

Memories of motive: A Not So Tame Publication Readers' Theater

Boston University School of Theology
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Narrator: Welcome to “Memories of *Motive*: A Not So Tame Publication”!

Jeanne Audrey Powers: “The magazine *motive* challenged me beyond natural ability. ... [It] was the most influential religious magazine for college students of its time.... [When I worked in campus ministry, I discovered that] *motive* forced everyone to stretch and triggered wonderful arguments at the dinner table. One student later said to me, ‘You helped our minds work in a better way than our studies did.’”¹

Narrator: That was Jeanne Audrey Powers, who was one of the first ordained women in the Methodist Church. She was later Associate General Secretary of the United Methodist General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. You will also want to meet B.J. Stiles, the last editor of *motive*. B.J., what was the purpose of *motive* magazine?.

B. J. Stiles: “Founded as a voice for the church in the academy, *motive* has endured, reflected, and—at its best—illuminated a quarter-century of chaos, decay and destruction of institutions and ideas which proved inadequate to the new world we have been given.” [But you will want to hear from some of the young people who read *motive*.]

Rebecca Owen: [My name is Rebecca Owen, and *motive* played a major role in my life.] “The Methodist Student Movement and the larger student Christian movement soon welcomed me as no sorority could, and *motive* magazine engaged me as no class or professor did. *Motive* gave me unsettling postwar contemporary art ...; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was to transform my southern fundamentalism; and a social gospel addressing events in America and the world, honed by the evil of World War II.”²

Narrator: Rebecca Owen was jailed for her involvement in the civil rights movement and was questioned in jail by men who came to interrogate her on behalf of a state judiciary committee that investigated communist practices.

Rebecca Owen: “They confronted me with several issues of *motive* magazine that were addressed to me and could only have come from my dorm room. My roommate later told me a woman she did not know came to the room to get things she said I requested and went carefully through my papers and belongings. They questioned me at length about *motive*, having underlined passages they thought particularly damning.”³ [But, Elmira, you were on the front lines a lot too.]

Elmira Kendricks Nazombe: [Yes, those were heady times. I was marching from Selma to Montgomery, organizing civil rights action, and meeting James Lawson and Vincent Harding. I

can remember going to an MSM Council meeting and being very impressed.] “I found myself dazzled by the intellectual power and scope of the discussions. I was struck by the way in which women students ... led right along with the men students in the council. ... Ruth Harris ... of the Board of Missions, and Margaret Rigg, art editor of *motive* magazine ... were clearly the equal of any of the male staff in the room.”⁴

Narrator: That must have been an exciting time.

Elmira Kendricks Nazombe: “It was a wonderful time to be in the Student Christian Movement. So much was happening The Southern Africa committee was just getting started, raising awareness and pressuring the churches to withdraw any investments in South Africa. The North American Committee on Latin America (NACLA) was doing the same thing for Latin America. This work was shifting the focus of the student movement from denominational relationships to social action.”⁵ [One of the people we all looked up to was Charlotte Bunch.]

Charlotte Bunch: “I worked with the staff of *motive* ... on a special issue devoted to the ‘woman question.’ ... That edition of *motive*, published in March 1969, was one of the first women’s liberation anthologies. All sixty thousand copies sold out in a few months. It created more controversy than any issue of *motive* in thirty years and contributed to the process of making the magazine independent of the church. It also furthered linkages between some women connected to the church and the women’s movement. As Alice Austin ... wrote ... from Geneva: ‘Life has not been the same here since the women’s liberation issue of *motive* finally reached me in June.’”⁶

Narrator: How was the women’s issue received? I read that the women’s issue “put *motive* on the map for women all over the country, who began flooding the office with requests for extra copies for classes they were teaching, for conferences and seminars and study groups, for mothers and sisters, and “because mine keeps disappearing.”⁷

Charlotte Bunch: [Yes indeed!] “In ... the controversy over the women’s issue, the church began to reduce its support of *motive*, and *motive* decided it could no longer function under the church. *Motive* could not survive without church money so the staff and editorial board decided to close up shop, using the remaining resources of the magazine to put out one final gay issue.’ ... It was fitting that the final products of *motive* were focused on gay and lesbian issues, both because *motive* had a tradition of being avant garde and because a number of staff members have come out over the years since it ended. It was also fitting for me that this was the end of my institutional relationship with the Methodist Church, because it was coming out as a lesbian that finally sent me out of the church.”⁸

Narrator: There were other young people who were bold to speak up and take risks, Sheila McCurdy – a southern white woman in college in Montgomery, AL, decided to go hear the new preacher in town at Dexter Ave. Baptist Church, Martin Luther King, Jr. When she returned to her dorm, she was greeted by the KKK, placing a cross in front of her dorm window, which they later burned.

M. Sheila McCurdy: “As I got out of my car, the college president appeared. He walked me to the dorm and told me that the state troopers had called him as I arrived at Dexter Avenue and asked if they should arrest me or bring me back to campus. He told them that he knew that I was there and to leave me alone ... He told me to stay in my room and he would see me the next morning. I was not expelled the next morning but was told that my behavior had not been appropriate for a southern lady, and therefore I could no longer expect to be protected when on campus.”⁹

Narrator: Sheila McCurdy did not stop, so she was eventually expelled, this time for refusing to stand in honor of George Wallace when he spoke at her school. Her pastor Charles Prestwood – a BU grad, by the way – called in the Methodist pressure on the President, who reinstated her. Of course, Charles Prestwood had his own challenges with the church leaders, and he eventually had to leave Alabama.¹⁰

M. Sheila McCurdy: [All through that time, the Methodist Student Movement was sustaining to me. “... I got to know students with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee ... I read all the books by James Baldwin and Richard Wright, and *motive* magazine became a catalyst for my spiritual growth and political commitment.”¹¹

Martin E. Martin: {I know what you mean.} “I read every issue [of *motive*], also admired the format and art--"best of its class," juries would have said. ... I'd compare those years to something Whitehead said about a time when "wise men" (and women) hoped and circumstances had not yet come along to deny the hopes.”

Wilson Yates: I really agree with you, Martin. “[*Motive*’s] treatment of the arts was exemplary. It became the leverage in the church for engaging the arts as voices that helped us make sense of culture, that probed the theological questions of our time through both religious and non-religious imagery, and invited all, Christians and non-Christians to remove their sandals and realize that art could truly be holy ground inviting all who came to explore the life of the spirit and confront the contours of their soul. Now twenty-six years ago, I began editing a new publication, ARTS, the Arts in Religious and Theological Studies. I well knew that *motive* broke the ground that helped create the conversation between theology and the arts that, now, ARTS sought to continue.”¹²

Narrator: Wilson, you make me wonder how the media folks responded to *motive*? We could ask Kenneth Woodward. He was Editor of the Religion section of *Newsweek* for 38 years, beginning in 1964. Mr. Woodward, what did you think of *motive*?

Kenneth L. Woodward: “In the late Sixties and on into the Seventies, when I regularly received about 104 publications in my in-basket ..., I reached for and read *motive* because it represented what young mainline Protestants, and not a few Catholics too, were thinking and doing. ... [T]his was a period shaped by what I am calling in my book, "movement religion," based mainly on the civil rights movement. As such it was activist, justice-seeking, critical of "institutional" religion”¹³

Narrator: Didn't *Newsweek* have something to say about Hillary Clinton and *motive* back in 1994?

***Newsweek* Writer Kenneth L. Woodward:** As a bright, well-educated woman growing up in the turbulent '60s, Hillary Rodham defied that generation's rebellious stereotype. At Wellesley, she continued to attend church, joined the interdenominational chapel society and took a year of required Bible study -- an experience, she says, "I'm very grateful for." She also read *Motive*, a now defunct magazine for college-age Methodists. "I still have every issue they sent me," Mrs. Clinton says. But the issue she remembers best contained an article by a Methodist theologian, Carl Oglesby, called "Change or Containment." "It was the first thing I had ever read that challenged the Vietnam War," Mrs. Clinton recalls. Partly because of that war, she switched from being a Goldwater Republican to a McGovern Democrat. But she remained a devout Methodist."¹⁴

Narrator: Wow! Who would think that one article could have so much influence? In fact, people are still talking about it. *Time* Magazine wrote about Hillary's faith in 2014, and *motive* received another shout-out.

***Time* Writer Elizabeth Dias:** "Hillary Clinton once described her faith as the background music of her life. "[T]he tune ... never fades away. It's there all the time. It's not something you have to think about, you believe it ... You have a faith center out of which the rest flows ... At Wellesley, Clinton regularly read the Methodist Church's *Motive* magazine, and she credited it with helping her to realize that her political beliefs [needed to change]"¹⁵

Narrator: So what happened to *motive*? Tom Trotter, you were General Secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry for many years. What did you think of *motive*?

Tom Trotter: At one time it was the best magazine published in America for intellectually sensitive young people. It had a 30 year life before it was shot down by scaredy-cats.

Narrator: Tom, is it true that *motive* was at one time chained and locked in a safe?

Tom Trotter: My predecessor at the board of higher education, following the instructions of the Council of Bishops, had secured all the copies of the two issues on homosexuality. He gathered up all the copies and locked them up with a padlock. When I became general secretary, I opened the padlock, partly with the help of some of the people who worked on the magazine.

Narrator: There you have it folks -- "Memories of *Motive*: A Not So Tame Publication"!

Players (in order of appearance)

Narrator
Jeanne Audrey Powers

Nathan Bakken
Cisca Ireland

B.J. Stiles
Rebecca Owen
Elmira Kendricks Nazombe
Charlotte Bunch
M. Sheila McCurdy
Martin E. Martin
Kenneth L. Woodward (*Newsweek* writer)
Elizabeth Dias (*Times* writer)
Tom Trotter

Brandon Powell
Alisa Harris
Charlene Zuill
Cheryl Boots
Anne Hillman
Daryl Ireland
Yusin Choi
Cisca Ireland
Brandon Powell

¹ Sara M. Evans, *Journeys that Opened up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 48, 55, 57.

² *Journeys*, 70.

³ *Journeys*, 79.

⁴ *Journeys*, 92.

⁵ *Journeys*, 97.

⁶ *Journeys*, 136-137.

⁷ Joanne Cook, "Preface," *The New Women: A MOTIVE Anthology on Women's Liberation*, eds., Joanne Cooke, Charlotte Bunch-Weeks, and Robin Morgan (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), xvii.

⁸ *Journeys*, 138-139.

⁹ *Journeys*, 158-159.

¹⁰ *Journeys*, 162.

¹¹ *Journeys*, 162.

¹² Wilson Yates, email communication to Alisa Harris, 9 September 2015.

¹³ Kenneth L. Woodward, email communication to B.J. Stiles, 9 April 2012.

¹⁴ Kenneth L. Woodward, "Soulful Matters," *Newsweek*, 30 October 1994: <http://www.newsweek.com/soulful-matters-189302> (accessed 2 September 2015).

¹⁵ Elizabeth Dias, "Hillary Clinton: Anchored by Faith," *Time*, 27 June 2014: <http://time.com/2927925/hillary-clintons-religion/> (accessed 8 August 2015). This originally appeared in *TIME*'s book *Hillary: An American Life*.