

BOOKS

Reviewed by Joseph R. Thomas
NC News Service

In the type of author's postscript that more writers should compose, Tom Wicker tells of his fascination with "the ordeal of the Union"—the Civil War—calling it "the most dramatic and fascinating story I know."

"I think it tells much about what we are as a people, and how we came to be that way," he says. "In reconstructing an important part of it, by applying my imagination to what I could learn of history, I hoped to make that story live for others as it does for me."

He has done exactly that,

"Unto This Hour," by Tom Wicker. Viking Press (New York, 1984), 642 pp. \$19.95.

enthraling me for hours with this historically accurate yet fictionalized account of the second Battle of Bull Run, the battle in which Robert E. Lee divided his forces and whipped a superior but fumbling foe."

Fought from Aug. 26 to Aug. 29 in 1862, the battle was one of the most ferocious of the war, exhausting both sides and giving the South added reason to carry on.

The higher considerations of strategy, however, are not the real stuff of Wicker's well-woven tale. Rather his concern is with individuals, running from the second or third line of command down to the rag-tag elements of the

opposing armies and those caught up in the fierce battling. There are glimpses here of red-neck life and plantation life, of heroic men and fearful men, of devastation and gallantry and of the horrors of Civil War medical practices.

While in one sense he has produced an anti-war novel, piling gory detail on top of gory detail almost to the point of revulsion, he is not without admiration for the men and women caught up in the fighting and the varied motivations behind their actions.

We come to know and understand bravery and cowardice and fear and frenzy and fanaticism and cynicism and devotion and patriotism as we encounter these traits in Wicker's characters.

Too, there are times when Wicker intrudes a little too much to preach a point, and other times when his passion for prose gets the better of him.

Additionally, his account of the homosexual relationship between a brutish corporal and a sensitive young poet-soldier comes across as contrived and stereotypical.

Nevertheless, the book provides more than its share of compelling moments and rewards the reader with authentic glimpses into a way of life that we have enshrined in myth and a way of soldiering that had been stripped of the grim realities.

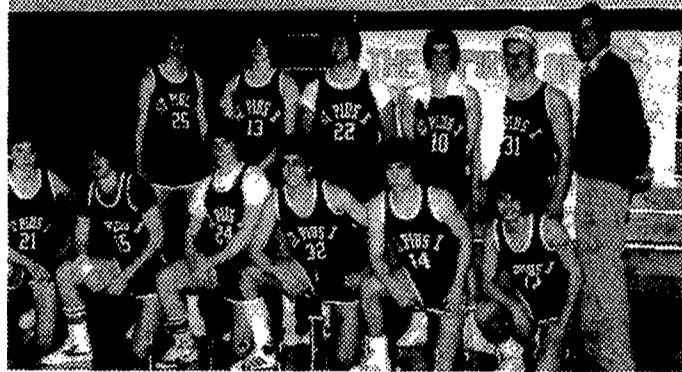
It has rich rewards for the reader who perseveres.

Thomas is editor in chief of *The Christophers*.



Ecumenical Clergy Conference

About 60 members of the clergy and various religious orders met last Tuesday for an all-day ecumenical conference at the Third Presbyterian Church. Right, from left, Margery Nurnberg, diocesan director of the Office of Ecumenism and Inter-religious Affairs, stands with the seminar's featured speaker, Brother Jeffrey Gros of the National Council of Churches, and Rev. Lawrence Witmer, director of Genesee Ecumenical Ministries (GEM). Above, some of the participants in discussion groups.



CYO Champs

The St. Pius X boys CYO high school basketball team won the annual Rochester-Buffalo Tournament, defeating St. Peter Claver of Buffalo, 74-65, completing their season with a 19-1 won-lost record. En route to the finals, they also defeated St. John the Baptist of Buffalo, 59-54, and the Lewis Street Center of Rochester, 80-76. Front row, from left, Rich Bassney, Kevin Kelly, Chuck Skvarek, Chris Schott, Jack Blake and Ted Caster. Back row, from left, Jeff Reynolds, Kevin Bolam, Ernie Campoli, John Sheehan, Matt Tuohey and Coach Glenn Schneider. Missing from photo, Brian Norton.



Father Bruce Ritter

ANONYMOUS DEATH

A bus driver found her in the parking lot behind Covenant House. My kids kept sneaking over to look at her body. She was 17 or 18. You really couldn't tell how pretty she'd been—her face had been mashed in and she had been stabbed eight times. The autopsy put the time of death between 2:00 and 5:00 AM on Thursday.

Detectives were able to determine that up until the night before her death she had been living in a hotel on 47th Street. The hotel is used by a lot of pimps and prostitutes.

My kids all know her—but nobody knew her real name. They remembered she used to have a baby. The word spread like wildfire. The kids sat in stunned silence or talked quietly. The older kids didn't bother getting angry or belligerent—casual, unexplained, anonymous death is a fact of street life.

That afternoon, Sister Alicia, our Director of Residential Services, called our kids together in the main lounge. "Look," she said, "this is a dangerous and violent area. Out there, we can't protect you. In here, we can. You're safe in here. Look," she said, "we care about you. Don't hang out in the streets. Times Square is a sick place with sick people who will do this to kids."

Our counselors, heavily involved, trying to reach as many kids as possible, reported that the shock and fear were profound. Our kids are afraid of dying—they feel exposed, vulnerable, used. A curious uneasy undercurrent of the discussion swirled to the surface repeatedly.

"We don't know her name...I can't use my name...nobody knows who I am...we can't tell anybody who we are...a hundred people know my first name and it isn't really me...Bruce, I ain't anybody somebody knows."

All during that day we tried to calm and reassure our

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway boys and girls all over the country

kids—and braced ourselves for what we knew would happen. A lot of kids did not go out that night. The few that did go out came home early. And then it began. The new kids, those we never saw before began flooding in, knowing they would be safe here. Our intake workers reported that a record number of kids came in that night and the next. More than 80 new kids. They came in small groups of twos and threes, afraid to walk alone, to be alone. We took them all. We beefed up our street patrols. Put extra 24-hour street counselors outside.

"She was 17 or 18. You really couldn't tell how pretty she'd been ..."

We were right to be afraid. Two Saturday nights later they found the body of Cheryl in an abandoned warehouse on 33rd Street. She had been strangled and beaten to death. She was 14. Cheryl ran away from warm, caring parents, from a small town, from safety and security and a future, to the Big Apple, to Fun City, to the Great White Way, to 42nd Street and the pushers and pimps and panders and johns who buy little girls.

Cheryl had stayed at Covenant House for about five days a couple of months ago and then had returned home to her parents. She ran away again and came back to New York—a tiny little moth—and flew directly into the flame. If she were trying to get to Covenant House she never made it. She was only blocks away when she was killed.

"Our counselors, trying to reach as many kids as possible, reported that the shock and fear were profound."

The police described her as simple, not sophisticated. She was known to hang around Times Square, often seen there in the company of a pimp.


My kids were scared to death. We didn't have problems with our 10 PM curfew for a long time. And our census

nearly went through the roof.

Please help Covenant House continue to care for these "fragile moths", to offer them a place where they can be safe, where they can come for help. Nine out of ten dollars we receive comes from people like you. Without your loving—and consistent—support we simply would have to close our doors.

Maybe it's a little easier to understand now why our crisis center in Houston is so desperately needed. I mean I really worry about these kids. You've got to, too

Pray for us and my kids. Pray for all the kids here in Houston and other cities in the United States who are at great risk. And thank you for caring about our kids.

I want to help Covenant House meet the needs of all homeless youth. Here is my gift of: \$ _____ please print: NAME: _____ ADDRESS: _____ CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____ AP (BGI) Please send this coupon with your donation to: COVENANT HOUSE Father Bruce Ritter P.O. Box 2121 Times Square Station New York, NY 10108  The street is NO PLACE FOR A CHILD