for future meals)

(can be brought to the Open Door Monday through Saturday 9:00 - 12:00 am and 1:00 - 5:30pm

KNIT HATS

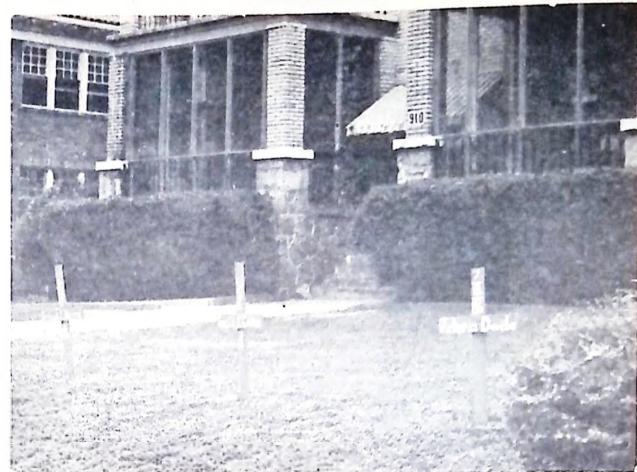
GLOVES

SOCKS

UNDERWEAR (men's briefs)

COATS

DRIP GRIND COFFEE - We are serving coffee daily in our soup kitchen & at Butler Street Breakfast to over 300 persons



HOSPITALITY is published 10 times a year by The Open Door Community (P.C.U.S.), Inc., an Atlanta community of Christians called to ministry with the homeless poor and with prisoners, particularly those on death row. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard. For more information about the life and work of the Open Door and about others involved in ministry to Atlanta's homeless, please contact any of the following:

Murphy Davis - Southern Prison Ministry Director

Rob Johnson - Treasurer

Ed Loring - Correspondence & Resident Volunteer Co-ordinator

Helen McCrady - Administrative Assistant (Contributions & Mailing List Maintenance)

Joanne Solomon - Administrative Assistant (Volunteer Co-ordination, Hardwick Prison Trip)

Newspaper:
Editor - Rob Johnson; Associate Editor - Ed Loring
Manuscript Preparation - Helen McCrady; Layout - Paula Clegg, Mark Harper, Rob Johnson; Circulation - Dietrich Gerstner and a multitude of earthly hosts and guests

A Notable Editor's Note

This is the last issue of **Hospitality** that I will have the privilege of editing. In early 1987 I am ending my work at the Open Door, while continuing my pilgrimage in new directions here in Atlanta. This decision was made in early September, so both the community and I have been about the structural and emotional processes of transition. I am a founder of the Open Door; my departure impacts many aspects of community life; it certainly is a major change for us all. Many thanks to many dear friends who have been so supportive these days.

This note will be brief. However, in the upcoming January issue of **Hospitality** (edited by our new team - Ed Loring, Elizabeth Dede, and Mark Harper) I will share a broader retrospective of the Open Door's six-year history. Most of my "good-byes" will be expressed then. But in this final issue as editor, I do want to share two notes:

One is profound thanks to people who have read **Hospitality** during these past years. Our circulation has grown from about 700 to 7,000! None of us began as (or really are now!) journalists or graphic artists. Certainly the challenges of our ministry, this forum for reflecting, and the encouraging feedback we've received have pushed us to grow in many areas.

Second is thanks to and admiration of the talents of people who have written, drawn, pasted, typed, proofed, stuffed, and labeled this newsprint. Most have lived or worked out of 910 Ponce de Leon. Several have been friends around the country. Thanks to all there has never been a dearth of material to share or a lack of energy to get it into the mail. My joy has been to have this channel for some of my own creativity. Praise God!

Rob Johnson

Solar Energy

Aids Open Door Community

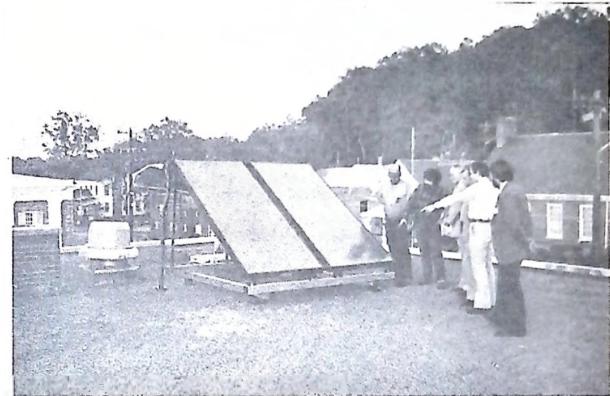
by Angelie Cooper

Thanks to the efforts of some industrious volunteers, the Open Door Community will soon be providing hot water to its patrons via solar energy. The project, which was conceived by Volkmar Wochatz (Project Coordinator) and Ed Loring during their visit to Nicaragua in early February, involves the installation of a solar water heating system on the Open Door Community facilities. The system will consist of six evacuated tube concentrating collectors, a heat exchanger tank, thermostatic controls, and pumps and plumbing parts. According to Volkmar, the system will save anywhere from 50% - 75% in water heating costs - a significant savings considering the amount of hot water the Open Door utilizes for bathroom, kitchen, and laundry facilities.

The project, which is scheduled to be completed by January 1987, is being done entirely through volunteer work and donated materials. Donor coordinator, Sam Hay, along with Joanne Solomon, has done an excellent job of gathering the necessary materials for the project. Thanks to generous donations from Fournelle Energy Technologies (evacuated tube concentrating collectors), Universal Solar Products Company, Inc. (miscellaneous solar components), Rheem Manufacturing Company (tank at reduced cost), Grundfos (pumps), Suntronix Inc. (solar controls), and Gerry Kilgore (installation supervision), the Open Door Community will be able to continue its much needed aid to the homeless, while reducing its water bills at the same time.

Despite the overwhelming response to this unique project, help is still needed. The Open Door Community is looking for volunteers to help install the solar water collectors, once they are shipped from Canada. The entire system will be installed over a series of weekends beginning in December. The project also needs a number of donated plumbing parts. Anyone who would like to make such a donation should call the Open Door Community at 874-9652.

Volkmar hopes that this project will not only reduce the Open Door's expenses, but will help educate people about solar energy as well. As Construction Coordinator of the Southface Alternative Energy Center, an alternative energy demonstration center in southeast Atlanta, he recognizes the importance of teaching others about alternative energy technologies and ef-



Georgia Solar Coalition installation of Flat Plate Collectors, which are similar to those used for the Open Door Community project

ficient energy usage. The Open Door Community Project is just one way of communicating these essential issues.

Throughout the coming months, Hospitality will give you a complete progress report on the solar water heater project. If you are interested in lending a hand, please call Joanne Solomon, 874-9652 or Volkmar Wochatz, 525-7657.

For more information on solar energy and/or products, contact:

Georgia Solar Coalition
Southface Alternative Energy Center
158 Moreland Ave., S.E.
Atlanta, GA 30307
(404) 525-7657

Universal Solar Products Company, Inc.
1225 Salem Gate Way
Conyers, GA 30208
(404) 922-2590

Open Door Schedule

WE ARE OPEN...

Monday through Saturday, telephones are answered from 9:00 am until 6:00 pm and from 7:15 pm to 8:30 pm. The building is open from 9:00 am until 8:30 pm those days. (Both phone & door are not answered during our lunch break (12:15-1:00). Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come at other times. On Sunday we are closed until 1:00 pm. Please do not make unscheduled drop-off of clothing, food, etc. on Sunday mornings. Sunday afternoon our phones and door are answered from 1:00 until 5:00 pm

OUR MINISTRY...

SOUP KITCHEN - Monday-Saturday, 11-12 noon; Sunday 3-4pm

BUTLER ST. CME BREAKFAST - Monday-Friday 7:30-8:30 am SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHES - Monday, Wednesday, Friday - 9:00 - 11:00 am (Be sure to call-- schedule varies) USE OF PHONE - Monday-Saturday, 9am - 4pm.

SHELTER REQUESTS - Monday-Saturday 9am - noon. SUNDAY WORSHIP - 5:00 - 6:30 pm.

BIBLE STUDY - Alternate Wednesdays 7:30 - 9:00 (call for winter schedule)

ALL-DAY RETREATS - Every 6th Sunday (for our household & volunteers/supporters) - Jan. 10 & 11

AL SMITH

by Murphy Davis

Sometime in the early morning hours of October 17, Al Smith, our dear friend and former house guest was brutally murdered. He was found, beaten to death, inside Samaritan House, the downtown day shelter he helped to run. Oh, how we mourn.

Al Smith was known on the streets as the Gypsy. He was probably as well known as any homeless person in Atlanta in recent years, because even though he was homeless, Al was not beaten down. He was a person of great spirit: a person who understood the importance of reaching out to others, speaking the truth of homelessness, and finding ways for the homeless to come together to tell the truth and cry out for justice.

We knew Al for a number of years. Soon after we met him at the Butler Street breakfast, he came to live with us at the Open Door. It was not long after his coming that he became a very important person in our household because of his gifts, because of his spirit, and because of his capacity to live in community and be a friend to other people. But Carolyn Johnson discovered to our horror and dismay one day that Al had been smoking in his room. At the Open Door we have a pretty firm understanding about smoking: outside of the designated area, it is simply not allowed. If somebody does smoke in their room, we have to throw them out. So Carolyn and I tried to swallow the lumps in our throats and went to Al and told him he'd have to leave. We did, however, invite him to come back in 24 hours and talk with us again. Al left and our hearts were very, very heavy; but sure enough, 24 hours later, Al showed up at the door again. He and Carolyn and I sat down and talked about why smoking in the rooms was so dangerous and why it was so important to us to prevent it. Al said he was sorry, that he understood that he had made a bad mistake, that he would never do it again. We accepted that and welcomed Al back into the household, even though the smoking incident necessitated his sharing a room with several other people. We were always glad that he had come back.

Andy Loving shared at Al's funeral: "Gypsy would fall down and get up, fall down and get up, fall down and get up." Our experiences with him were true to that understanding. He was a person who was not afraid to say, "I made a mistake, I fell down. I did something wrong." And he wasn't afraid to say, "I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?" I think it's one of the greatest gifts that Gypsy had for living in family and community: he understood how important it was for all of us to be able to say, "I'm sorry," and to start over again.

Al was an important part of our household. He helped with many different jobs while he lived with us. Most important and for a long period of time, (nine months or maybe as long as a year) he answered the phone and the door. Over the years we have had many different people to do that job, but I doubt if anybody ever did it with any more class and panache than Al. He understood the importance of the job: that it was important to welcome people whether they came in through the door or over the telephone wires. He understood that it was important to communicate messages and to be plain and clear about what the possibilities are and about what the limits are. He was not embarrassed to say no when he knew the answer had to be no. He understood the points at which he needed to consult with somebody else. Part of the way we operate at the Open Door is to acknowledge that while we make many decisions on our own, we often get to a point when we must stop and discuss a decision with someone else. Al understood that way of operating. He knew where the nuances were so that he didn't hesitate to come to somebody and say, "Look, I'm not sure what we should do about this. How should we handle this? Here's a problem, what do you think I ought to do about it? Should somebody else handle it?" I think it was that appreciation of nuance that made him such an important worker at the Open Door and so helpful to us in the time that he was here.

Gypsy had an incredible sense of humor. He loved a good joke as well as anybody I can think of. He so often would just throw his head back and open his mouth

Photos - Rob Johnson



wide and laugh and laugh and laugh. He loved to be in on the jokes that were going around the house and help start a good tease. Once when Joyce Hollyday from Sojourner's Magazine was visiting us, Ed had started a tongue-in-cheek campaign to be featured on the cover of Sojourner's Magazine. So every time we turned around he was waging some new effort to convince Joyce that he should be on the cover of Sojourner's. One morning while Joyce was there, she and Ed and I were eating breakfast upstairs when Gypsy knocked on the door. We invited him in. He came in with a pink phone message slip. He went straight to Joyce and said, "Joyce, Jim Wallis just called from Washington and he asked me to get this crucial message to you. It's really important that while you're here you take pictures of Ed Loring, because they want to put him on the cover of the magazine." Joyce looked at Gypsy because he was talking as seriously as he possibly could. She looked at Ed, and she looked at me. I don't know who smiled first but finally we were all guffawing and practically rolling on the floor because Al had pulled it off with perfect finesse. She was sure that he was being serious and it took a long time to catch on to the fact that it was a joke. That was the kind of thing that Al loved. He loved to be included in a joke and to play along and enjoy it.

The pictures we have of Al from his time in the house, especially the pictures of him dressed up as the king of Halloween really exemplify the kind spirit that he had; the way he could dress himself up and laugh at himself and laugh at everybody else. It was as if being human was a good chuckle, and he loved to share that chuckle with other people.

Al really knew how to get mad, too. He knew what to be mad about and what to do with some of his anger. He knew that being homeless was an insult to the human family; that not having enough to go around was a slap in the face of human dignity. It made him mad, and he used that anger to articulate the pain of homelessness, to articulate the cry of homeless people for justice in this city and across the land. So he was an important person in the Atlanta Advocates for the Homeless, when that group formed. He came to the meetings and explained things about being homeless that those of us who come from homes didn't understand. He helped articulate how homeless people would respond to certain things or what their needs were. He was so valuable to that effort, to that struggle to understand and to find ways to push towards justice. He was involved in the fight for the day labor pool renovation and the fight for public toilets: for all of those things that in our

Al Smith - cont. on page 5



Al, I Met You Twice

Al, I met you twice
and I loved you.
I met you twice and
I mourn your death.
A man of the streets, you
were wise to drunkenness and
poverty.
Running a Day Shelter you
joked about public showers,
playing cards and AA meetings.
Is nothing sacred? The sparkle!
The human soul.
At the rally for the Homeless
just last week - just last week!
a man came up to us, begging bus fare,
and you gave it to him and laughed,
"He must think I'm a damn fool,"
you said and we all watched
and learned your ways of holding
out honesty and responsibility to him.
Was it too much? Too much
for him to carry?
Was he the one who beat you?
Or another like him.
Not ready to take
the gift of life
you handed him.
Yes, you're a fool Al
with your hair pulled back and
that wonderful hat
you're a fool with
your twinkling eye
and unmanicured teeth
God grant us a few
more fools
like you
Al.

by Nancy Rice

Nancy is a partner at our neighbor community
Jubilee Partners in Comer, Georgia.

city are so needed to lift up and enhance the dignity of every child of God. But he was also very deeply involved with us in the work against the death penalty.

I think one of my first memories of Gypsy when I heard that he had been murdered, was the memory of how many funerals Gypsy had helped us with. When Ivan Stanley was executed in July of 1984, Al was such an important person, to me, to Ivan Stanley, and to everybody who fought that execution. I'll forever be grateful for what he gave us and for the way he helped and consoled and comforted us all the way through that terrible, terrible experience. The first and most important thing is that Al shared a sense of absolute outrage that this could be happening: that this dirt poor, retarded, hurt young black man could be executed and thrown out as a scapegoat for our corporate frustration and sense of helplessness about the chaos of our society. He helped to build up the commitment to struggle and fight against the death penalty. But when Ivan was executed, Al was right there. He was doing what had to be done. Because it fell to us to prepare for burial and comforting Ivan's family, Al was doing everything he could do to help. I said, "Al, we're going to need some clothes." He said, "Murphy, how big a man was he?" I described Ivan, told him about height and weight. Within no time at all, Al had found a beautiful pin-striped suit from our clothes closet, along with socks, underwear, a white shirt, and a tie. He looked for and found the best we had. He knew, that at a time like this we needed to give our best to Ivan. We couldn't save his life, we failed in that effort, but we sure could give him the best we could come up with in death. We could be with him, we could dress him and bury him in a way that remembered all his good qualities and lifted up his dignity and strength. So Al found that suit, pressed it, and hung it up. On the morning that we drove down to Jackson and to claim Ivan's body, Al and Bobby Harris drove our red van, with the used coffin in the back. They followed as I drove the station wagon with Ivan's grandmother, mother, brother and sister-in-law. We got to the funeral home and Lewis Sims was the only person there. He said, "Who's going to help me dress the body? I need some help." Without a second's hesitation Al said, "Of course I'll help, of course I'll do it." So he went into the back room with Lewis Sims and they lovingly and carefully dressed Ivan's body, prepared him for burial, and lifted his body into the casket. Then Al came and walked with Ivan's grandmother into the funeral home to see Ivan one last time. He was

just that kind of person. He liked to do what needed to be done. If it was making a phone call, he'd do that. If what needed to be done was dressing a body, then he'd do that. We drove from Jackson up to Jubilee Partners, and took Ivan's body to that beautiful pasture by the woods. We laid him down, and all during that time Al was there with Ivan's grandmother, brother, mother and sister-in-law. He comforted them and joined us in trying to be family to them and to support them at a time when they so desperately needed support. He was an important bridge: Ivan's family was black, and they had never been around white people who were nice to them before. They could look at us and see that we, and Al, Joe Owens, Sy Pressley, and Bobby Harris were all struggling to live together and be family to one another. Together we were trying to reach out to them and be family to them. I think it was an important witness for all of us that we could indeed cross some of the false barriers that divide us: barriers of race and class, literacy and illiteracy. Al was there.

The other funeral with which I associate Al, was that of Jesse Owens, or "Goatman" as he was known on the street. Goatman was beaten to death while sleeping where he often slept: inside a car in a used car lot on Edgewood Avenue. Goatman was a good friend of Al's, so when he was so senselessly murdered we planned a memorial service for him at Butler Street C.M.E. Church. We all went down and gathered around Goatman's memory and rededicated ourselves to the struggle for life. During the funeral there was a time for people to share memories. I'll never forget Al's. He came to the front of the sanctuary and he leaned his elbow up on the window sill of the church and stood there and talked about Goatman. He talked about how important his friend and he talked about all the things he remembered. One thing he said was, "Now people call me Gypsy. But I want to tell you, Jessie Owens was the real gypsy, the authentic gypsy." It was sort of a designation of honor that Al gave his street name to the Goatman, that he shared it and wanted to identify with him like that. Another thing he said, (and I've thought of this so often since his death), was, "I think we've got to stay together and we got to figure out why did this happen? Why was Goatman murdered? We gotta know why so we can make sure that it never happens again."

It seems like a cruel irony that Al died the same way: beaten to death. And we don't know why. And we didn't find out why in time for it not to happen to Al. That makes me very, very sad.

But I think where Al's memory encourages and lifts us up and strengthens us is that we know he wouldn't want us to give up. We know that no matter what happened, he would never say that violence would be an appropriate answer to even this act of violence. He would never want anybody to be so torn up over his death that we quit. He, I think, would want his blood and his death to be a further impetus to the struggle to find ways that we can live together in peace and find justice for all God's children. This is an important memory for us to sustain and to nurture, for we need to know that no matter what happens, no matter what comes, we must hold on to the life that comes to us as a gift from God through each other. And remembering a brother like Al Smith helps us to go on.



A CALL TO FAITHFULNESS:



at KINGS BAY SUBMARINE BASE
(future home of the TRIDENT submarine)
ST. MARYS, GEORGIA

FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS
DECEMBER 26, 27, 28, 1986

For the past five years on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, an ecumenical group from the Southeast has gathered at Kings Bay Submarine Base in St. Marys, Georgia, to witness their allegiance to the ways of love and life and their opposition to the ways of death and the false security of nuclear armaments.

The date for the planned witness was chosen because it marks the remembrance of King Herod's slaughter of the innocent children in his attempt to kill the infant Jesus and maintain his security (Matt 2:16). Today the major world governments, are prepared to kill millions of innocent children and adults in an attempt to maintain "national security".

As Christians, people of other faiths or strong moral convictions, we are called to love our enemies and to seek reconciliation through which all can find genuine security. We also seek an end to racism, poverty and other evils bred in a world where so many of our resources go into preparing for war rather than building justice and peace.

Affirming the light of God in each person, we hope to communicate to those who work on the base that we feel kinship with them as sisters and brothers. It is not they that we oppose but the threat of mass annihilation of which the Trident Submarine is a centerpiece. We go to St. Marys to witness our opposition to Trident and to hear the concerns and hopes of the people there. We trust that together we can find new ways to build both peace and security.

REGISTRATION FORM

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

I am interested in the KINGS BAY WITNESS and plan to attend.
 I am interested in participating in the peaceful nonviolent civil disobedience and will attend the training session on Nov. 14th & 15th. Attendance is required of all those planning this.
 I am interested in "Listening to the people" of St. Marys, a new Kings Bay focus. (See reverse side)
 I am interested in participating in the Peace Walk to Cape Canaveral. (See reverse side)

PLEASE RETURN TO: JUDY AND JACK CUMBLE
517 Moore's Mill
Auburn, AL 36830

Black Theology:

A Theology of Liberation

by Willie Coleman

The primary resource for this lecture is For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church by James Cone.

An Overview of Black Theology

According to James Cone, Black theology emerged as a conscious discipline during the mid 1960's when radical Black ministers began to reflect on the meaning of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements within the Black community and the United States. It underwent a second phase from roughly 1970 to 1975 when Black theologians took their case to white colleges, universities and seminaries. It is currently undergoing a third phase in which it is focusing on global issues in relationship to Black communities in the United States (Cone, FMP, pp. 24-27).

After the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, a radical Black political consciousness that had been boiling under the surface erupted throughout the United States. It was a time of intense social unrest. King's dream of a beloved community evaporated and a nightmarish broken one took its place. In this context some Black ministers began holding a series of conferences in an effort to understand and respond to the crisis of a growing Black militancy that was the result of the end of the Civil Rights movement. Black people could no longer depend on white liberalism, especially liberal Christianity. The radical Black ministers concluded that a different understanding of God and of God's activity in history had to arise from the experiences of Black people.

One of those radicals was James H. Cone, a young theologian who had done his Ph.D. work at Northwestern University on the subject of Karl Barth's anthropology. Dr. Cone participated in those earlier dialogues and in 1969 he wrote his first book, Black Theology and Black Power. His purpose was:

...to demonstrate that the politics of Black power was the gospel of Jesus Christ to twentieth-century America, for Black power was concerned with the liberation of the Black poor from oppression, and Jesus had shown just such concern for the liberation of the poor during this earthly ministry...Luke 4:18 (FMP, p.33)

I'll return to this christological focus later. But for now, the important thing to remember is that although other Black ministers, philosophers of religion, and theologians have had their hand in shaping the subsequent development of Black theology in the United States, it was this claim by Cone that gave Black theology its characteristic form that continues to the present.

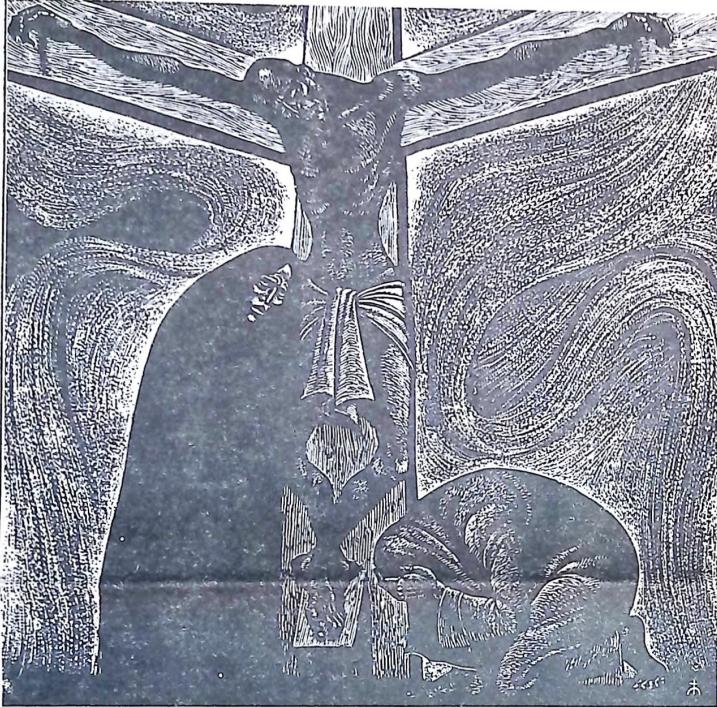
In summary then, two things can be said regarding the origin of Black theology. First, it emerged as an attack on white religion, either for its complacency to racism in America or its outright support of it. This is why Cone and others have called white religion in the United States as heretical as apartheid in South Africa. And second, Black theology emerged as a theology which sees Jesus as the Liberator. (FMP Chs. II.III).

Black Theology, Black Churches and Black Women

I want to continue this survey with some observations on the relationship between Black Theology, Black Churches, and Black Women.

First, Black theology and the Black churches: The relationship between Black theology and the Black churches has been an ambivalent one during the past twenty years; it has been one of mutual attraction and repulsion. The Black church has been the central symbol of Black unity within the Black community and the single most independent institution in this society (FMP, p. 99). Historically, it was the "Ole ship of Zion" that

Theology - cont. on page 8



THE BLACK CRUCIFIXION 1963

Acts 1:8

I want to set the tone for this reflection by doing a Black theological paraphrase of Acts 1:8 where Jesus instructs his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the promise of the Holy Spirit:

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (or, you shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you);

And you shall be my witnesses in the United States, Latin America, Europe, Asia, and throughout Africa, even into the tip of South Africa."

Introduction

Black theology is a theology of liberation. Like North American feminist theology, Latin American liberation theology, and other Third World theologies, it attempts to discern and proclaim God's presence (God's Spirit, if you will) in liberating those who suffer under various forms of sin and oppression. Among these oppressions are racism, sexism, classism, and imperialism. Every theology, including so-called traditional theology, has its particular focus and/or point of departure. For Black theology, the focus is on the analysis, interpretation, and proclamation of how God liberates Black people from racist oppression.

The purpose of this article is to offer a basic interpretation of Black theology. It is impossible to do justice to this subject here, so I will only survey the landscape in order to identify and to describe the major developments and themes with the hope that it will point you in the direction for engaging it with your own praxis of ministry.

anchored Black people against the harsh storms of racism, from lynchings to water hoses. The Black church is where leaders first "cut their teeth" (to quote from Gayraud Wilmore, Presbyterian minister, historian and social ethicist). It is also the place where Black people learned to organize and translate faith into praxis. In that sense it has been radical. But the Black church has also had a strong conservative stand. (FMP p. 100). This has been the other-worldly, "Christ against culture" posture that stood in tension alongside the more radical tradition. From personal experience, I can attest to the opiate affect of Black religio-political conservatism.

So when Black theology appeared on the scene it was not unanimously received within the Black church. Some argue that Black theology has nothing to do with the Black church because it is an academic discipline taught mostly in white seminaries and universities, and out of touch with the spiritual and worship life of the Black church. Others contend that it is the prophetic voice of the Black church, reclaiming its liberation heritage (FMP, p. 101). In either case, deep antagonisms have developed between Black theology and the Black church that have to be overcome if the needs of contemporary poor Blacks are going to be met.

Remember that, initially, Black theology emerged from within the radical tradition. But as it underwent its second phase of development, from roughly 1970-1975, it moved away from the Black church and into white educational institutions. This was due in part to reactionary anti-intellectualism from Black churches, especially the conservatives, and in part to the move that Black scholars made into white institutions. Since the late 1970's Black theologians have made efforts to re-establish dialogue with a new generation of grassroots pastors, theologians and organizers. Two things must transpire in order for future dialogue to be fruitful: (1) black theologians must re-claim their place within the Black churches; and (2) Black churches must open up to their Black teachers of the Word. This is the only way that there will be a future of mutual cooperation (FMP pp. 116-121).

Turning to the relationship between Black theology, Black churches, and Black women introduces one to an embarrassing problem. The Black liberation movement, both in its secular and religious forms, has been primarily a revolution for Black men. Within a racist, sexist, and classist society, Black women historically have been caught in a triple bind. More than once they have been pulled in three different directions simultaneously. And frequently they have been betrayed by Black men, White women and the society at-large. The best description of this pattern that I have read is Bell Hooks book, *Ain't I a Woman*. (At the same time, it should be noted that there is a real crises among Black men in the U.S. today which is unprecedented in the history of this nation - permanent unemployment).

During the Black power movement, and even now, many Black men have either ignored or denied sexism within their ranks (FMP, p. 123). Others have been blatantly sexist, calling the feminist movement a "white woman's thing." In spite of this half-truth, Black women in the church and society have contributed to everyone else's freedom. Ironically, Black men clergy have used a similarly peculiar logic to "keep women in their place" within the church as was used by white clergy to keep slaves in their "appointed status" during slavery.

Nevertheless, some Black women seminarians and professors, such as Jacqueline Grant, who teaches systematic theology at Interdenominational Theological Center and Katie Cannon at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. have begun to articulate a Black feminist theology. Black men ministers need to hear the voices that arise from the unique experiences of women who are adversely impacted by racism, sexism and classism. And furthermore, they need to be advocates with them in the liberation struggle of all marginalized people (FMP p. 136-139). This "beam" of sexism must be removed from the eyes of the Black church.

The final portion of this admittedly sketchy survey pertains to the relationships between Black theology, Black churches and the Third World. James Cone has identified three phases or stages in the development of Black theology:

Theology - cont. on page 9



1966-1970: When radical Black ministers began to express an emerging Black theology from the Civil Rights and Black power movements (FMP p. 24).

1970-1975: When Black theologians took their call primarily to white colleges, universities and seminaries (FMP p. 25).

1975-present: When Black theologians realized that it was time to focus on global issues in relationship to Black communities in the U.S.A. (FMP p. 27).

Having come from separate but parallel situations of oppression, dialogue between Black Christians, Hispanics, Asian and Native Americans is indispensable. Although differences are unavoidable, the commonality of ethnic suffering is the basis for dialogue. Beginning in 1973, Sergio Torres, a Chilean priest, began working on a conference that evolved into the "Theology in the Americas" project. The first conference was held in Detroit in 1975 (FMP, p. 161) with a subsequent one held at the same location in 1980 (FMP p. 165).

Initially the 1975 conference was to focus on dialogue between White North Americans and Latin Americans, to which several feminist and minority representatives objected (FMP p. 161). But the Latin American and White North American leftists were more interested in Marxist and socialist ideology than they were in addressing racism or sexism (FMP p. 163). Several minority caucuses were formed as part of Theology in the Americas: Black Theology Project, Hispanic Project, Asian-American Project, Indigenous People's Project, Women's Project, Church and Labor Dialogue and Alternative Theology Project. Through these various projects dialogue among constituency groups has been enhanced. (FMP p. 165).

The 1980 conference fared better because minority members participated in the planning of it. Three conclusions resulted from the dialogue between these liberation theologians:

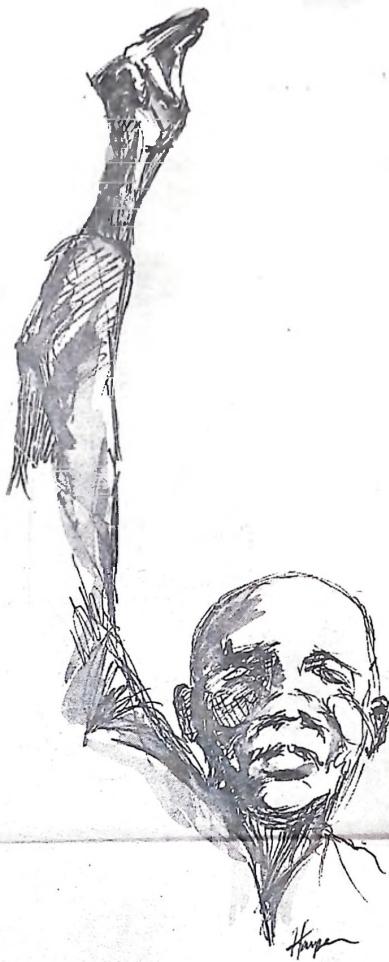
- 1) Every theology is a product of its social environment and thus in part a reflection of it.
- 2) Every theology ought to move beyond its particularity to the concrete experience of others.
- 3) Every theology needs the instruments of social analysis that will help theologians define the causes of injustice. (FMP p. 174).

The papers that grew out of both conferences are available in the library under the headings "Theology in the Americas."

Another arena of dialogue has been between Black theologians and Third World theologians through an organization called the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). The foundational conference was held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (1976) with five major intercontinental conferences: Ghana (1977), Sri Lanka (1979), Brazil (1980), India (1981) and Switzerland (1983). (FMP, p. 144). These conferences were the result of the deep frustration that Third World theologians felt from meetings of the past that had been set by the Euro-American agenda of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC.

As in the case of TIA, dialogue between Black and Third World Theologians has not come easily. But several significant developments have evolved from them. Foremost among them is a "new method of doing theology" called "praxis." Praxis is "a reflective political action that incorporates cultural identity and that comes before theology in the formal sense." (FMP p. 147). In other words, the traditional model of reflection-action is reversed. Black and Third World theologians agreed on four principles in utilizing this new methodology:

- 1) Theology is made in complex religio-cultural contexts and with political commitment to liberate the poor from oppression. (FMP, p. 150).
- 2) Social analysis is indispensable to the theological enterprise of liberating oppressed people (FMP, p. 150).



- 3) A new hermeneutical situation is created through a political commitment that is informed by social and cultural analyses. (FMP p. 152).

- 4) The meaning of the gospel that is derived from re-reading the gospel in light of the oppressed renders old European and White North American concepts bankrupt. (FMP, p. 153).

The publications from EATWOT conferences are: African Theology en Route, Asia's Search for Full Humanity, The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities and Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology. (FMP p. 146).

Doctrines of Black Theology

In a sense, it is inappropriate to speak of any systematic doctrine of Black theology, given what has already been stated regarding traditional Euro-American theological categories. Nevertheless, one year after Black Theology and Black Power, James Cone wrote A Black Theology of Liberation, a second edition of which was published this year. In it he attempted to outline the essential elements of a Black theology of liberation in a systematic manner. In his second edition, he argues that, conceptually, this outline of doctrines is still relevant. It should be noted, however, that this volume more than any other of Cone's writings has been the basis of accusations from other Black theologians that he relied too much on European theologians, especially Karl Barth.

I am simply going to mention the highlights in order to move on to the critique of Black theology.

Becoming Sisters and Brothers

Glimpses of/Reflections by Open Door Community Resident Volunteers



Paula Clegg

I am an Appalachian woman who doesn't clog, a North Carolinian who doesn't support Jesse Helms, an English major graduate who doesn't want to teach, and a horse lover who doesn't mount without a boost. I was born in 1960, but my new birth in Jesus occurred about two and a half years ago. Very soon, I'll be a godmother to a beautiful baby girl named Tabitha. After I leave the Open Door, I hope (God willing) either to become a minister or to teach box turtles to jump through rings of fire.



Pat Fons

Hello all you Hospitality readers from Patricia Ann Marie Egan Fons, most often know as Pat. Who am I? Only God knows and she hasn't really decided yet. One window to my personality could be the fact that I am writing this just one hour before the deadline. Am I truly dedicated to being on time or an incredible procrastinator? You decide.

Some facts about me are that I am the most recently arrived resident volunteer and the oldest member of the Open Door Community. I spent most of my life living in and around Milwaukee, Wisconsin. My education and training make me an accountant. In 1984, I became a lay missionary with Movement for North American Mission which is the outreach arm of the Wellspring Community of Gloucester, MA. They minister to the homeless in that area. MNAM helps Christian lay people like myself in their search for ways to work with and for the poor in response to the gospel vision. My search has taken me to Dunedin, FL where I worked with limited income older adults and now to the Open Door.

For relaxation I like to read, go to movies, and walk as briskly as the Atlanta hills allow. The rest of my time is taken up with the extensive correspondence I conduct with children, parents, other family and friends.

Photos by Dietrich Gerstner



Mark Harper

"There are nights," James once commented, "when I'm back there. I hear them machine guns, the screaming - hot as hell, and, you know, a few guys crying, some maybe laughin' a little." My friend cut his reflections on Vietnam short. "But I don't think about it too much," he continued. "You hear a little crying, a little laughin' on the streets, too."

He had spent ten months in Indochina and ten hours that day digging ditches on a job he had gotten by chance at a day-labor center in downtown Atlanta. He made \$22 and would spend that night in a local church shelter.

James is 37 years old and black. He is my brother, my conscience, my teacher. He is one of many people who eat soup and take showers in the house where I eat soup and take showers. And when he has eaten his fill, he turns up his collar against the November rain and demands that I turn my eyes up from my books and know his life: know that he loves Otis Redding as much as I love a Springsteen ballad; know that he once played with his little boy in a park much like the one in which seven-year-old Hannah Loring-Davis and I often ride our bikes; know that he has been in love, that he has been to war, that he fights to claim his humanity everyday in a city that has dehumanized people on the street so successfully that many speak of sleeping in "catholes" and finding water at "watering holes."

James and I will trade opinions on the Hawks' chances and jokes on the chances of either one of us playing professional basketball (he says that he's too old and I'm too short). We will also be enemies for several days when he has been too drunk to receive a ticket for the Druid Hills night shelter.

There are nights for me that are sleepless, defined by the rage of knowing that James often sleeps on concrete steps while I have a bed. I struggle, he struggles, and a single woman with three small children and a smaller government check struggles. And yet, as I come to know and feel their lives, I remember that Jesus struggled... and was executed by the state... and rose again... inviting all of us to share our pain, our joys, our music, and our laughter at a common table. It is an absurd, wonderful feast - one that I am learning to come to with daily gratitude.

Sisters and Brothers

cont. from page 10

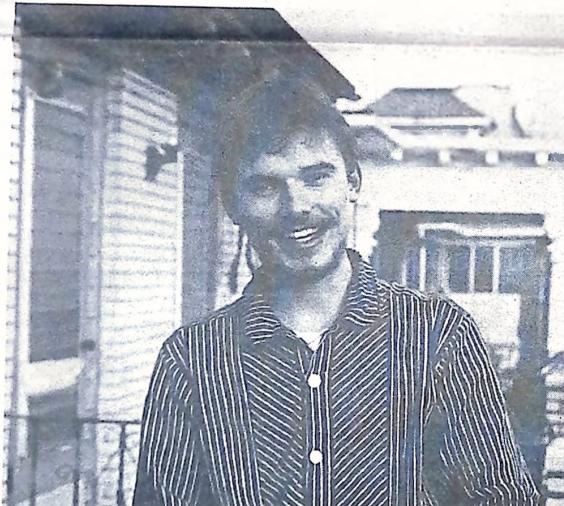


Rebecca Green

My name is Rebecca, but actually I am more widely known as the "grits angel." Really though, I am far from angelic. I am just another undecided person, halfway through school, no concrete future plans, confused about everything most of the time. You know the type. But I'm very happy, despite my life's disarray.

My family lives in Austell, Georgia, so fortunately I am close to home. It's nice having two families - I'm with.

Okay. If anyone out there has the answers to life's most difficult questions, please let me know. That's all.



Dietrich Gerstner

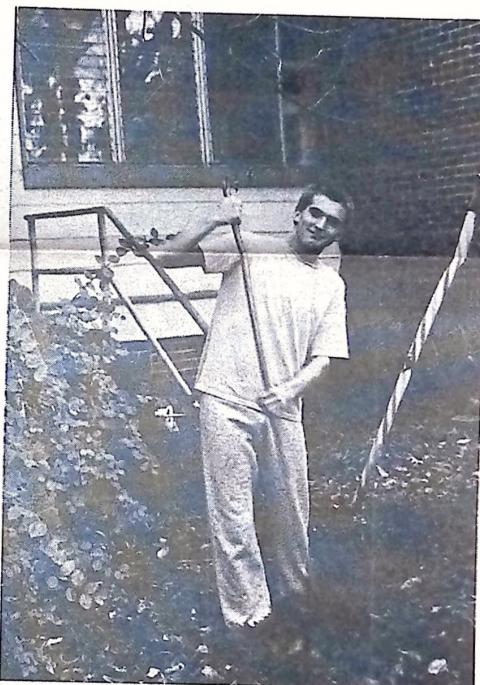
After having finished my alternative year of service as a conscientious objector in West Germany I came over to the United States in early February of 1986 in order to be a normal tourist. Very soon I was confronted with the issue of homelessness, this ultimate poverty in such a rich and powerful country. I was so shocked and appalled by this gross injustice, especially in light of your country's excessive expenditures on armaments. I made up my mind to do a different kind of tour and visit several Catholic Worker communities throughout the States. In June I came to the Open Door for the second time and decided for various reasons to stay here and follow my call to live in a Christian community working for and with the least among us. I see my time here as an opportunity to explore community life for the long haul and to do the work that is so shamelessly avoided by most people, that means to care for those who are shoved to the bottom of our society, our sisters and brothers in prison and on the streets, in short, the very poor.

11



Jane Okrasinski

My name is Jane Okrasinski, and I'd much rather write about Pat or Mike. I came to the Open Door after spending four years as a corporate lawyer and one year in the Texas prisons (all 28 of them). I have a nine-month-old son who has a smile and a wave for everyone who walks through the door. He teaches me more about God and hospitality every day.



Mike Stoltzfus

Been looking around for my soul
But my soul decided to hide.
Even tried to find my God
But he had fallen off the slide.
So I decided to wander awhile
Took a walk on the wild side.

But my soul and my God
They just wouldn't leave me be
I kept on a searching, seeking
But they kept on eluding me
So hey, I sought my neighbor out
Jamming, now I can see all three.

My name is Michael. I'm trying to row my boat ashore. Haven't got there yet, but our brothers and sisters among the homeless poor are setting the course and leading the way. Lead on, brother, lead on. Lead on, sister, lead on.

Dear Editor

Dear Ed and Joanne,

Thanks for sending me a copy of "A Proclamation to the City of Atlanta, Georgia." I thought it was a clear, concise, and insightful report that offered important and feasible ways to deal with problems faced by homeless people in Atlanta.

Although all the points in your four-fold plan are extremely important, I was especially pleased to see the emphasis placed on transportation. As you know, this seemingly obvious problem (i.e. the lack of means for homeless people to travel around Atlanta) is overlooked time and time again by those who often expect homeless persons to travel all around the city to gather verification needed to apply for benefits, to apply for work, and to get to shelters.

I appreciate your work and your inspiring commitment to the "Beloved Community."

Very sincerely,

Karen Ogle



Community for Creative Non-Violence

October 17th, 1986

Dear friends,

This winter, there will be an unprecedented number of homeless people in the streets of our nation. The demands for emergency assistance will be at record levels, far beyond our ability to meet.

In Washington, D.C., for example, women's shelter providers are deeply concerned because there have already been more homeless women in the shelters in the summer months than there were last winter. In city after city across the country, the story is the same.

Why is this happening now? No one can say for certain. Perhaps it's the cumulative effects of the budget cuts, or economic conditions, or the virtual disappearance of affordable housing that has finally caused the simultaneous destitution of so many who have hung on until now. But whatever resources or possibilities that were previously available have been exhausted. Regardless of why this is happening, the results are the same: the pain, suffering, and death in the streets is on the increase.

The time has come - in fact, it is long overdue - for Congress and the Federal government to do their fair share in meeting the needs of America's homeless.

It is unconscionable that the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), which oversees the Federal government's only spending program specifically for the homeless, has, in fact, spent less money on homelessness in America in the last 3 years, than the City of New York has spent on its homeless in just the past year. And New York City has not spent nearly enough!

We have asked our friends in Congress to introduce emergency legislation that reflects a more realistic and proportionate response by the Federal government to the needs of our nation's homeless.

This week, a bill will be introduced in Congress by Representative Mike Lowry of Seattle. The bill appropriates \$250 million for the immediate provision of food and shelter for the homeless, a drastic increase in what the Federal government has spent in the past. In addition, the bill appropriates \$100 million for the renovation of Federal buildings for use as shelters

Dear Friends,

Thanks so very much for the gift of a subscription to SoJourners - it is greatly appreciated. Hospitality arrived 2 days ago and brought back floods of memories; laughter and tears, joy and pain, loves and worries. Perhaps the most beautiful was the story of Harold. His photo and the picture of him sitting down with his milkshake was so vivid it was like being back at 910 again. Since I left, questions about Harold were often cropping up. "How is he, is he still alive?" I thank God that his death was peaceful, fitting to someone who brought so much love to those around him and fitting to such a place as 910 where love and peace reign.

Oxford is linked to Leon in Nicaragua and the student link group is raising money for a health campaign to help with hospital supplies. The first meeting of the student link group I went to, a student was giving a slide show on his summer in Nicaragua - part of it spent working at German Pomares! Also I am trying to get involved in one of the night shelters here in Oxford. The difference between the rich (particularly some very wealthy students) and the poor is very marked. It is strange that such a beautiful city as Oxford contains such obscenities.

I pray that all may go well and God keeps you safe.

In the love of Christ,

David Pritchard

P.S. One of the Americans here comes from Buckhead. He recognized the Open Door when I pointed out its various features seen when driving past it. May you always be a reminder to us all. It's strange talking to him about Little Five Points, Virginia Ave., etc.

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or the construction of new facilities where appropriate Federal buildings are not available. These buildings will be in areas where some combination of the public and private sectors will operate them on a long-term basis.

The bill also creates a permanent agency within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to administer this program, and to formulate, facilitate, and coordinate the Federal government's future response to the problem of homelessness in America.

Solutions do not rest solely with the Federal government, of course. Considering the magnitude of the problem, however, realistic responses are just not possible without Federal involvement. Besides, at least a few Federal dollars can be used to buy something besides overpriced hardware and unnecessary new weapons for an already-bloated military.

We can't sit back and watch another winter go by with Congress and the Federal government turning a deaf ear - from the comfort of their warm offices - while millions of our sisters and brothers live - and die - in the street.

To bring the reality of homelessness closer to members of Congress, we have decided to focus on several specific actions at the Capitol. Every year, we serve a traditional Thanksgiving dinner to a thousand or more homeless people in Lafayette Park, across from the White House. On November 27, we will instead serve that meal at the Capitol.

Immediately following Thanksgiving Dinner, some of us will take up residence on the Capitol grounds, remaining there in a continuous presence until Congress enacts emergency legislation, or until spring. This will be our effort to make visible and concrete the consequences of Federal inaction and indifference, and to reduce the distance between ourselves and those who wait - in pain and loneliness - to come in from the cold.

It is our hope that we will be joined by others from across the country, people who share both our outrage and our hope. Please join us anytime - for a day, a week, a month, for the duration.

We believe that Congress will not act unless and until it has to. We believe that our presence at the Capitol can help create the focus and the pressure that will result in action.

Please join us.

On behalf of CCNV,

Mitch
Mitch Snyder

P.S. If you want more information or if you have decided to join us, please call or write. Contact either Carol Fennelly at 202-722-2740, Mary Ellen Komis at 202-332-4332, or Mitch Snyder at 202-393-1909. We hope to see you soon.

1345 Euclid Street NW
Washington, DC 20009
202-332-4332

An Experience in Life

by Joseph M. Giarratano

Editor's note: The article is reprinted from the Southern Coalition Report on Jails & Prisons, Summer 1986, (Vol. 13, No. 2). It expresses eloquently the position one man on death row takes toward his fate, a fate he experiences as one condemned, as a friend of those condemned, and as a still-living member of a society bent on killing him and his friends. Because of the power in his words, we print the following as a special insert. We urge you to share it with others.

by Joseph M. Giarratano

Nine days before my twenty-fourth birthday, I stood before a judge in Norfolk, Virginia, and was sentenced to die in the state's electric chair. Late that same afternoon I began the process of awaiting my predetermined death. That process began almost seven years ago, and, since that afternoon, I have had to cope with the realities of death on a day to day basis: dealing with the guilt of arbitrarily having taken the life of two human beings (a guilt that often comingles with nightmares from my past); facing the very real possibility of my own violent death; and coping with the anger, resentment, frustration, helplessness, and grief of having four friends taken from my side to be coldly exterminated. These have been seven long years of struggling to maintain my sanity, of growing, and of grasping onto a sense of humanity in a controlled environment designed specifically for the purpose of bombarding the five senses with hopelessness.

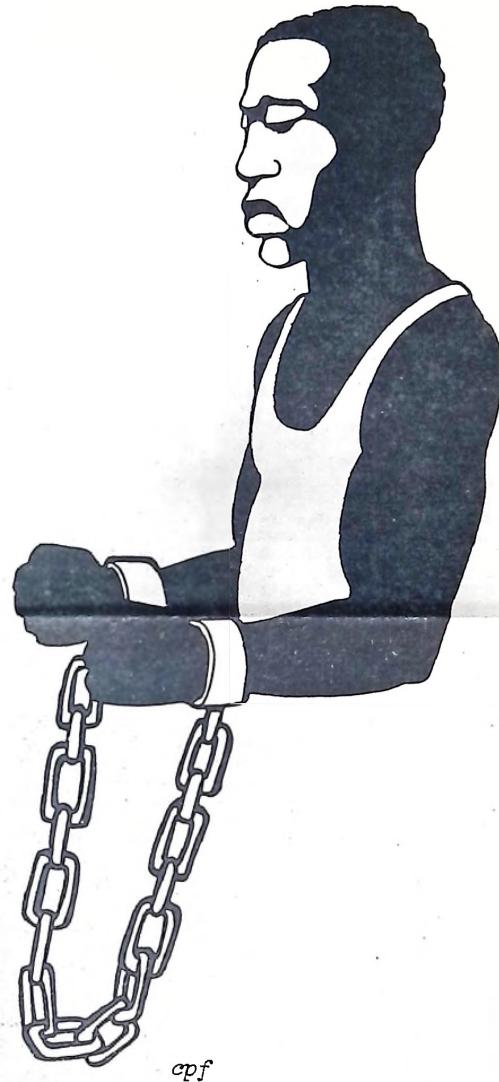
It is extremely hard to maintain a sense of humanity in a system that ignores the fact that you are a living, breathing human being - a system where you are recognized only as a number; a compilation of legal issues open for debate; a twenty to thirty page legal brief before judges who will determine your fate without ever seeing your face; as something non-human, a piece of contaminated meat to be disposed of.

My "home" is known as death row, a unit not only segregated from the outside world, but also from the general prison population. My contact with others not "like" me is very limited: visits with friends and family that take place in an enclosed cubicle no larger than a telephone booth, with thick security glass separating me from those who still recognize my humanity. There are also face to face visits with those who work to save my life through the judicial channels. These are individuals who continue to acknowledge my humanity and who I've come to know as friends. When I am permitted to visit these friends, I leave my "home" escorted by an elite group of guards; their black uniforms and shining combat boots distinguish them from the ordinary correctional officers (whose uniforms are light blue). But the essence is in the unit where my life is spent. Here, 24 hours a day, is where I experience and interact with the basic emotions of life, and face the reality of death.

On August 10, 1982 Frank Coppola, a former college basketball star, Catholic seminary student, police officer, current father of two and a close friend was executed.

A week after Frank was coldly strapped into the electric killing machine, I received a letter from him written shortly before the 2700 volts of current coursed through his body. It was a short letter that, to this day, fills my eyes with tears. It said, "Little Brother, be true to yourself. I love you, Joey."

Even now I experience the anger I felt at his death, and the pain of having a friend coldly taken from me to be ritually put to death. Memories of his mother and two young sons wash over me. I came to know and love the son and father who they could not touch, and who they could only visit once a week. They are and are painful and joyful memories. For example, I remember Frank's youngest son, Buddy, asking me to give his father a kiss for him, and Frank trying to explain



cpf

to him how the guards would misunderstand that. It wasn't making sense to Buddy, so I just leaned over and kissed him before Frank could move out of the way. And there were the times when another of Frank's appeals would be denied, and he would try to explain it to his kids. I could see Frank's mom fighting back the tears - wanting to reach out and hold him, and the glass not allowing it. I share their loss, tears, anger, pain, and grief.

I wanted to understand why my friend was taken from me, but it was impossible. Each day I had to interact with the same guards who came to the unit and

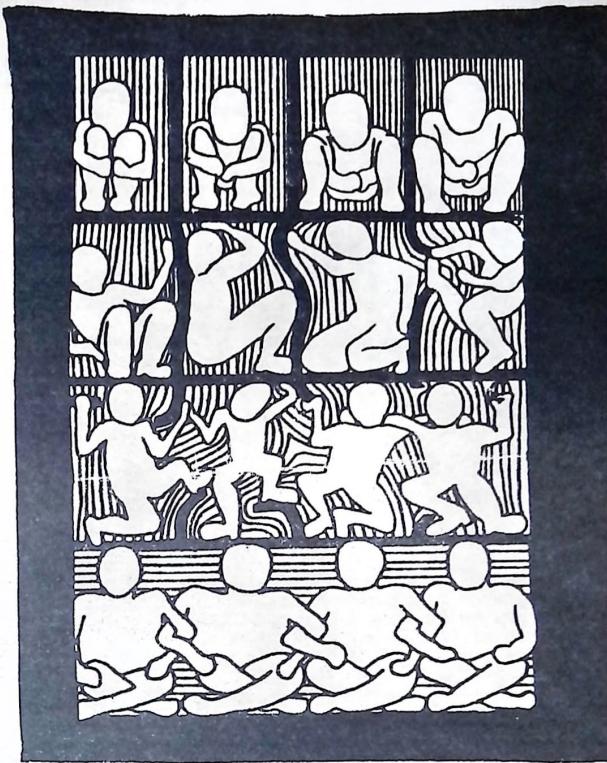
took him away. I still feel the helplessness I experienced that day while locked in my cell, watching my friend being chained: the helplessness I felt when Frank stopped in front of my cell, so that we could shake hands and say goodbye through my food slot; as the guards said "Let's go Frank," not able to look either of us in the face. I didn't want to let go, I wanted to scream "No!" I wanted to pull him back; I wanted to tear my cell door down and make them stop. I hated them.

Since that day three other friends have been executed: men who I ate with, talked with, played with, argued with, men who I came to know as friends and shared a life bond with. Men who, regardless of their crimes, I could see as nothing but human beings - and not as animals or pieces of meat. James and Linwood Briley and Morris Mason are the men whose tears I saw, whose flesh I touched, whose pain I still feel. I still know the hopelessness. I am still with guards who took them away to be exterminated. And I am still trying to understand.

I know the pain that I brought to my victims' family; I know their loss, their anger, their frustration and hatred. I know their feelings of helplessness. I know these emotions as they, Frank's family, Morris' family, James and Linwood's family, and my family and friends do - a paradoxical cycle of continuing violence, loss, pain, grief and helplessness. Unlike those who invest with authority, I have learned that killing people is wrong.

Hope is such a fragile thing when hopelessness constantly bombards the senses. You can hear its hollow sound in the clanging of steel doors, in the rattle of chains, in the body searches, in the lack of privacy, in the night sounds of death row. And you can see it in the eyes of the guards who never really look at you, but who are always watching to see that you do not commit suicide. You can feel the hopelessness each time you are asked to state your number, when you are holding the hand of a friend in chains who is being pulled away from you, never to be seen again. You can hear it in the echo of a system where humanity is constantly ignored. Eventually I, like all human beings, will die. But for now, I am very much alive and, until death touches me, I feel the pain, anger, frustration, despair and grief at the loss of those close to me, even as I feel the fear of my own predetermined death. For Frank's family, life must go on, as is true for all who have lost loved ones. The focus shifts back to life, and the death grows more remote as time passes. But here on the row, where life goes on, death is never distant. Here life and death are constantly one. Both are ever present. While there are times when death appears distant, it is only an illusion: at any time an announcer on TV or radio may remind you of your death, or that of a friend. You may read about your death in the daily newspaper, or in a letter from a court clerk, or when the guards say "Let's go...." Here you can never forget about death for long - on the row where hope and hopelessness coexist daily.

All of these emotions are very real to me, and I can see them in the eyes of the human beings around me, the condemned and executioner alike. Any one who stays on a death row, or visits regularly, can feel these emotions pulsating in the air. One can hear the sound of guards and prisoners laughing together, talking, sharing meals. There are the ministers who come to visit through the bars - some trying to save our souls, all praying and telling us not to give up hope, but none telling us how to do it. Many share in our helplessness for a time, but they also have their daily lives to contend with. That the condemned and executioners live together is an odd paradox.



I have spoken with many of the guards, most of whom avoid the subject of my death, the possible death of the men around me, and their role in this - *danse macabre*. There are a few who will avoid my eyes and say: "Joe, it's not my doing. I don't want to see any of you die. There are others who deserve it more than you." Many find it easy to avoid the subject since they will only escort me to the death chamber where their co-workers will take over. But their eyes tell all that needs to be said. They have very human eyes like the other human beings around me. Just like those of my dead friends. Yet, they will do their job. Standing in this house of death amidst all these human beings - some who come to visit, some who come to stay, and some never to be seen again. Life is not cogent. Each day I long to touch, hold and be with my loved ones, just as they want me with them. The closeness of death makes me more aware of my human feelings, and constantly adds fuel to a passion for life. It makes me more aware of how much time I have wasted in life, how very responsible we all must be, and how precious each day of living is. Each day I hear Frank Coppola's words to me: "Be true to yourself. I love you, Joey." Hearing those words does not allow me to ignore the humanity around me, not that of the condemned or the executioner. On August 10, 1982 I hated them. Each day since has been an experience in Life. Although death will eventually come, it has not overtaken me yet, and until it does, I live. Where there is life there is hope, as both flourish through the recognition of humanity - both yours and mine. Each day I spend here is an experience in Life, as well as in Death.





Paul Peter Piech

The Content of Black Theology. Black theology is a theology of liberation; it is one that is rooted in the Black community; it is a survival theology; it utilizes passionate language (BTL, Ch. 1).

Sources and Norm of Black Theology. Its sources are the Black experience, Black history, Black culture, Revelation, Scripture and Church tradition. Its norm is the seriousness with which it takes the liberation of Blacks and the revelation of Jesus Christ. (BTL, pp. 23, 38).

The meaning of Revelation in Black theology is more than just divine self-disclosure; it is "God's self-disclosure to humankind in the context of liberation." (BTL, p. 45).

God in Black Theology. "The Blackness of God, and everything implied by it in a racist society, is the heart of the Black theology doctrine of God." This means that the essence of the nature of God is liberation. (BTL, p. 64).

The Human Being in Black Theology. The Black condition is the concrete experience into which God enters to liberate Black people. (BTL, p. 84).

Jesus Christ in Black Theology. Black theology focuses on the historical Jesus as the "indispensable foundation for christology." In relation to the Black oppressed, Jesus is Black. (BTL, p. 119).

The Church. The church is called to proclaim the reality of divine liberation and "actively participate in the liberation struggle." (BTL, p. 132).

Eschatology. The future is God's. Meanwhile, however, the struggle against injustice must continually move towards that future (BTL, p. 142).

Critique of Black Theology

In *For My People* James Cone offers his own critique, or assessment, of Black Theology. He focuses specifically on the strengths and weaknesses of Black theology in its early development. First, Black theology was creative in relating the Christian faith and the Black freedom struggle in American society (FMP, p. 79). It raised the central question: What has the gospel of Jesus to do with the oppressed Black people's struggle for justice in American society? By doing so, it identified liberation as the heart of the gospel of Jesus (pp. 80-81). Second, it exposed and attacked racism in the White church and theology as an un-Christian heresy (p. 81). Thirdly, it caused radical Black ministers to re-read and develop a deeper appreciation of their own African and Afro-American heritage. And further, it lead Black theologians to move away from an inordinate dependence on European theology. (p. 83). It also provided a challenge to conservative Black churches with their pie-in-the-sky religion. And finally, Black theology contributed in fostering a climate of Black ecumenism by noting that the struggle of Black people in America was not determined by denomination or religious persuasion, but by race. Commitment to liberation became the norm for this spirit of ecumenism.

Those were the strengths of early Black theology that remain valid today. But there also were serious weaknesses to this radical new theology. First, it overreacted to racism in White churches and in society. Therefore, it allowed attacking racism to become a dominant characteristic. (p. 88). Second, it depended too much on "moral persuasion and not enough on social analysis in response to White racism. Therefore, its analysis of oppression was too superficial, offering no clues to the linkages between racism, and other forms of oppression." (p. 88). Thirdly, it provided no economic analysis of capitalism as it contributes to the impoverishment of Black people. This was due in part to mutual marginality of Marxists and the Black community in American society. (p. 92). But it was also due to the fact that Black Christians did not trust atheists and that Marxism did not prevent Whites from being racist. Today, economic analysis is not an option, but a necessity. (p. 95). Fourth, Black theology did not address the issue of sexism early in its development. Racism cannot be eliminated without a corresponding elimination of sexism and classism because they are interconnected. Other Black theologians have identified at least two more weaknesses that are still prevalent in Black theology. J. Deotis Roberts contends that Black theology must develop its own metaphysics. In other words, it must address questions of ultimate reality beyond historical understandings of oppression and liberation.

In 1975, a Black philosopher named William R. Jones wrote a book entitled, *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology*. In it, he criticized Black theologians for not placing the theodicy issue as the foundational one upon which to construct a Black theology. His argument was that while traditional theology could evade the question of evil, given the sufferings of Black people, Black theology could not avoid the centrality of this issue. To date, no one has adequately responded to Jone's challenge.

Conclusion

"Black theology is a theology of liberation." It is one that is still in the making, as an ongoing project among those who are concerned about faithful discipleship among the poorest and most oppressed people on this planet, whether they live in the ghettos of the U.S., the base communities of Latin America or the homelands of South Africa. Herein lies its contemporary relevance as a witnessing-liberating theology according to Acts 1:8.

Willie Coleman is Staff Associate for Education/Action for Justice of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and a friend and neighbor of the Open Door Community.

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1929 - 1986



Harold participating in an all-night vigil in front of
City Hall in December 1983

Rob Johnson