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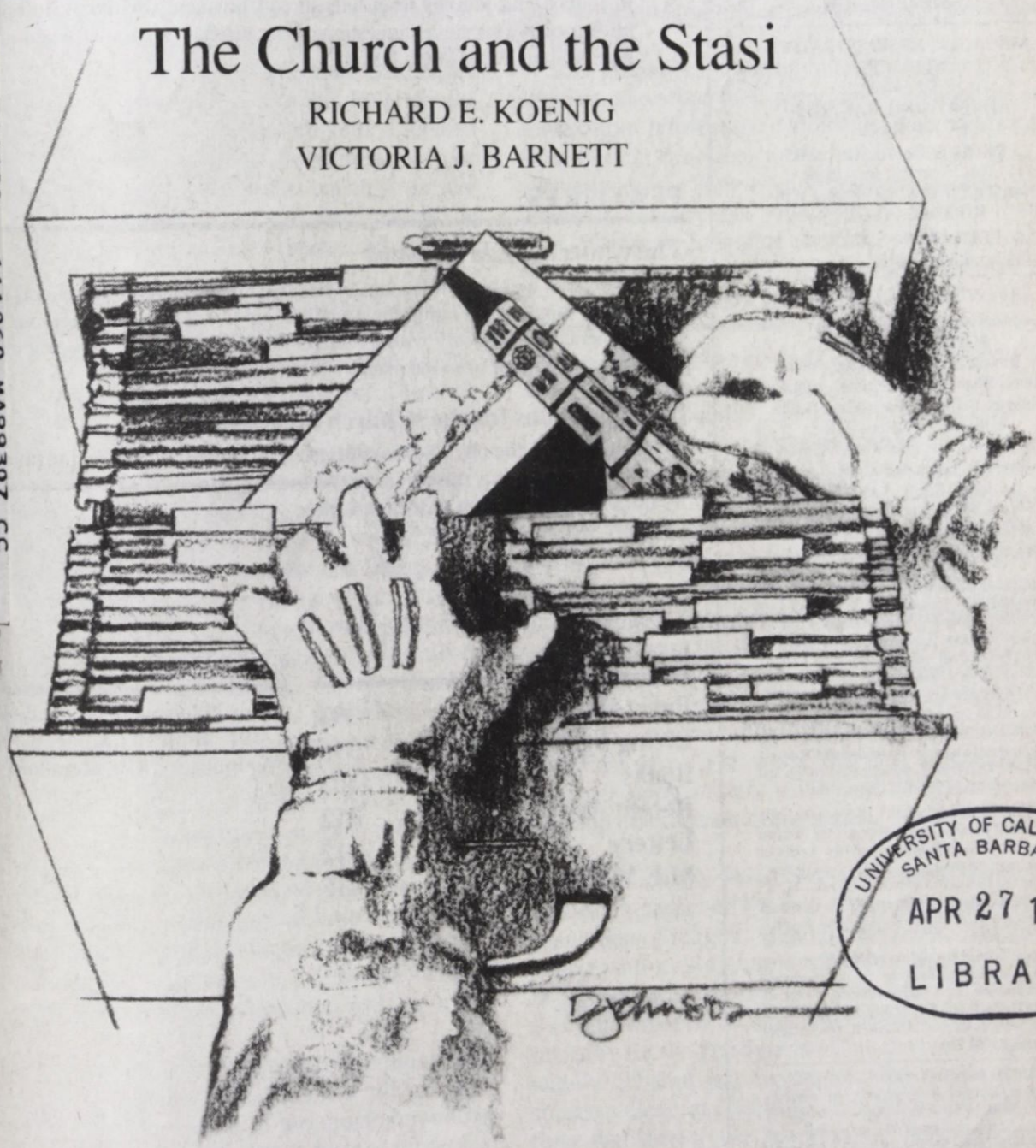
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The Church and the Stasi

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William H. Willimon: Praying in Strange Places
James M. Wall: The Rhetoric of Public Life

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An Ecumenical Weekly

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James M. Wall wonders how a religious worldview can be injected into public discourse in a pluralistic nation.

When Prayer Goes Public 388

When prayer goes public it usually becomes generic, and that's a mistake, says Editor-at-Large William H. Willimon.

In the Enemy's Camp: A Convert's Sadness: 390

Recounting his journey from Judaism to Christianity, Murray Joseph Haar reflects on the holiness of questions. Haar teaches religion at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

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The Churches and the Stasi 396

Two years ago church leaders in East Germany were being hailed for their role in toppling the communist regime. Now many are suspected of having cooperated too closely with the secret police. Richard E. Koenig examines the moral fallout from the opening of the Stasi files.

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Diane Johnson, cover; Dale Bargmann, p. 391; John Brundige, p. 404; Joseph Shoopack, p. 410; Reinhold Löffler, p. 413.

remarkable conversations leave one with hope, even in the face of threatening statistics.

Jeffrey H. Mahan

The Rise of Selfishness in the United States.

By James Lincoln Collier. Oxford University Press, 308 pp., \$24.95.

The timing couldn't be better: here is the first full-length documentary work on the pervasive shift toward self-seeking, self-indulgence and self-gratification in contemporary America. James Lincoln Collier asks the obvious question: how did a society that once prized self-restraint reverse the direction of its motivational pulls so thoroughly and dramatically?

He draws on a survey of influential social codes of the past 90 years. In the course of his treatise, he provides vivid insight into the Victorian period, traditional rural America and city life, and how the individual and collective aspirations of these times and places were reflected in art, music, literature and recreational pursuits.

Collier offers a searching commentary on the consequences of exclusive devotion to self-enjoyment. Children have been abandoned, Collier contends, and the acquisition of private goods has come at the expense of public goods. People waste money on items of self-indulgence, while the goods and services necessary to individual health and a resilient society go begging for support. Self-seekers ignore the law, having talked themselves into believing that rules and regulations apply primarily to other people. Many give the desire to satisfy wants and wishes priority over concerns about the common good.

Charles Taylor has written a number of philosophical treatises that culminate in similar conclusions. Taylor believes that social and cultural life are diminished when people direct every effort toward regulating and negotiating competing rights and privileges. At some point individuals must pay attention to the dictates of the good life. Collier takes such thoughts, Americanizes them thoroughly, and applies their chilling but arresting implications to the current scene.

Walter H. Capps

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