

Katallagete

V. 11 no. 3

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SUMMER
1966

Journal of the
Committee of
Southern Churchmen

"They will no longer consider you members of the congregation and the time will come when the ones that kill you will think they do God a favor" John 16: 2 & 3

About The Cover

J. LOUIS MARTYN
JAMES Y. HOLLOWAY

They will no longer consider you members of the congregation. And the time will come when the ones that kill you will think they do God a favor. John 16:2-3

The paragraph which stretches from John 15:18 to 16:4 is a message of comfort and challenge to the Church from the Risen Lord. One of the main themes of the passage is Jesus' insistence that the hatreds which the churches face are very similar to the hatreds which he faced during his time on earth. Indeed, the events, the dramas, are essentially one: "If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you If they persecute me, they will persecute you."

Only the *form* of the persecution changes. The Risen Lord reminds his followers that they must expect persecution and hatred to continue to the end of the world, and that often the persecution and hatred will come from fellow religionists. When John was writing his account of the "good news" brought by Jesus Christ, the community of Christians with whom he was associated in his city had just been amputated from the synagogue by fellow religionists. The great pain connected with this amputation, keenly felt on both sides, was a major element in the daily life of these Christians. It was the setting for the passage we are considering, "They will no longer consider you members of the congregation"

What happened was something like this: before there had been a separate Christian community in John's city, there came into the synagogue some Christian Jews who preached the "good news"—the gospel—that the long-awaited Messiah had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. A number of the members of the synagogue embraced this belief without the slightest intention of being in any way disloyal to the Jewish way of life or to its local embodiment in their synagogue. Later, however, another group of traveling messengers came with orders designed to root out of all the centers of worship any person who confessed Jesus as Messiah.

But how should the Messianic believers be rooted out? Through religion, through the use of prayers. If any member of the congregation did or said anything suggesting that he might be a Christian—especially if he refused to pronounce a curse on the heresy that confessed Jesus to be the Messiah—he was "put out of the synagogue," that is, "he was no longer considered a member of the congregation." In the standard synagogue service a very important part was the recitation of "The Eighteen Benedictions." Any adult male member of the congregation could be selected by the Synagogue Ruler and then actually called upon by the leader of worship to pray aloud "The Eighteen Benedictions." What had been done was to re-word Benediction Number Twelve so that it was in fact a curse pronounced upon all heretics, including those who confessed Jesus as Messiah. If a member of the congregation said or did anything suggesting that he might be a Christian, he

would be selected to pray aloud "The Eighteen Benedictions." When he came to Number Twelve, everyone would listen carefully to see if he recited it according to the new wording which cursed Christians. If he did not do so, he would immediately be called down from his position in front of the altar and put out of the synagogue. He would no longer be considered a member of the congregation.

Exclusion from religious congregations sanctioned by Roman law could bring with it a loss of legal and political sanctions in general, and could cut across the customs and practices prevailing in the localities where the particular congregations had become accepted as a part of the overall community. The Christians were forced, in a very real sense against their will but in obedience to their Lord, to become a sect, to give up the conveniences and favors and status of being a part of the religious, political, and social consensus.

Hence, some later readers of John's Gospel believed this was the point of the Risen Lord's words in the paragraph from 15:18 to 16:4. The dramas in which the churches found themselves were not unlike the dramas which unfolded around Jesus during his earthly lifetime. In the trials they faced when no longer considered members of the congregation, they had to depend upon God, not the "world." They had to, John records in 6:19, walk "on the sea," as Jesus himself had done and not rely upon the artifacts of religion, or culture, or politics to sustain them. And yet, they remembered that they are not alone: Jesus is risen and is present in the everyday life of the churches, in their joys and sorrows, in their amputations and exclusions.

In John's day the "world," which hated Jesus, expressed its hatred for him by amputating his followers from the synagogue. But, just as the *form* of this hatred had changed by John's day, so the hatred has taken various *forms* down to and including our own day. The *form* of no longer being a member of the congregation might in our day be a tolerant exclusion of those who reject the identification of the Body of Christ with the culture and politics and religion of white western civilization. Still, the *unity* of the dramas which Jesus and the churches experience remains the same: hatred by and exclusion from the "world," yet dependence upon God, who sent his Son "full of grace and truth," not to judge and condemn the world, "but that through him the world might be saved."

When they no longer consider you a member of the congregation, "Remember the word that I say to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.'"

Cover photo by Al Clayton, Nashville, Tennessee.

Cover design by Fred Hall, member of the Committee of Southern Churchmen.

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KATALLAGETE, Summer 1966

Published by the Committee of Southern Churchmen, Inc. Individuals receiving KATALLAGETE forward a contribution of \$2.00 for four issues to cover the costs of printing and mailing. Correspondence relating to subscriptions and mailings should be sent to the Committee of Southern Churchmen, 1207 Eighteenth Avenue, South, Nashville, Tennessee 37212. Editorial correspondence should be sent to James Y. Holloway, Box 936, Berea College Station, Berea, Kentucky 40403.

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Which Way for Southern Churches: Footwashing or the New Hermeneutic?

WILL D. CAMPBELL

What will the racial situation be among the churches of the South when the Yankees have all gone home? They said they came because we had done so little. We may question the conjunction, but not the compound on either side. They *did* come. And we *had* done so little.

How soon ago it was they came! We had heard the talk of the long, hot summer. Then they came. Several of them we killed. Then the rest went away. At least most of them went away, though none to my knowledge went away because we killed several of them. Most stayed longer because of that.

How soon ago it was the Ivy League doctors—mostly the teaching, preaching doctors, but a few of the doctoring doctors—were here. There were the calls to take them bail or to visit them. Was it Birmingham, Montgomery, Albany, or Jackson; and was it Freedom Ride, Voter Registration, or Sit-in? Anyway, they were here and we were glad, and now they are gone. Sometimes one hears that they are a part of the Clergy Concerned with the War in Viet Nam, a worthy cause, God knows, but how fickle they are, our Yankee brothers.

They came to be our conscience because we let expectant citizens be shot down in the streets and little girls be slaughtered at their prayers. But conscience is not a thing of the moment. It is a thing of generations. It could not be remade in one summer or two.

There was the Mississippi Project, the F.D.P., COFO, baptized in Oxford, Ohio, confirmed somewhere between there and Neshoba County where three at once were buried in the red clay of a government dam.

Surely such an offspring would last for a long time. But it didn't. It is true that a law was passed, and then another; and now a third is proposed after Lurleen showed us what we should have known about the South while Dirksen tells us what we should have known about the North — "any further legislation is clearly unconstitutional on its face." (Southern rednecks are one thing. Northern rentals are another.)

Meanwhile there were more than 20 race-related murders in the South in a one-year period



following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 making that period the bloodiest since the Movement began.

And yet they have all gone away. At least almost all of them. And surely the dream is gone. The dream that the Mississippi Project, the F.D.P. and COFO would arouse that latent goodness alleged to be in all men, South and Federal, and that we would rise up to stay the evil passion of racism is gone. From that we have awakened. The dream of a degree of justice remains, and thank God. That is an important dream. But the dream of reconciliation based on the coming of the Yankees is gone. If one does not believe it, then let him go to a tavern in Tennessee and hear the manager say, following the visit of a thirsty Negro, "Yes, we have to serve them, but we break every glass they drink out of. There is no law against that." That may be justice, but it is not reconciliation. Or let him go into a truck stop with a Negro friend and watch the waitress stroll casually to the juke box. Hear the inserted dime produce the words, sung to well-composed and equally well-played music:

Move them niggers north.

Move them niggers north.

If they don't like our Southern ways,

Move them niggers north.

There is no law against playing the juke box. Not yet. To say nothing about the dangers of having one.

Where is the reconciliation? In fact, where is the justice? Is there really any justice in a hamburger? Or does the juke box negate even the hamburger, for who could hold it down? Anyway, most of them are gone. SNCC—though not really North—remains, but since they recently declared their intention of becoming all black, that dream becomes a spasm. At least for white churchly folk. And the Delta Ministry remains in name, but days after their Poor Peoples' Conference sought to take over the Greenville Air Base, a faction of the Poor People's Conference sought to take over the leased property of the Delta Ministry at gunpoint. Folks don't like such ingrates as that. Especially if the enthusiasm and financial support from back home is on the wane. The Freedmen's Bureau, one of the more promising programs to come South following the Civil War, folded after six years. It did so because the lack of order among the victorious Yankees and the lack of financial support discouraged its advocates to the point of giving up. A very similar thing is happening now, and we may anticipate an early departure of those whom some saw as hostile invaders and others as our last hope. Who then will remain?

We will. We who were born here, who partly created and partly fell heir to what we have come to call "the Race Problem." Negro and white, Christian, Jew, and pagan, we remain. And we will remain. If anyone does.

And what hope is there among *us*? There are indigenous Negro groups and inter-racial organizations to which we can still look for help. Help, but not Messiah. SNCC, even with its all-black policy, may be at once judgment and long-range hope. Those individuals now involved, however, may see the promised land of true reconciliation (which they verbally reject but still yearn to see) only from an isolated mountain, standing then alone, with neither leader nor follower. And SCLC, though wrought with so many internal problems that the sophisticated liberal sees little hope, may yet be the tailor for the sack cloth and ashes which we continue to shun, but which remains the only acceptable garment for an audience with the Almighty.

But what hope is there among us, within us, the Church? If by that one means the institution this observer, after forty years within it, does sadly conclude—none. For there is little to indicate that we are any different today from what we were in 1954, in 1964, in 1965. While we see the all-black policy of SNCC as the hardened heart which God uses as his judgment upon a segment, we the churches may be the hardened heart which He uses as judgment upon us all.

If we are to be honest, we must admit that at the congregational level the white church in the South has not yet had the slightest involvement in the racial crisis. A few pastors have joined an occasional march. A few more have signed statements. Nearly all of these neither march, sign statements, nor pastor any longer, for their flocks not only did not follow them to street and parchment, but did not tolerate the resulting controversy of their shepherds' strange behavior. But if the drought of direct action has been acute during the past few years, the drought of preaching is chronic. Embarrassed with the "Bible Belt" label the Fundamentalists have given rise to, most of us have shied away from a doctrine of man rooted deeply in the Scripture, which rejects race as a category, and have turned to more sophisticated documentation for such preaching as we have done on the subject. Rejecting such arguments as none of the preachers' business—as they should have done—our congregations have been left to flounder in the mire of religion—that curse of man Christ sought to dispel, but which continues to dominate us in such proportion as to approach anti-Christ.

But let us not speak now of the churches. Let us speak now of churchmen. If we had admitted the nature of institutions from the beginning, we would not now sink into despair over the inadequacies of the institutional church. Nor is it enough to talk now of "para-church." Whatever ways for witness we may find as Christians will be the witness of Church, or it will not be witness at all.

And there are at least two embarrassments which we must overcome. The first is the embarrassment of Biblicism. The second is the embarrassment of the sects. They may well be treated together.

Partly because we rejected Fundamentalism as adolescents (and the seminaries gave us higher criticism to sustain the rejection), and partly because we saw the evils of institutionalized Biblical literalism, we turned away from seeking answers in the Scriptures. While the religious racists have indoctrinated the region with Biblical distortions, we have retreated into the sophistication of the New Hermeneutic. No one will deny that a hook and ladder is better equipment for fighting a fire than a garden hose. But the house is on fire now. There is not time to send to Detroit for a hook and ladder. There is not time to await scholarly research. Unless, of course, we will enjoy the Stoic satisfaction of knowing how the fire might have been put out long after the embers are dead.

The point to be made is a simple one. Everything else has failed. There has not been reconciliation. There has been social change. But do you remember how we used to scoff at the "moderates" when they said, "What they are doing will set race relations back fifty years"? We should still be dubious of this and all other clichés. But it is becoming more and more obvious that the social changes have not seen a corresponding change in the basic human relationships of one man to another—Negro to white and white to Negro. Such interpersonal relationships are not considered important by those who see changing the structures as our greatest hope. But structures are persons, groups of persons, who lean in the same direction at a given point in history, and Presidents, Senators, and Supreme Court Justices read the morning paper to learn the direction in which their followers are leaning.

And although it is denied by both groups, white liberals are cooling off at a rapid pace, and a considerable element of the civil rights movement is moving pell-mell into the yawning lap of Black Nationalism. Thousands who referred to the justice, rightness, and necessity of the Selma March are now referring to the Mississippi March as a civil rights williwaw without meaning or purpose.

Somehow I fail to see the difference if either had to do with injustice, for there was as much of that on the road from Memphis to Jackson in 1966 as there was from Selma to Montgomery in 1965.

And the religious commissions on race are roughly back where we were four years ago—passing resolutions deploring this or that, and urging individual church members to wire the President.

Great God Almighty!

What does, what could, what will *ever* the President of the United States have to do with the witness of the Church? And when will we quit seeing him as our spiritual head?

But why are we back where we were after three exciting years of a more or less active participation in The Movement? The answer again is simple. More and more white folks are seeing that The Movement is not about coffee and hamburgers, or black and white together, but a more equitable distribution of the goods and opportunities whites have by being white. And more and more Movement leaders don't want whites involved because they don't, they can't trust them. One year ago all the national church groups were issuing nationwide appeals for marchers to go to Selma. There were no such appeals for participation in the Mississippi marches. There were some tactical reasons offered, but the real, the big reason was that those appeals of a year ago resulted in too many white marchers. (If there is one prophetic role the national church commissions and Departments of Christian Social Relations can play now, it is to tell white Christians the truth however painful and unpopular it might be). Anyone who was surprised with the Black Power development must never have read the Bible or history, for the development began when the first boat departed the shores of Africa.

But enough of saying things are worse. Actually things are not worse for everyone. We are not saying that at all. Things are better for a fairly large number of Negroes. Things are better for a fairly large number of whites, for *they* are better. The recent civil rights legislation and the Economic Opportunity programs have had some effect within the culture. Not much, but some.

When we speak of things being worse, we are talking of institutionalized Christianity being worse. It is worse because it is not better. It is not better because it remained where it was twenty, ten, two years ago, protective of its own, self-loving and largely self-worshipping, while the world whirled by.

So. Where do we turn? One thing that all other institutions have learned from the civil rights

movement is that their own structures which they assumed to be sacred were not sacred after all. Restaurant owners learned that there was nothing sacred about property rights as they had thought. School boards are learning that there is nothing sacred about neighborhood schools as they have thought. ("If you can go to the moon, you can bus our children across town.") Only the churches continue to contend that their structures are sacred. As long as they are sacred, they will be stagnant and sterile. For a sacred tool is one not to be used but to be fondled and polished. Howard Moody says the church is an instrument of God literally to be used up on His service, a service to those not even within it. There is little evidence of its going out of business through such usefulness.

But there has been a segment of the Church whose idols have been less secure than main-line, white Protestantism. These have been what we call the fringe sects. And what do they do that we don't? Well, they wash one another's feet, they shout, they sing jazzed up songs to guitar music, they handle snakes. They do all sorts of things. But *what* they do is not so important for our concern as the zeal with which they do it. They do it with zeal because they really believe it. Because they really believe in what they do, the tools they employ are not so important for them. A silver basin is fine for washing feet, but a galvanized foot tub is just as good. A brick, air-conditioned building is all right for handling snakes, but a brush arbor is just as good. Acoustical tile would be dandy for shouting, but an unpainted frame ceiling is just as good.

But aside from those things they do, a case can be made that they were more faithful in the racial crisis all along than the established church.

* * * * *

Consider Horace Germany. Horace, a white man, had lived all his life in rural Neshoba County, Mississippi. He made his living farming. He was also a Church of God preacher. Nearly ten years ago I saw him for the first time. He was lying on his side, his back purple and sore from a beating he had just received from his neighbors. He told me this story only when I produced a letter of introduction written by a Church of God preacher in another state.

He had wanted to build a school for Church of God young people who wanted to preach. He would teach them tent making, of whatever variety they chose. They would study the Bible, and they would do it without regard to race, for he said he believed that the gospel was a "universal gospel to all men, as given by Christ in the Great Commission. All men are made one in Jesus Christ."

To reach him I had traveled down a country dirt road which came very near the scene where some years later three civil rights workers were to be murdered and buried. About three miles down that recently graded, winding and sloping dirt road, hardly wide enough for two cars to pass, there was an open gate at the top of the slope. Through the wooded area there was a clearing and a large pond, the kind the U.S. Department of Agriculture builds for farmers to water cattle. Beside the pond was a long shed with lumber stacked almost to the tin roof. Outside the shed was more lumber and concrete blocks, some with black mildew and spider webs, indicating that this building material had been gradually accumulated over an extended period of time. In the center of the clearing there was the foundation and part of the first story of a large building. This was the beginning of the school.

And it was the beginning of his troubles. A week earlier a large crowd had gathered at one of the main-line churches in the area. Some two hundred could be accommodated inside, and another estimated five hundred formed a sea of solemn faces on the dry, dusty lawn and pressed as closely as possible to open doors and windows in order not to miss the important proceedings inside.

There were the customary prayers which must precede any event in church, but a minimum of preliminaries. They were there to discuss the school going up down the road. A resolution was presented and discussed, then adopted with a voice vote consisting of shouts — shouts not generally heard in the services of that denomination. The resolution asserted that the school was seeking to destroy harmony between the white and colored races of the area. "The college is purportedly a Christian educational institution," the resolution stated, but, "we are convinced that the purpose of this college is to promote, foster, and encourage violence and to disrupt the good will between the races."

Following the meeting at the church a committee of two hundred waited upon Brother Germany and delivered this message: "Preacher, this is it! We mean, this is it! You get your family and them imported niggers (he already had several students) away from here within forty-eight hours, or we will not be responsible for what happens." Horace reported wryly that "Liquor and tobacco smelled strongly, and some of them talked rough."

Brother Germany announced that construction of the school would continue.

He gave me a copy of a newsletter which they mailed regularly to friends and supporters.

On Friday, August 26, Pres. Germany, Vice Pres. Burns, and three of our brethren drove into Union where we had bought part of a school building. They were loading material onto the truck when a mob of five or six carloads came, drove the Colored brethren away at the threat of their lives, and set into beating Bro. Germany in a most unmerciful manner with blackjacks, fists, clubs, and while he was on the ground they would kick him. It was one of the most outrageous things that have happened since the establishment of any form of law and order in the United States, especially in connection with the activity of the church. At this writing Bro. Germany is still in the hospital.

He talked sadly of his shattered dream. I asked him what he planned to do. He said that he wasn't afraid. "Jesus died for me, and I will die for Him. I could finish the school all right. People from all over the country have said they would bring their trailers and tents and stand guard until the school is finished. But all I would prove is that I am not afraid. I could build the buildings, but it wouldn't be a school. There would be no students. A school is not a school without students."

"And what will you do with what you have built?"

He turned slowly away and gazed steadily at the wall. A plaster of paris plaque, looking at once like those won at county fair carnivals and the kind made by children at vacation Bible schools, hung on the wall with the inscription: "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy path."

"Yesterday morning one of the biggest bootleggers in the county sent word that he wanted to buy the property. I know what he wants with it.

He wants to make a dance hall out of my school and sell whiskey."

"And will you sell it to him?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I'm going to sell it to him. I told these people that if they won't let God do His work in this county, the Devil will sure move in and do his. There's a lot more to this race problem than just segregation."

And how right he was. Maybe those who killed Mickey and James and Andy in Neshoba County that night got the courage to do it in a bottle from what began as the Bay Ridge Christian College.

There were numerous others from the sects who have been both prophetic and courageous in the racial crisis. There was James Willis Vaughn, a tall, raw-boned preacher from one of the most rigidly fundamentalistic sects, who preached a revival at Bethlehem Temple in Jackson, and because the host under whose roof he slept was a Negro, he was fined five-hundred dollars, and he and his wife spent sixty days in jail.

But the point for us is not who they were and what they did, but what we can learn from them.

We are not suggesting that we all turn to handling copperheads and washing one another's feet—though if Aubrey Norvel would wash James Meredith's feet, and Meredith would let him do it, I would be for setting him free.

The real point is that the idols of the sects do not seem so secure as those of the established church. When the Yankees have all gone home here may be the hope for renewal if we in the Establishment can learn to . . .

Think sect!

Deceptive Words

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.' Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Ba'al, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord." (Jeremiah 7:1-4, 8-10)

JAMES Y. HOLLOWAY

Jeremiah warned the people of God about trusting in the "deceptive words" that a religious institution ought to be worshipped for the deliverance it promises in its own strength. Yet trust in just such deceptive words is characteristic of what is happening in and to churches today. We trust in the "deceptive words" that churches are the ground for their own existence; that the churches' first duty is to themselves; that church structures may become disorganized and irrelevant but never perverted; that churches authenticate their own existence, justify their own activities and sanctify the activities of their members. By churches we are talking not only about buildings, and people coming together once or twice a week (except June-August) for sundry matters which may or may not include worship and thanksgiving; we mean the institutionalized temples whose tentacles of boards and agencies and bureaus have grown into ends in themselves, into gods to be served by parson and layman alike and which, on occasion, demand human sacrifice from those who publically express doubts of their divinity. We are, in other words, talking about what Jeremiah meant by the deception of "the temple,"—institutions which equate their existence with the life of God, institutions which claim the authority to proclaim in their own strength, "we are delivered . . ."

* * * * *

What are the consequences of our trust in these "deceptive words"? Almost daily the office of the Committee of Southern Churchmen is called upon by preachers who are being pressured out of their ministry, preachers who feel they are no longer able to say, do, and be what seems to be expected of them by those who bear a large share

of responsibility for supporting their efforts to proclaim the Gospel. Beyond trying to get them a "job," one frankly does not know what to "do," and still less, what to "say." But whatever needs to be said must be said about us all, for we have all trusted the deceptive words.

The haplessness of the churches in what the world refers to as "social issues" is the most evident expression of trust in the deceptive words—words which in fact and in deed contradict the Source of life in the Church. The failure of the churches on the "race" question springs from the same misplaced trust as the sin of the churches on matters of politics, war, poverty, hunger and misery, and is warp and woof of the idolatry of the churches' attempt to sanctify their agencies, buildings, and business enterprises. Our willingness to grant that in the Body of Christ there is such a thing as "race" springs from the same misplaced trust as our eagerness to equate God with a specific social or political nostrum rather than identifying God with all men in the sense of Immanuel, God-with-us; and these, in turn, are warp and woof of the human sacrifice we exact from our ministers, seminary and college teachers, laymen and youth because they refuse to trust the "deceptive words: 'this is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'"

The victims of the churches' trust in deceptive words about "the Church and race" are more numerous, perhaps, than even the most cynical observer might suspect. Often the victim simply "leaves the ministry" rather than subject his friends and his family to the agony of a public airing of what he knows in his heart is the case—"they have their churches, we have ours; why

should we 'go out after them' when they are perfectly content with *their* own churches and the way they do things in them; after all, a church is for worship, not for socializing and politiking Deceptive words! And what does a man do with and say about the time and the talents he has invested in years—even decades—in the ministry when even the smallest of multitudes will hear him no longer? What shall he do with himself and with others when he has made his last "talk" to the liberal-minded group, and writes his last "article" on "the Church and race"? What does he do with and say about all this to his family, his friends, his God? Of course, there is the Poverty Program, and VISTA, and Human Rights Commissions, and institutional and military chaplaincies, and the staff of the Justice Department, and insurance; possibly even a graduate degree and a teaching career somewhere in some discipline (except "religion," where there is scarcely a seller's market); or there are "education" courses at the state university, accreditation, and the public school system What else can one say to them?

What is equally if not more depressing—and undoubtedly more numerous—are the victims of those temple autocrats who trust in the "deceptive words" that the churches and their agencies are self-authenticating and self-justifying. Here, the "race" issue, or "Birchism," or even religious "orthodoxy" seldom if ever is at stake, for a self-justifying entity seldom allows such either/or issues to come to the surface. They are "dealt with in committee." Instead, the churches and their agencies authenticate themselves as a sort of special preserve of the good things and services and comforts and conveniences of this life that go to "them that are called" into the service of the church, agency, bureau. More parsons than we dare think—young and otherwise—pack their grips and leave Church and ministry heartsick and physically nauseated at the sanctimonious, self-righteous material aggrandizement by agency and individual that is part and parcel of the cult of trusting in the deceptive words that churches live for themselves instead of their Lord. One hears of such incidents of aggrandizement and raw ambition and is reminded of those foes Paul faced in the congregation at Corinth who insisted that the resurrection age was already at hand, thus liberating the true believer to all things material, sensual, and what have you. Or, one sees a paraphrase of the attitude of a churchman of another era, "the Lord has given us the church offices, let us enjoy them!"

What do these victims of the autocrats of deceptive words do and say about the time and talent

invested in his years—even decades—in the ministry? What shall he now do with himself and with others, those who "quit," and who have made no "talks" about their experiences to the liberal-minded organizations, and written no "articles" for the prophetic journals? What shall he do with and say about all this to his family, his friends, his God, these who could no longer turn their heads away from crass and overt perversions of the mission of the Church?

And what does the layman, who listens in vain for a Word other than what he hears on TV and reads in the newspaper? What does the young person who sees not the pragmatism and wholesomeness but the chicanery and duplicity of the secular city celebrated in microcosm in the Household which offers itself as the Body of that Man whose "purpose in dying for all was that men, while still in life, should cease to live for themselves, and should live for him who for their sake died and was raised to life." And most important of all, what do those who "labor and are heavy laden," the ones for and in whose Body are promised "rest"? In God's name, what do we all when the prophet's warning that we trust in deceptive words "to no avail" is sealed in the blood and resurrection of Christ?

Paul's answer appears simplistic, naive, unrealistic, but here it is: "It is not ourselves that we proclaim; we proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake. For the same God who said, 'Out of darkness let light shine,' has caused his light to shine within us, to give the light of revelation—the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 4:5-6). The deceptive word is that we proclaim ourselves, we live for ourselves, we trust in ourselves. But all this is to "no avail," if Jeremiah and Paul are true in their witness to the Word that defines "deceptive words"; the "Light" that "we proclaim" is not there and does not shine because of our achievements and our trust in ourselves, but because God "has caused his light to shine within us."

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Patently, the Church is an institution whose structures, groupings, interests and values can (and ought) to be studied by those skilled in and enthusiastic about such analyses. Paul says as much: "we are no better than pots of earthenware to contain this treasure." Hence, the Church has no immunity from all the temptations which beset the finite and the sinful, and it is occasionally pleasant and assuring to have the experts document this for us in their own idiom. But the

point is that when we of the Church deny or overlook the earthenware quality of the Church, when we confuse or even equate pots of earthenware with the treasure the pots have been commissioned to carry—not possess, only carry!—we trust in deceptive words, and to no avail! We proclaim ourselves, not Christ Jesus as Lord, but to no avail! We live for ourselves and our temples of deceptive words and not for the poor, the prisoner, the blind, the frightened, the desperate, the racist, the autocrat, the harlot, the haughty, the prideful—those, in a word, to whom Christ came, for whom he died and was raised to life. Patently again, whatever institutional reordering that may be demanded by trusting in deceptive words will not spring from sociological analyses and projections, but from a renewal, a repentance, a right-wising that takes place within the fellowship of those individuals who proclaim "Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake." Nowhere in the New Testament is there a guarantee that the churches will not on occasion have to abandon, or even reject, the institutional temples which become the focus of the temptation to trust in deceptive words, and thereby deny Christ Jesus as Lord. Jesus' own cleansing of the temple was not done once and for all time. And just this is Paul's case about the task and mission of the Church, and the Source of the renewal of that task and mission—namely, not we, but God, renews: "we are not better than pots of earthenware to contain this treasure, and this proves that such transcendent power does not come from us, but is God's alone." (II Corinthians 4:7).

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Something is going on in the midst of us, but we cannot yet discern too clearly the significance

or the direction. The temples trusting deceptive words are being cleansed, but now as then, by Christ Jesus. We may be entering (or more accurately, returning to) an era in which salaried workers will decrease, and perhaps perform purely technical functions; in which certain bureaucracies and organizations of the churches will become increasingly integrated into the welfare activities of society; in which new congregations arise which take no thought of who they are by "worldly standards," or how large their number, or even pay much attention to where they gather to worship and praise God, only that they do so Scripturally, and in word and deed and therefore in all of the other hours and days and weeks when they are in the field.

What if the offices and bureaus and agencies and services—the structures and institutions—of the Body of Christ became the "pots of earthenware" containing this "treasure" of witness of Christ Jesus as Lord? What if the "treasure" became the center of our trust and proclamation to such an extent that successful temples were measured by how effectively they went out of business to make way for new structures and institutions? What if it is even true that where only two or three are gathered together, in a basement, or in a living room, or a shack, or a tenement, or brush arbor, or a dormitory—but gathered together, nevertheless, in His Name—He is in the midst of them?

Why not? "We are no better than pots of earthenware to contain this treasure, and this proves that such transcendent power does not come from us, but is God's alone."

Events and Pseudo-Events

Letter to a Southern Churchman

THOMAS MERTON

I have publically stated that I would no longer comment on current events. People ask why. There are many reasons, and I might as well say at once that they are reasons which may possibly be valid for me only, not for others. In any case I did not make this decision for anyone but myself.

First of all, I mistrust an obsession with declarations and pronouncements. While silence can constitute guilt and complicity, once one has taken a stand he is not necessarily obliged to come out with a new answer and a new solution to insoluble problems every third day.

After all, was it not Bonhoeffer himself who said it was an "Anglo-Saxon failing" to imagine that the Church was supposed to have a ready answer for every social problem?

When one has too many answers, and when one joins a chorus of others chanting the same slogans, there is, it seems to me, a danger that one is trying to evade the loneliness of a conscience that realizes itself to be in an inescapably evil situation. We are all under judgment. None of us is free from contamination. Our choice is not that of being pure and whole at the mere cost of formulating a just and honest opinion. Mere commitment to a decent program of action does not lift the curse. Our real choice is between being like Job, who *knew* he was stricken, and Job's friends who did not know that they were stricken too—though less obviously than he. (So they had answers!)

If we *know* that we are all under judgment, we will cease to make the obvious wickedness of "the others" a fulcrum for our supposed righteousness to exert itself upon the world. On the contrary, we will be willing to admit that we are "right-wised" not by condemning others according

to our law or ethical ideal, but by seeing that the real sinner whom we find abominable and frightening (because he threatens our very life) still has in himself the ground for God's love, the same ground that is in our own sinful and deluded hearts.

To justify ourselves is to justify our sin and to call God a liar.

Second, there is the nature of my own vocation to the monastic, solitary, contemplative life — the vocation of Job! Of course this monastic life does not necessarily imply a total refusal to have anything to do with the world. Such a refusal would, in any case, be illusory. It would deceive no one but the monk himself. It is not possible for anyone, however isolated from the world, to say "I will no longer concern myself with the affairs of the world." We cannot help being implicated. We can be guilty even by default. But the monastic and contemplative life does certainly imply a very special perspective, a viewpoint which others do not share, the viewpoint of one who is not directly engaged in the struggles and controversies of the world. Now it seems to me that if a monk is permitted to be detached from these struggles over particular interests, it is only in order that he may give more thought to the interests of all, to the whole question of the reconciliation of all men with one another in Christ. One is permitted, it seems to me, to stand back from parochial and partisan concerns, if one can thereby hope to get a better view of the whole problem and mystery of man.

A contemplative will, then, concern himself with the same problems as other people, but he will try to get to the spiritual and metaphysical

roots of these problems — not by analysis but by simplicity. This of course is no easy task, and I cannot claim that I have discovered anything worth saying. Yet since I have been asked to say something, I will at least hazard a few conjectures. Take them for what they may be worth: they are subjective, they are provisional, they are mere intuitions, they will certainly need to be completed by the thinking of others. If they suggest a few useful perspectives to others, then I am satisfied.

I am more and more impressed by the fact that it is largely futile to get up and make statements about current problems. At the same time, I know that silent acquiescence in evil is also out of the question. I know too that there are times when protest is inescapable, even when it seems as useless as beating your head up against a brick wall. At the same time, when protest simply becomes an act of desperation, it loses its power to communicate anything to anyone who does not share the same feelings of despair.

There is of course no need to comment on the uselessness of false optimism, or to waste any attentions on the sunlit absurdities of those who consistently refuse to face reality. One cannot be a Christian today without having a deeply afflicted conscience. I say it again: — we are all under judgment. And it seems to me that our gestures of repentance, though they may be individually sincere, are collectively hollow and even meaningless. Why?

This is the question that plagues me.

The reason seems to be, to some extent, a deep failure of communication.

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There is a great deal of talk today about the Church and the world, about secular Christianity, religionless religion and so on. It seems to me that religionless religion is certainly a result of this failure of communication. (Here I am distinguishing Bonhoeffer's disciples from Bonhoeffer himself.) Seeing that traditional and biblical language simply does not ring any bells in the minds of modern men, the apostles of religionless religion have discarded that language and decided thereby to avoid the problem of communication altogether. Having done so, however, they seem to have also got rid of any recognizable Christian message. To reconcile man with man and not with God is to reconcile no one at all. It is the old problem of the social Gospel over again. When the life expectancy of the average secular ideology today is about five years (barring a few notable exceptions that have

become orthodoxies, like Marxism and Freudianism) it seems rather irresponsible to identify the Gospel with one or the other of them.

Assuming then that the Church has something to communicate to the world that the world does not already know, what does this imply? First of all, we must try to clarify the relation of the Church to the world. It seems to me false simply to say that the Church and the world should be considered as perfectly identified, as indistinguishable, and leave it at that. After all, there is still I John 2:15-16 to be considered.

This judgment of the world as by definition *closed in upon itself* and therefore *closed to any revelation that demands to break through its defensive shell* is surely one of the key ideas of the New Testament. By the Incarnation and Cross Christ does in fact *break through* the defensive shell not only of sin and passionate attachment, but of all ethical and religious systems that strive to make man self-sufficient in his own worldly realm.

The Church and the world are related in a dialectic of identity and non-identity, yes and no, nearness and distance. The Church is Christ present in the world to reconcile the world to Himself. The world is therefore not purely and simply Christ. There is a question of acceptance or refusal. If we are dealing with the self-revelation of a cosmic Christ who is gradually becoming visible in man, simply *as man*, the decision for this Christ becomes a kind of poetic commitment to pantheistic vitalism or something of the sort, not an acceptance of the Gospel in the obedience of faith. In other words "Christ" is then only a symbol for the world as a closed-system. Further, if Christ is simply manifesting himself in man's history, whether we do anything about it or not, then there is no need either of dialogue or of dialectic between the Church and the world. By this dialectic of challenge, faith and love, word and response, we break out of the closed system. If we forsake this forward movement toward eschatological fulfillment, then we plunge into the interminable circling of the world upon itself. No amount of religious cliches can make this encapsulation a true "freedom."

It seems to me that one of the great obligations of the Christian is to keep the eyes of his faith clear of such confusions. And the monk above all has to keep free from this circling-in-desperation, this closed system, which is essentially pagan and which implies a hidden servitude to the elements and the powers of the air in St. Paul's sense (Galatians 4:3, 9). (I readily admit, with Luther,

that in practice the monk who makes monasticism a "law" automatically fails in his primal obligation.)

Though there are certainly more ways than one of preserving the freedom of the sons of God, the way to which I was called and which I have chosen is that of the monastic life.

Paul's view of the "elements" and the "powers of the air" was couched in the language of the cosmology of his day. Translated into the language of our own time, I would say these mysterious realities are to be sought where we least expect them, not in what is most remote and mysterious, but in what is most familiar, what is near at hand, what is at our elbow all day long—what speaks or sings in our ear, and practically does our thinking for us. The "powers" and "elements" are precisely what stand between the world and Christ. It is they who stand in the way of reconciliation. It is they who, by influencing all our thinking and behaviour in so many unsuspected ways, dispose us to decide for the world as *against* Christ, thus making reconciliation impossible.

Clearly, the "powers" and "elements" which in Paul's day dominated men's minds through pagan religion or through religious legalism, today dominate us in the confusion and the ambiguity of the Babel of tongues that we call mass-society. Certainly I do not condemn everything in the mass-media. But how does one stop to separate the truth from the half-truth, the event from the pseudo-event, reality from the manufactured image? It is in this confusion of images and myths, superstitions and ideologies that the "powers of the air" govern our thinking—even our thinking about religion! Where there is no critical perspective, no detached observation, no time, to ask the pertinent questions, how can one avoid being deluded and confused?

Someone has to try to keep his head clear of static and preserve the interior solitude and silence that are essential for independent thought.

A monk loses his reason for existing if he simply submits to all the routines that govern the thinking of everybody else. He loses his reason for existing if he simply substitutes other routines of his own! He is obliged by his vocation to have his *own mind* if not to speak it. He has got to be a free man.

What did the radio say this evening? I don't know.

What was on TV? I have watched TV twice in my life. I am frankly not terribly interested in TV anyway. Certainly I do not pretend that by simply refusing to keep up with the latest news I am therefore unaffected by what goes on, or *free* of it all.

Certainly events happen and they affect me as they do other people. It is important for me to know about them too: but I refrain from trying to know them in their fresh condition as "news." When they reach me they have become slightly stale. I eat the same tragedies as others, but in the form of tasteless crusts. The news reaches me in the long run through books and magazines, and no longer as a stimulant. Living without news is like living without cigarettes (another peculiarity of the monastic life). The need for this habitual indulgence quickly disappears. So, when you hear news without the "need" to hear it, it treats you differently. And you treat it differently too.

In this perspective you are perhaps able to distinguish the real happening from the pseudo-event. Nine tenths of the news, as printed in the papers, is pseudo-news, manufactured event. Some days ten tenths. The ritual morning trance, in which one scans columns of newsprint, creates a peculiar form of generalized pseudo-attention to a pseudo-reality. This experience is taken *seriously*. It is one's daily immersion in "reality." One's orientation to the rest of the world. One's way of reassuring himself that he has not fallen behind. That he is still there. That he still counts!

My own experience has been that renunciation of this self-hypnosis, of this participation in the unquiet universal trance, is no sacrifice of reality at all. To "fall behind" in this sense is to get out of the big cloud of dust that everybody is kicking up, to breathe, and to see a little more clearly.

When you get a clearer picture you can understand why so many want to stand in the dust cloud, where there is comfort in confusion.

The things that actually happen are sometimes incredibly horrible.

The fog of semi-rational verbiage with which the events are surrounded is also terrible, but in a different way.

And then, beside the few real horrors, there are the countless pseudo-events, the come-on's, the releases, the statements, the surmises, the slanders, the quarrels, the insults and the interminable self-advertising of the image-makers.

We believe that the "news" has a strange metaphysical status outside us: it "happens" by itself. Actually, it is something we fabricate. Those who are poor artisans make only pseudo-events. These are the tired politicians and businessmen, the educators, writers, intellectuals and tiredest of all, the Churchmen.

Others are better at it: they know how to make real bad news!

Reading the Vulgate I run across the Latin word *simulacrum* which has implications of a mask-like deceptiveness, of intellectual cheating, of an ideological shell-game. The word *simulacrum*, it seems to me, presents itself as a very suggestive one to describe an advertisement, or an over-inflated political presence, or that face on the TV screen. The word shimmers, grins, cajoles. It is a fine word for something monumentally phony. It occurs for instance in the last line of the First Epistle of John. But there it is usually translated as "idols" . . . "Little children, watch out for the *simulacra*!"—watch out for the national, the regional, the institutional images!

Does it not occur to us that if, in fact, we live in a society which is par excellence that of the *simulacrum*, we are the champion idolators of all history? No, it does not occur to us, because for us an idol is nothing more than a harmless Greek statue, complete with a figleaf, in the corner of the museum. We have given up worrying about idols—as well as devils. And we are living in the age of science. How could we, the most emancipated of men, be guilty of superstition? Could science itself be our number one superstition?

You see where my rambling has brought me. To this: we are under judgment. And what for? For the primal sin. We are idolators. We make *simulacra* and we hypnotize ourselves with our skill in creating these mental movies that do not appear to be idols because they are so alive! Because we are idolators, because we have "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the semblance of the likeness of mortal man, of birds, of quadrupeds, of reptiles . . .," we fulfill all the other requirements of those who are under God's wrath, as catalogued by Paul in Romans 1:24-32.

Our idols are by no means dumb and powerless. The sardonic diatribes of the prophets against images of wood and stone do not apply to our images that live, and speak, and smile, and dance, and allure us, and lead us off to kill. Not only are we idolators, but we are likely to carry out point by point the harlotries of the Apocalypse. And if we do, we will do so innocently, decently, with clean hands, for the blood is always shed somewhere else! The smoke of the victim is always justified by some clean sociological explanation, and of course it is not superstition, because we are by definition the most enlightened people that ever happened.

The things that we do, the things that make our news, the things that are contemporary, are abominations of superstition, of idolatry, proceeding from minds that are full of myths, distortions,

half-truths, prejudices, evasions, illusions, lies: in a word—*simulacra*. Ideas and conceptions that look good but aren't. Ideals that claim to be humane and prove themselves, in their effects, to be callous, cruel, cynical, sometimes even criminal.

We have no trouble at all detecting all this in the ideologies of *other* nations, *other* social groups. That is at least something! But it is not enough. We cannot begin to face our real problems until we admit that these evils are universal. We see them in others because they are in ourselves. Until we admit that we are subject to the same risks and the same follies, the same evils and the same fanaticisms, only in different forms, under different appearances (*simulacra*) we will continue to propose solutions that make our problems insoluble. We will continue to be deadlocked with adversaries who happen to be our own mirror image.

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My thesis is now clear: in my opinion the root of our trouble is that our habits of thought and the drives that proceed from them are basically idolatrous and mythical. We are all the more inclined to idolatry because we imagine that we are of all generations the most enlightened, the most objective, the most scientific, the most progressive and the most humane. This, in fact, is an "image" of ourselves—an image which is false and is also the object of a cult. We worship ourselves in this image. The nature of our acts is determined in large measure by the demands of our worship. Because we have an image (*simulacrum*) of ourselves as fair, objective, practical and humane, we actually make it more difficult for ourselves to be what we think we are. Since our "objectivity" for instance is in fact an image of ourselves as "objective," we soon take our objectivity for granted, and instead of checking the facts, we simply manipulate the facts to fit one pious conviction. In other words, instead of taking care to examine the realities of our political or social problems, we simply bring out the idols in solemn procession. "We are the ones who are right, *they* are the ones who are wrong. We are the good guys, *they* are the bad guys. We are honest, *they* are crooks." In this confrontation of images, "objectivity" ceases to be a consistent attention to fact and becomes a devout and blind fidelity to myth. If the adversary is by definition wicked, then objectivity consists simply in refusing to believe that he can possibly be honest in any circumstances whatever. If facts seem to conflict with images, then we feel that we are being tempted by the devil, and we determine that we will be all the more blindly loyal to our images. To debate with the devil would be to yield! Thus in support of realism and objectivity we simply determine beforehand that we will be swayed by

no fact whatever that does not accord perfectly with our own preconceived judgment. Objectivity becomes simple dogmatism.

As I say, we can see this mechanism at work in the Communists. We cannot see it in ourselves. True, of course, our dogmatism is not as blatant, as rigid, as bureaucratically dense, as monolithic. It is none the less real. That is to say, it is based on *refusals* that are just as categorical and just as absolute.

These refusals are made necessary by a primary commitment to a false image which is the object of superstitious worship. The fact that the image is not made of stone or metal, but of ideas, slogans, and pseudo-events only makes it all the more dangerous.

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A more complex syndrome is our mythical thinking. I shall call it "justification by snake handling."

Let me say at once that I am not trying to ridicule the good, simple people in the Tennessee mountains or in North Carolina who every once in a while gather in their little churches, work themselves up into a state of exaltation and then pass around a live rattlesnake from hand to hand. There is a kind of rugged starkness about this primitive fundamentalism that calls for a certain respect, and I am reminded that in the novels of Flannery O'Connor due honor was not denied to primitives. The people Flannery O'Connor despised were those whose mental snake-handling was more polite and less risky, more sophisticated and adroit, more complacent and much less honest, based on the invocation not of Mark 16:18, but of something at once more sinister, more modern and more obscure.

I take the mountain people as my starting point because in them the cycle is stark and clinically clear. And they are aware of what they are doing.

The rest of us do it without recognizing the analogy.

I do not say we do it every day. Snake-handling is reserved for moments of crisis, when we feel ourselves and our ideals called into question. It is our reaction to deep stirring of guilt about ourselves and our image. We handle snakes in order to restore the image to a place of perfect security.

In Christian terms, the mental-snake-handling is an attempt to evade judgment when our conscience obscurely tells us that we are under judgment. It represents recourse to a daring and ritual act, a magic gesture that is visible and recognized

by others, which proves to us that we are right, that the image is right, that our rightness cannot be contested, and whoever contests it is a minion of the devil.

Here is the scenario.

First, a drab, uninteresting or over-organized, bored existence. Or at least an obscure feeling that your life is not quite as meaningful as it ought to be. That there is not only something lacking, but probably *everything* lacking. The more obscure and diffuse the feeling, the better. If you are hardly aware of it at all, fine. Most Americans on any day of the week can, if they reflect a little on it, see that they easily meet these qualifications. Even if one has all he needs in material goods, he can still feel as if he lacked *everything*!

Second, you have to connive with a group of other people who feel the same way, at least implicitly. You may perhaps come to an agreement with them in actual discussion together, or you may simply (more often than not) find that you and a lot of other people have all seen the same thing on TV or somewhere and are all reacting to it in the same way. I will not go into bizarre details about snake handling in small fanatical groups of adepts and snake handling on the national level. Let's keep it simple. First you are bored and dissatisfied. Second you find yourself in collusion with others who react as you do to some event.

Implicitly or explicitly you agree on some course of action which is at the same time *symbolic, arbitrary and dangerous*. These three characteristics are essential. There may be others. But at least the act has to be symbolic. If the symbolism is unconscious, so much the better. The act or event has to be arbitrary, irrational, and in a sense provocative. It must not only be more or less unreasonable, it should, if possible, even openly *defy* reason. Indeed it may be totally irrelevant. If at the same time it is an act which defies morality, public or private, this may enhance its value. But that is not essential. It must at least be basically irrational. If it is completely useless and irrelevant, so much the better. And it must be dangerous, if not physically then at least socially or morally. The event brings one face to face with destruction or grave harm, if not danger to life and limb, then a danger to reputation, to one's social acceptability, one's future.

However, while the event may implicitly defy ostracism or hatred on the part of an out-group, it strengthens the bonds of the in-group, those who have agreed to engage in the symbolic and arbitrary activity together. At this point, we recognize characteristic adolescent behavior, but teenagers

have no monopoly on it, except in so far as we are in fact a teen-age society — a society that likes to play "chicken" not with fast cars, but with ballistic missiles.

The symbolic, irrational and perilous event must prove something, at least to those who perform it. The thing it attempts to prove must be some basic value in themselves: that they are *alive*, that they are *real*, that they *count*, or (as in the case of the authentic snake handlers) that they are *the Chosen*. In fact, it is a *substitute for divine judgment*. Instead of waiting around in uncertainty, one forces the issue. One does something drastic and "conclusive."

Naturally, not all who enact such events are necessarily believers. One does not have to believe in God — one merely needs to have an "image"! This mental ritual is a component in our contemporary idolatries.

Finally, and this is the point, those who have come together, who have agreed, who have performed the irrational, quasi-initiatory act, who have "proved themselves" thereby, who have stabilized their common image, *are now in a position to judge others*. By creating this situation of challenge, by constructing this "event," they have proved themselves to be "the ones who are right." They have not done this by thinking or reasoning, nor by discussion, dialogue, investigation: they have done it by ritual and initiatory action in which they enjoyed the sense of self-transcendence, of escape from the monotony and the affront of a meaningless existence. And not that it is a cycle that is all the more easily set in motion when existence is in fact more really drab, when the mentality of the participants is more genuinely desperate, when the inner contradictions they seek to escape are all the more inexorable.

Though by its nature this event is arbitrary, unnecessary, and in some sense fabricated, if it is sufficiently drastic it can become far more than a pseudo-event. It can become an act of genuine horror. It can lead to incalculably tragic consequences. If, in handling the rattlesnake around, somebody gets bitten, it is no longer a pseudo-event. Yet nevertheless, in its origin, the event was artificial, fabricated and indeed uncalled for.

Some examples: on the international level, a paradigm of snake-handling and pseudo-event was the Berlin crisis, turned on and off periodically, for the sake of effect. It reached its paroxysm in Cuba, and shortly after that Khrushchev's snake-handling days were over.

The big fuss about fallout shelters in this country was another episode of the same kind,

and it was our reaction to the Berlin crisis. A purely symbolic and irrational exercise.

The philosophy of escalation, with its mystical degrees and esoteric meanings, is a form of intellectual snake-handling. To "think of the unthinkable" is to display one's prowess in handling a cosmic copperhead without dismay. Since the copperhead is only abstract at the time the feat is not uncomfortable. But in this area myths can suddenly and without warning turn into unpleasant realities. In point of fact, our snake-handling in Southeast Asia is not abstract — but, as I said before, I am not commenting on events.

On another level, we all participate in one way or another in this national or international snake-handling when we get into the act in some more or less dramatic way. A lot of our protests and demonstrations, even when they are perfectly valid and reasonable in themselves, take the form of political snake-handling. This, I submit, robs them of their real value, because it isolates our action and protest in a closed realm of images and idols which mean one thing to us and another to our adversaries. *We no longer communicate. We abandon communication in order to celebrate our own favorite group-myths in a ritual pseudo-event.* "News" is largely made up of this liturgy of pseudo-events and irrelevant witness. Let us realize that "ideals" and "purity of heart" may easily cover a snake-handling approach to political reality.

Everywhere, from extreme right to extreme left, we find people in our society who become "sanctified," set apart, chosen, sealed off in a ritual game of some sort by reason of events enacted in honor of images. They move step by step, taking the nation with them, into realms of commitment and of absurdity, areas where, by virtue of the fact that one has agreed to face some very select irrationality *one is quarantined from the ordinary world of right and wrong.*

The man who has agreed with his peers in the enactment of a symbolic, dangerous and arbitrary event has thereby put himself and them beyond good and evil. They have all entered together into the realm of the gods, and in that realm they find that their action has had amazing consequences: it changes the whole meaning of truth and falsity, it imposes on life an entirely new logic: one must follow on from one irrationality to the next in a demonic consistency dictated by machines.

But here of course, I am speaking of mental snake-handling only at the highest and most mystical echelons of the technological elite. Down on our pedestrian level there is no such mystical security,

no such permanent election. We are not initiated into a whole new kingdom of sacred irresponsibilities. We have to repeat some crude fanatical stunt again and again because it never quite takes. However, we have the privilege of remotely participating in the snake-handling exploits of the high-priests of policy and strategy.

On this liturgy of pseudo-events the survival of the human race—or at least its sanity and dignity—are now made to depend.

Our salvation, on the contrary, cannot be sought in this realm of images and idols, of fabricated events and unclear meanings.

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After all this rambling and conjecturing, it is time to draw a few conclusions. Should the Church turn to the world of modern man and identify with him completely? In all his legitimate aspirations, in all his authentic human hopes and aspirations, obviously it must. If not it betrays him and betrays the Gospel. "In so far as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). But the Church betrays herself and modern man if she simply identifies with his superstitions, his image-making, his political snake-handling and his idolatries of nation, party, class and race.

The Church has an obligation *not* to join in the incantation of political slogans and in the concoction of pseudo-events, *but to cut clear through the deviousness and ambiguity of both slogans and events by her simplicity and her love.*

"To be simple," says Bonhoeffer, "is to fix one's eye solely on the simple truth of God at a time when all concepts are being confused, distorted and turned upside-down. It is to be single-hearted and not a man of two souls *Not fettered by principles but bound by love for God.* The (simple man) has been set free from the problems and conflicts of ethical decision."

It is unfortunately true that the Church has to repent of remaining enclosed in parochial concerns, and turn to the outside world. To turn to the world is to recognize our mission and service to man and man's world. We are not in the world for ourselves, for our own spiritual advantage, but for Christ and for the world. We have a mission to reconcile the world with Christ. How can we do this if we do not "turn to the world"? At the same time, in turning to our fellow man and loving him, we will ourselves be reconciled with Christ. What other point has there ever been in preaching the Gospel? Unfortunately the simple business of "making converts" has sometimes obscured all

deep understanding of what this turning to the world really means as *event*.

The Church is indeed concerned with news: the Good News. The Church is concerned with real events: saving events, the encounter of man and Christ in the reconciliation of man with man. In a sense, there is no other kind of event that matters and there is no other news that matters. To abandon this news, and become implicated in the manufacturing of pseudo-events in order to create an "image" that will then attract converts This is an affront to the world and to Christ. Can it be entirely avoided? I do not know, but one thing must be said about it now: *it has ceased to have any meaning whatever to modern man.*

If *image* means *idol*—and it does—then the Church too can unfortunately make an idol of itself, or identify itself too closely with other idols: nation, region, race, political theory.

Obviously the Church is present in history and is responsible to man in his historical predicament. But let us not take too superficial and too distorted a view of history. Our over-sensitive awareness of ourselves as responsible for "making history" is a grotesque illusion, and it leads us into the morass of pseudo-events. Those who are obsessed with "making history" are responsible for the banality of the bad news which comes more and more to constitute our "history." The Church that takes all this too literally and too seriously needs to go back and read the New Testament, not omitting the book of *Revelation*.

The genuine saving event, the encounter of man with Christ in his encounter of love and reconciliation with his fellow man, is generally *not newsworthy*. Not because there is an ingrained malice in journalists but because such events are not sufficiently visible. In trying to make them newsworthy, or visible, in trying to put them on TV, we often make them altogether incredible—or else reduce them to the common level of banality at which they can no longer be distinguished from pseudo-events.

Finally, no matter how you doctor it, *the pseudo-event cannot be turned into a saving and reconciling event*. Whether it is a display of political snake-handling, or some other demonstration of man's intent to justify his existence by seeing himself in the morning paper, no matter how noble and how Christian the intention may be, no man is ever going to come to the truth through pseudo-events, or be reconciled with his fellow-man as a result of pseudo-events. On the contrary, by its very nature the pseudo-event

arouses anxiety, suspicion, fear of deception, and a full awareness of the inherent weakness of the position which it is supposed to justify.

The great question then is how do we communicate with the modern world? If in fact communication has been reduced to pseudo-communication, to the celebration of pseudo-events and of incompatible myth-systems, how are we to avoid falling into this predicament? How are we to avoid the common obsession with pseudo-events in order to construct what seems to us to be a credible idol?

It is a nasty question, but it needs to be considered, for in it is contained the mystery of the evil of our time.

I do not have an answer to the question, but I suspect the root of it is this: if we love our own ideology and our own opinion instead of loving our brother, we will seek only to glorify our ideas

and our institutions and by that fact we will make real communication impossible.

I think Bonhoeffer was absolutely right when he said our real task is to bear in ourselves the fury of the world against Christ in order to reconcile the world with Christ—(a statement that does not accord with the superficial worldliness of some of Bonhoeffer's disciples). But let us take care that the fury of the world is not merely directed against our own ethical or political ideals, worse still our *image* of ourselves incarnated in our particular mode of symbolic protest.

When I began this letter I did not promise an answer, I only promised a question. Our own lifetime will not suffice to bring us close to the answer. But the root of the answer is the love of Christ and the ground is the sinful heart of sinful man as he really is—as we really are, you, and I, and our disconcerting neighbor.

Two Stories

The two stories that follow revolve about what social scientists, newspapers, political journals, politicians, bureaucrats, welfare workers, and certain kinds of religionists refer to as "the pressing contemporary domestic social issue": the "war" on "poverty." More accurately, these two stories record two responses to the wretched fact that physical poverty does exist in the body politic of affluent and democratic America. It exists in the fact that old men and young women, boys in their teens and girl babies suffer hunger and inadequate diets, disease and physical miseries. The existence of this poverty denies them the possibility to pursue in plenteous and bountiful orders of creation the happiness which they are endowed by their very existence. For the very elementary fact is that they have been denied political and social and legal and economic equity—the "rights" of "life and liberty"—and are thereby deprived, ruthlessly, of the opportunity to earn a decent living in wholesome vocations. In a word, they are denied the very rights this government proclaims itself constituted to guarantee. This poverty is in the body politic not because its victims lack "individual initiative" and "the competitive spirit" but because they are casualties of the very system that makes the "war" on "poverty" a matter of survival to democracy in America.

Physical poverty in the midst of economic affluence breeds spiritual poverty; in some, it takes the form of a callous or calculated indifference at the misery of their brothers; in others, vincible ignorance and social selfishness; in still others, a point of view which accepts their own physical poverty as inevitable and their own situation as beyond hope, so that social scientists now suggest that poverty in America must be understood as a state of mind as well as the absence of a certain amount of income and employment. For centuries moralists have warned that the system of slavery exacted as heavy a toll on the character and personality of the slaveholder as it did upon the slave. Now, perhaps, we need to have them warn us that the toll exacted on the character and personality of the affluent citizen is just as heavy as upon the victims of the affluent society, viz., the poor. In Hosea's words, "they came to Ba'al-pe'or and consecrated themselves to Ba'al, and became detestable like the things they loved."



KATALLAGETE

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Photographs are used by permission of Drinnon, Inc., of Macon, Georgia, and by the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. Photographs in the story about Mrs. Combs were made by Bill Strode, of the *Courier-Journal*, who received the 1966 Photographer of the Year Award from the National Press Photographers Association.

The Plutocrats and The Po' Folks

WILLIAM P. RANDALL

The second section of the Sunday edition of *The Macon Telegraph and News* is "About Women and The Arts" and "The Home and Family Life." The headline on page one reported on Sunday, January 16, that GREAT SOCIETY POVERTY PROGRAM EVENT ENTERTAINS EXCHANGE CLUB. It did, and it was no accident that it did. The chairman of the party committee was asked by the club to "have something different" for the annual "Ladies Night" meeting. In SWAPS, the Bulletin of the Macon Exchange Club, the plan for "something different" was explained by the chairman: "With the Poverty Program, the Job Corps, the Ladybird Beautification Program, Medicare, unemployment insurance, government by handouts and money by pipeline from Washington and LBJ, this could well be called 'The Get Age'." "As it is almost impossible to beat them, just for tonight we have decided to join them. The Great Society Poverty Program was designed so you may let your hair down, join in the fun and live like po' folks for tonight."

The fact is, however, this kind of program is not something altogether new to Macon. In October, 1964, local Republicans staged their "Goldwater Gala," a principal theme of which was a "take-off" on "make-believe poverty." Admission charges were a minimum of \$10. The newspaper account of the affair reported that "one song in the 'Appalachia' skit said some people believe the anti-poverty promises because they are 'ignorant, stupid' and another said the people didn't need washing machines because 'they ain't got no clothes to wash nor place to plug 'em in.'" "The ridicule even went so far," the newspaper report continued, as to include a song that said that "since they closed Prince Edward's schools, we can't read nor write," an apparent reference to the county in Virginia where Negroes were without schooling for several years, although there were no blacked faces in the cast." So, the ground for the subsequent effort of the Exchangites to entertain

Mrs. Combs and The Bulldozers

LOYAL JONES

This is a story about Mrs. Ollie Combs. It is also a story about a community, but mostly it is her story. Mrs. Combs is 61 years old, but in some ways she looks older. She is small and frail and looks weary. But in other ways, she looks younger. She has a quick intelligence, a wry humor, and her smile is still girlish for she has had her moments of joy. In 1944, she gave birth to triplets, two boys and a girl. Mostly, though, as she puts it, "We lived hard." With her five sons she lives in a small, three-room wooden house under Honey Gap on Clear Creek in Knott County, Kentucky. The house has electricity and television, but is heated by coal in fireplaces. When a stiff wind comes, it sends a draft down through the chimney and blows eye-burning coal dust into the rooms. Yet the rooms are neat, the beds made, the mantles and tables hold family pictures and the Bible, and on one wall hangs a large, woolly, pastel-colored panda bear, wrapped in cellophane to protect it from the coal dust.

Her husband, Balis Combs, a coal miner, died a year ago. A month later, her nineteen-year-old son died. Another son, Jimmy Lee, an Army veteran, has been almost totally paralyzed since an automobile accident six years ago. Most of the time he is confined to a bed in the front room off the kitchen, but the other boys are able, occasionally, to take him out for a ride. The youngest son, Barney 13, is in school. Lincoln, 17, and two of the triplets, Jesse and Elmer, 22, are unemployed. Mrs. Combs and her five sons live on Social Security and on the small disability allowance Jimmy Lee receives from the state of Kentucky.

* * * * *

This particular story about Mrs. Combs really began a long time ago, when a mining company bought the mineral rights to the land on which the Combs' lived. The agreement involved a "broad form" deed, which gave the mining company the right to do anything necessary to the surface of the land in order to get at the minerals beneath

THE PLUTOCRATS—

their ladies had already been broken, and success seemed a sure thing.

The spoof party began at the beginning. The newspaper reported that when the guests entered the YWCA, "they faced two doors leading to the banquet room: "For Plutocrats," and "For Po'-Folks," the reference, apparently was to the guest "costumed in the spirit of the occasion." Members had been "urged ahead of time to dress for the occasion, either as po' folks or plutocrats."

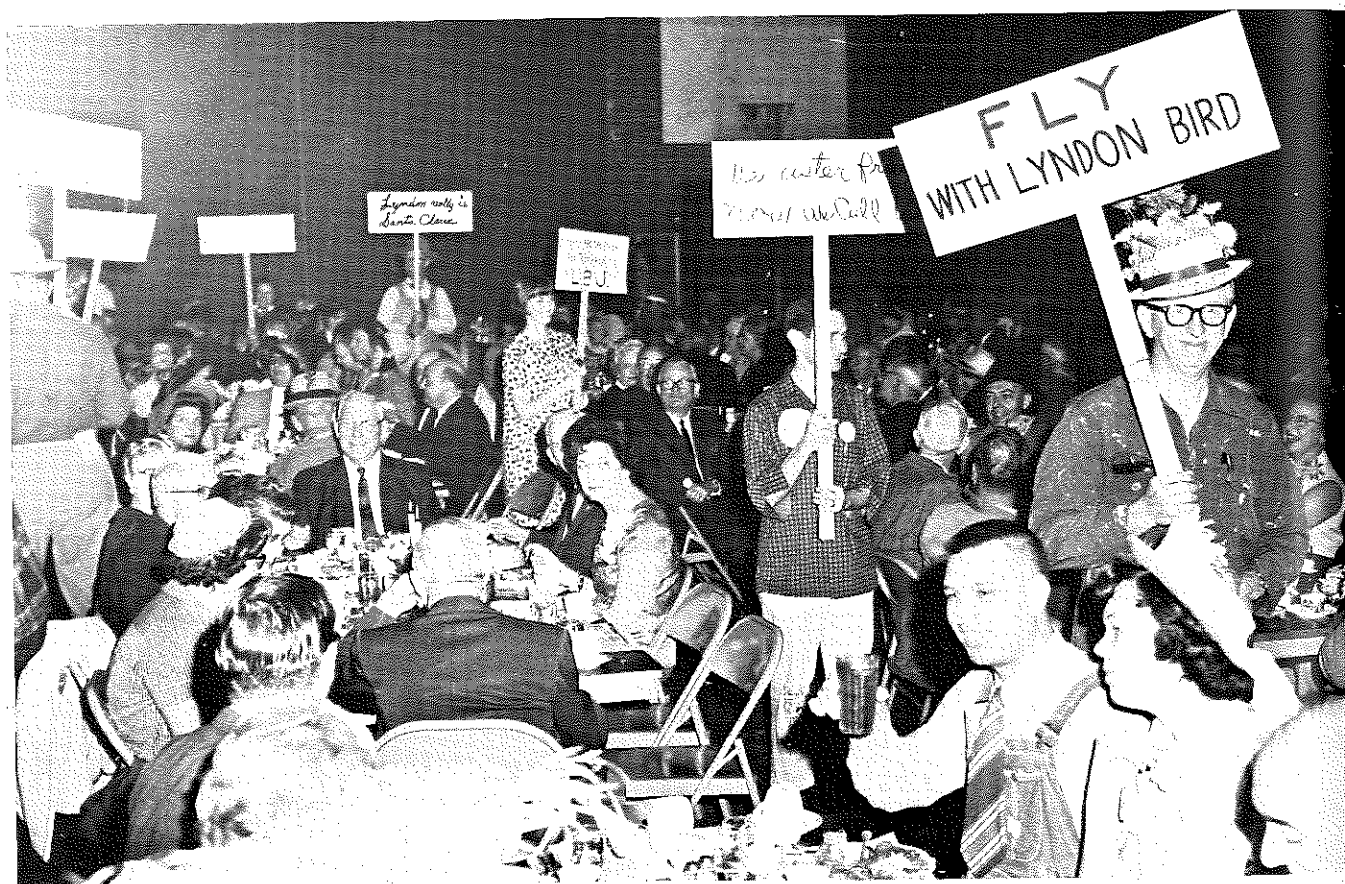
"Favors for the ladies" were distributed from "sacks of groceries" on which was printed in black and bold letters, "POVERTY PROGRAM."

After members and guests were seated, the banquet was picketed by members of the party

MRS. COMBS—

the surface. Mrs. Combs "owns" the surface of the land, but not the minerals; hence, the mining company can "strip" the surface of the land which she owns in order to get at what they own.

On Monday, November 22, 1965, bulldozers from the Caperton Coal Company pushed through the trees of Honey Gap and onto Mrs. Combs' land. The dozers were following one of the seams of coal which runs around the mountain that rises almost abruptly in the back and side of Mrs. Combs' home. This is "strip mining," and the technique is quite simple. The bulldozers push trees and rocks and earth off the seam of coal, and then power shovels scoop up the coal from whatever depth it might be found. There is no place for the trees



committee of the Club. Their signs explained what the party was all about: "Spend all Your Pay, There's More on the Way." "Yes, Virginia, There Really is a Santa Claus." "Fly with Lyndon Bird." "LBJ will Pay Our Way." The menu included peas, crackling bread and sweet 'tater pudding. But since it was "Ladies Nite" for the club, the menu also included roast beef, ham and fried chicken, doubtless for those with stomachs too delicate to be poor even for a night.

Religion and Church were not left out. One sign carried by the pickets read "We uster pray;

and rocks and earth—the "overburden"—to go except to plummet down the mountain, crushing and polluting and destroying whatever might be in the path, until the "overburden" runs its course. For every foot of coal mined by this technique, up to four feet of earth and rocks as well as trees stripped by the dozers pour down the mountain. The point was very simple: had the bulldozers continued to strip, the home of the six members of the Combs family would have been rendered inhabitable, if not swept away, by the "overburden."

So Mrs. Combs stopped the bulldozers. She climbed the steep hill between her home and Honey

THE PLUTOCRATS—

now we call LBJ." Another said, "Blessed are the poor, for they have LBJ." The minister of a large congregation, who was "costumed for the Great Society Poverty Program," the newspaper said, sang and chorded his picket: "Never on Sunday"! It was "a feature of the program 'broadcast' from the stage." And, to sum it all up, The Outstanding Exchangite Award was presented to the Master of Ceremonies at the dinner preceding the program, a prominent civic leader in Macon. He was praised for his work "in his church as well as in the club."

In response to all this, one brave person, in a signed letter to the editor of the *Macon News*, wrote, that "One with a shudder suspects that if the Christ of Canaan were to come to Macon, He

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Gap, and sat down in their path, despite a court injunction against picketing or interfering with mining operations.

And she talked to the drivers: "We live hard. This land and this house is all we've got. Go on and leave us alone."

The president of the mining company, William Caperton, came to the Gap to reason with her. He appealed to Law and Order: "The law's on our side. We have a restraining order to keep you folks off the strip sites."

"It's not worth the paper it's written on," Mrs. Combs responded.

"I've never been stopped yet," Mr. Caperton warned.



might find it easier to turn the muddy water of the Ocmulgee River into wine than to turn the water of our callous indifference into the heady wine of God's passionate concern for human need . . . the billboard injunction, 'Attend the Church of your choice this Sunday,' raises the question: Why? to learn how to laugh?"

"Neither have I," she said, and she continued to talk.

The bulldozers withdrew. The "High" Sheriff, "Bud" Hylton, a deputy and two state patrolmen came to the scene at Honey Gap, and arrested Mrs. Combs, and two of her sons, Jesse and Lincoln. She instructed the boys to go with the officers peaceably, but she stayed where she was, seated in the middle of the path the dozers had abandoned. Finally, the Sheriff and a state trooper picked her up, and started down the almost sheer path with their burden, still arguing with her. As she recalls it, about half way down, the puffing "High"

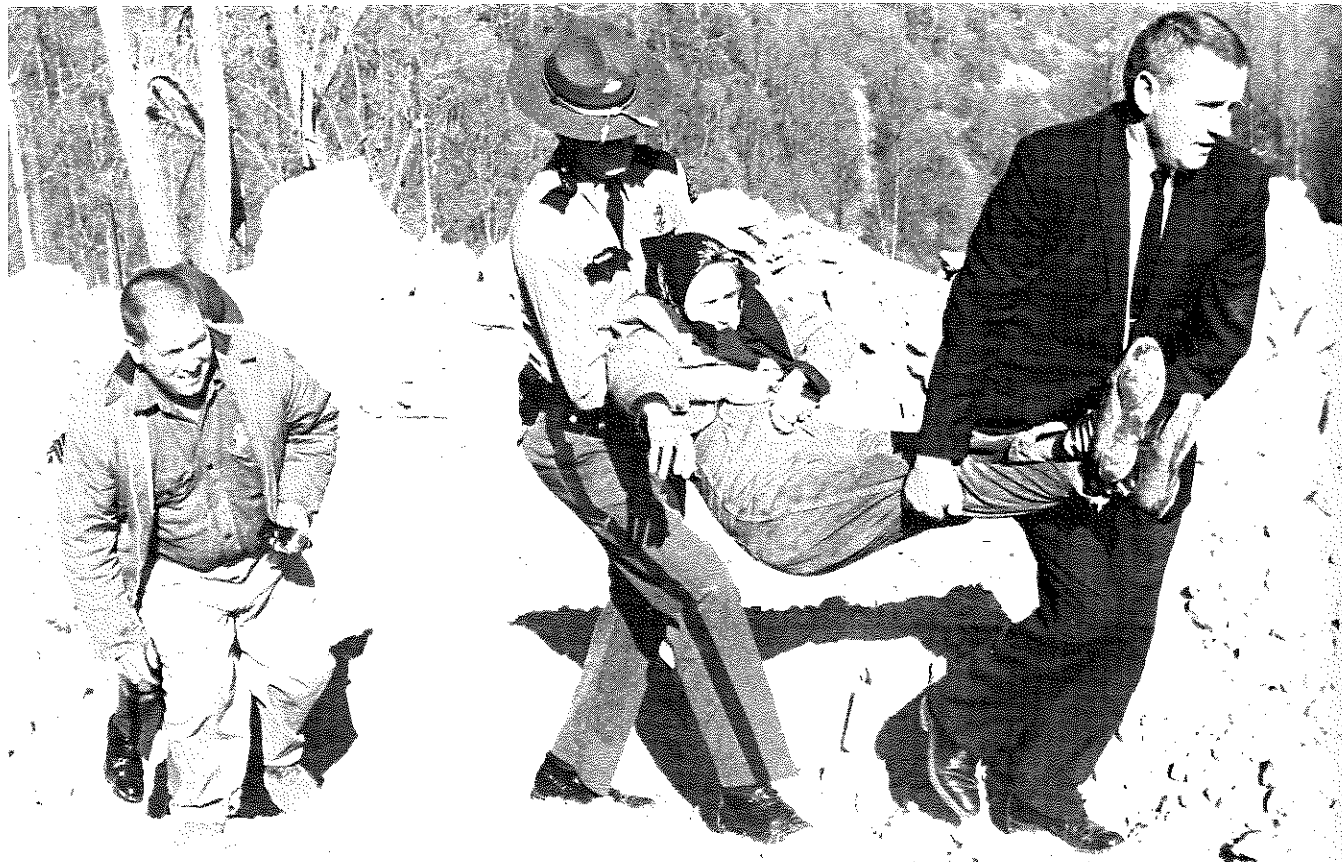
MRS. COMBS—

Sheriff complained, "Mrs. Combs, if you'll walk, I'll buy you a cup of coffee when we get to town."

"I don't drink coffee," she replied, although later she wryly confessed that this was not so; she did like coffee.

At any event, they had to carry her down the mountain, and they put her in the patrol car and drove her to the county seat of Knott county, Hindman. Her bond was signed, and she was released.

The next day she heard the bulldozers again, at the same spot in Honey Gap. Again she trudged up the mountain to the Gap, and again she sat down in front of the dozers. Again she was arrested, carried off and released on bond. Bill Strode,



a photographer from the *Louisville Courier-Journal* who had been taking pictures of the action, was arrested on a "John Doe" warrant for trespassing and put in jail for three and a half hours until his bond was made.

On the day before Thanksgiving, Mrs. Combs halted the bulldozers for a third time. She and her sons were arrested for a third time, and again she was carried off down the mountain. This time, however, she and Jesse and Lincoln were taken before Circuit Judge Don Ward at Hazard, Kentucky. The three were sentenced to twenty hours in jail for violating the court injunction, beginning im-

mediately and running almost to the full Thanksgiving Day.

When the prisoners and the High Sheriff arrived at the jail in Hindman, the Sheriff asked Mrs. Combs to walk into the jail. "My back hurts," he explained.

"You started this business," she answered, "and if you want me in that jail, you're going to have to carry me into it." Later, she recalled that the idea of refusing to walk into the jail had only occurred to her on the trip from Hazard to Hindman.

So the sheriff had a problem. He called some townspeople to help carry Mrs. Combs into the jailhouse. One of the Combs boys said, within their hearing, "Mama's pretty mad." So the townspeople strolled away from the Sheriff with Mrs. Combs

still seated in the car. He tried one of his prisoners, but after hearing what was expected of him, he declined. It seems his back hurt, too. Finally, the Sheriff located a deputy, and the two of them carried her to a cell. The next day after Thanksgiving dinner of chicken and dumplings prepared by the jailor's wife, Mrs. Buddy Calhoun, she and sons Jesse and Lincoln were released.

"They treated me real good," she explained.

Her neighbors looked after the sons who had to remain at home up Clear Creek.

The influential *Louisville Courier-Journal* gave day by day coverage of Mrs. Combs' encounter with the bulldozers, including a remarkable series of photographs by Bill Strode. Other newspapers and radio and television in the area picked up the story. The governor of Kentucky, Edward W. Breathitt, issued a statement urging strip miners to stop their insistence upon a strict interpretation of "broad form" deeds. He announced that he was on the side of the small land owners in controversy with the coal companies, and promised to introduce a new strip mine control bill. Judge Ward, who had passed the sentence upon Mrs. Combs and her sons, then ordered into immediate effect the more stringent strip mine regulations which had passed the legislature earlier and were due to go into effect on December 18. William Caperton agreed, for his part, to abide by the new regulations, and stated that he would not mine coal on Mrs. Combs' property. He might, he said, cut a road on the mountain that rises above her home to haul coal mined on adjoining property. Cutting the road, however, would have exactly the same effect as stripping the coal seam. The overburden of trees, rocks, and dirt would ruin her home. Hence, her reaction to this was the same as before: "I'm ready to go back up there again, if they come back."

At any rate, Governor Breathitt was as good as his word. He journeyed to Pennsylvania to study the effect of their strip mine reclamation laws. When the Legislature reconvened, he presented them with a strong strip mine bill. He arranged to have the legislators visit the strip mine fields in Kentucky and to fly to Pennsylvania to see what had been done with their law.

Mrs. Combs went to Frankfort, the State capitol, in mid-January to testify before the Legislature on the strip-mine bill. In her quiet but emphatic way, she explained to the legislators how, and why, she had stopped the bulldozers, and what she thought about strip mining.

"It's destroying the land. It's poisoning the water. There should be something done to stop them from destroying what people have got, from destroying their homes and their land. I stopped them, if only they stay stopped."

She was applauded by the lawmakers when she finished her statement. They passed a bill which forbids strip mining on slopes steeper than 30 degrees, and requires a greater effort to restore the land which has been stripped.

A few days later, the governor offered another bill seeking to invalidate the despised "broad-form" deeds. His bill argued that when the mineral rights had been sold some 50 to 80 years ago, the sellers

could not have foreseen the present-day methods of extracting minerals by means of strip mining. He proposed that only the techniques known at the time the deeds were sold could be employed, without additional consent of current surface owners, and without adequate compensation. The bill was promptly called "The Widow Combs Bill." But, the bill was tabled, and was not revived before the session of the legislature adjourned. The most enthusiastic and optimistic supporters for the elimination of the "broad-form" deed see little prospect for passage in the near future. At present, the fate of those threatened by strip mining, such as Mrs. Combs and her five sons, rests with the new law, the diligence of its enforcement, public opinion and interest, particularly in the localities affected by indiscriminate stripping, and the whim or enlightenment of the coal companies. It is clear that the effort to eliminate the ravages and wastes of human and natural resources produced by strip mining is far from over.

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Mrs. Combs stopped the bulldozers from pushing through Honey Gap and destroying the home of her family. Because she did this, she helped to get a bill through the legislature of Kentucky which will help others who face the same peril that she faced, and met. And it is important to this story to remember that Mrs. Combs was not alone—that support by her neighbors was not exhausted by bringing Thanksgiving dinner to the jail at Hindman. Taken together, the story of Mrs. Combs and her neighbors is one demonstration of what the victims of poverty can do when they act together to meet a common problem. Mrs. Combs' neighbors, the people of Clear Creek and Lotts Creek, supported her defiance of the bulldozers of the Caperton Mining Company. They kept her in sight as she sat in protest in front of the dozers, and confronted the miners, and the law itself. They cheered her on, they looked after her boys while she was in jail, and they saw to it that she had something tangible to be thankful for on Thanksgiving Day besides being a prisoner in the Knotts County jail. These same neighbors, at least some of them, have defied the bulldozers on their own land, with other techniques, including the use of firearms.

When the "War on Poverty" came to Knott County, the people of Lotts and Clear Creeks came together and formed a neighborhood council. They saw, or thought they saw, rays of hope in the Economic Opportunity Act. The problems of the bulldozers gave impetus to their activities. In the meetings of the neighborhood council, the people talked bitterly of the ruin left by the strip miners

as they pushed the top of the mountain off of "Number Nine," as the seven to nine foot coal seam at the top of the mountain was called. Literally, the top of the mountain — the "overburden" — rolled down the slopes, covering trees and underbrush, and sending dirt and boulders into streams, and fields, and even buildings.

"Why should we be using government to improve things," someone complained, "when the stripminers will come and destroy all that we have done?"

Everyone in the neighborhood council agreed that stripmining was the most urgent problem they faced. And they agreed that something had to be done. So they created an organization called "The Appalachian Group to Save the Land and People." They retained Harry Caudill, the Whitesburg attorney already famous for his wrangling with the stripminers and for his book, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*. LeRoy Martin, a schoolteacher was elected president. Alice Slone, director of Lotts Creek Community School, which most of the children on the Creek attend, insisted that the word "people" be in the name of the group. Miss Slone founded the community school 33 years ago with the help of the small landowners in the area. She had seen bulldozers destroy 40 acres of the school's timber, including two acres of white pine which the schoolchildren had set out as a conservation example for the community. Miss Slone helped in the founding of the Group, but she insists that it was mostly the work of the people of Clear and Lotts Creeks. "They were the small farmers and landowners who felt that they had to come together to protect their homes and property from ruin," she said. In many cases the property they sought to defend was, literally, their last chance to avoid becoming wards of the state, or their relatives. They were people like Mrs. Combs, Clarence and Clara Williams and Ruthie Smith, who successfully fought the strip miners. Then there was Red Singleton who "let lightning strike" the bridge across his creek to keep the bulldozers off his property. Dan Gibson stood with a rifle in front of the property of his step-son who is in Viet Nam. He kept off not only the miners but also the sheriff, deputies and state police who came with a machine gun, carbines and pistols to remove him. "I don't want any trouble," he said. "I'm 81 years old, and I'm ready to die. If I leave, the undertaker will take me. We don't want our homes destroyed and our water polluted. Do any of you want to die? If so, just try to move me." Mr. Gibson won. Incidentally, the miners had no permit to strip his step-son's property, and were on the wrong land.

The Appalachian Group to Save the Land and People piled into cars and went to Frankfort and picketed the Capitol. The governor was impressed, and became a student of the strip mine control and reclamation laws.

Then the bulldozers of the Caperton Coal Company pushed through Honey Gap and onto Mrs. Ollie Combs' property. Indignant, determined, and with nowhere else to go, she stopped the strippers from destroying her home, but she was arrested for the effort. And jailed also was Bill Strode, staff photographer for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, who refused the order of the Sheriff to stop taking pictures of the incident connected with the arrest of Mrs. Combs. These arrests were costly to the stripminers. National broadcasting networks sent camera crews to the region, as did the British Broadcasting System. *Life* and other magazines and newspapers sent writers and cameramen. Mrs. Combs, and others, who faced bulldozers or guns one day saw themselves as heroes the next day.

The victory of Mrs. Combs and the people of Clear Creek and Lotts Creek is an important one, albeit temporary. Their victory was wrung out of a situation when their backs were to the wall. Abstractions and invocations about freedom of peace, the rights of life and liberty were of no avail. As they saw it, the only choice they had was to put their lives in the gap between the promise and the reality of American democracy. From the point of view of "law and order", the state was simply an instrument to sanction the destruction of their homes. Mrs. Combs had already lost a great deal that had made her life important. The security she had left for herself and for her five sons was the two bedrooms and kitchen under the mountain. She accepted the fact that the wealth of her children—of the crippled Jimmy Lee, of Barney and Jesse and Elmer and Lincoln — depended upon what happened when those bulldozers came through Honey Gap. Stripping above her home would surely have ruined what little she did have left—including the possibility of keeping the family together — if not immediately with tumbling boulders, then eventually with the shifting of the overburden after the winter rains.

It was no easy thing for Mrs. Combs to go down to the meetings of the Appalachian Group to Save The Land and the People or to go to Lexington and speak before the legislators. It was even more difficult for her to defy physically the bulldozers.

But, the way she looks at it is, "You never know what you can stand until it's put on you."

KATALLAGETE

Mr. Wall is Director of Information of the Voter Education project, Southern Regional Council, Atlanta, Georgia. He was formerly associated with the Southern Education Reporting Service in Nashville, Tennessee, and was columnist and editorial writer for the *Atlanta Constitution*.

What Happened In Alabama

MARVIN WALL

After a swing through Hayneville, where Jonathan Daniels was gunned down, we picked up a friend at the Montgomery airport and headed toward Selma. We drove along the stretch of highway where Mrs. Viola Luizzo was assassinated. Continuing along the route of the historic Selma-to-Montgomery march, we crossed over the Pettus bridge where Negro marchers were put to flight before a horrified national television audience. Inside Selma, we saw the spot where the Reverend James Reeb was beaten to death. And driving westward in the Black Belt to Marion, we passed the place where Jimmy Lee Jackson was buried.

It was Election Day in Alabama. A lot of blood—Negro and white—had been shed for the rights Negroes were exercising on a cloudless and pleasant day in late May. And Alabama's brutality had been largely responsible for the legislation which had made it possible for thousands of Negroes to vote for the first time.

When the Voting Rights Act went into effect last August, only 113,493 of Alabama's 481,320 voting-age Negroes were registered. By the time of the first primary on May 3, Negro registration in Alabama had more than doubled, rising above 235,000.

To be sure, white registration also increased. In fact, it came within 11,000 of matching Negro registration for the same nine-month period. But with 87 per cent of the white voting-age population registered (against less than 50 per cent of the Negroes) the day of dramatic upswings in white registration has pretty much passed.

So the question in the first primary on May 3 was this: Will the newly registered Negroes, those who had never seen a ballot or a voting machine, actually go to the polls and vote?

A young college graduate we encountered on the eve of the first primary was sure the answer would be no. He was wearing a straw hat bearing the campaign colors of gubernatorial candidate Carl Elliott.

"They'll go register," he said, "but they won't go vote."

The next morning, at a large Negro precinct, we saw for ourselves. Lines of voters twisted around the corner and down the block. There weren't nearly enough voting machines. All the same, nobody—so far as we could tell—was giving up to go home.

We asked a Negro poll official if he thought the massive lines would prove discouraging. His answer was quick and simple:

"They've been waiting 100 years for this day. They'll vote."

As the hours went by, they proved the poll official right. The young Elliot supporter was wrong.

The way we figured it at the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, close to 175,000 Negroes cast ballots in Alabama on May 3. That was nearly three-fourths of the Negro registration.

But the white vote also was heavy. The total turnout was a record-breaking 888,000, or 64 per cent of the registration.

With Governor Wallace running his wife as a stand-in candidate, it was the sort of election that would draw about everybody who could walk, drive or be carried to the polls. And despite Mrs. Wallace's lopsided victory, the Negro turnout made a lasting impression. In a less polarized election,

175,000 or so votes could very easily tip the balance.

In a Birmingham press conference the day after the first primary, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. said the Negro turnout, along with a large number of Negro candidates for county and legislative offices, indicated "a new day in Alabama." He described the Wallace landslide (she, or he or they, got 54 per cent of the vote) as a "protest vote against the tide of inevitable progress."

Some say it was a protest vote against Dr. King and his vigorous pre-election activities in Alabama. "Backlash" remains a favorite argument of the segregationists. It shifts the blame for a segregationist vote from the segregationist who casts it.

But the white voters of Alabama had — or thought they had — plenty to protest besides Dr. King. First there was the Voting Rights Act itself, and all the other civil rights legislation that Alabama has helped inspire. Then there were the federal examiners sent to register voters in 11 Alabama counties, and the federal observers sent in to watch the election. On top of all this came the school guidelines which have touched off new explosions of white outrage, like a string of fire-crackers, across the Deep South.

The whole legal (and moral) weight of the nation was pressing in on white Alabama. The only thing to do was to "stand up" for Alabama and vote for Wallace. Mrs. Wallace polled 480,841 votes.

The Negro vote went almost solidly for Attorney General Richmond Flowers, who ran second to Mrs. Wallace with 172,386 votes. A handful of Negro votes went to Carl Elliott, who ran third with 71,972.

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There were more than 50 Negro candidates for county and legislative offices, most of them in the Black Belt counties. For the most part, they fared poorly.

While Negroes were united in their support of Flowers, they broke ranks at the local level. There were many reasons. One was old interracial friendships and loyalties and paternalisms. Another was genuine reservations about the qualifications of a few of the Negro candidates. Still another reason, and an important one, was fear—fear of offending white poll officials and the white power structure by voting for Negro candidates.

On top of all this, Negroes and civil rights leaders were far from convinced that all the elections involving Negroes had been conducted fairly. Dr. King and his aides spoke of complaints from a half-dozen or so counties. In three counties, federal observers weren't allowed to watch the marking of ballots for illiterates.

In the May 31 runoffs, attention was focused on the Black Belt. Twenty-six Negro candidates made it to the runoffs, and most of them were running in the Black Belt.

Of these, only four won. Three of these were in Macon County, home of Tuskegee, where Negroes already held 47 different elected and appointed offices. Nevertheless, one of these is a sheriff, and that is quite a departure for the white management and ownership of Alabama. The fourth victor was a candidate for the school board in Greene County, at the western end of the Alabama Black Belt.

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This time, the federal observers did a better job, but the Negro turnout was smaller. The big push had been made on May 3 and it had failed to get anybody elected. There was fear, but there was also disappointment. There was talk of Negro tenant farmers' being threatened with eviction. At one Black Belt courthouse, I heard that some Negroes, being afraid to tell white poll officials how they really wanted to vote, stayed home rather than cast a ballot contrary to their wishes. Negroes spoke of being "mistreated in the last election" and of an election that "was taken away from us."

The results might indicate that the best course for Alabama Negroes is to quit running themselves—especially in the white-managed primaries—and throw their weight behind a white "moderate." This was done in Dallas County. And with the help of the federal courts, it resulted in the ouster of Sheriff Jim Clark.

But it would be erroneous to conclude, as some have, that the Negro candidate will have to get off the center of the playing field and return to his traditional "place" on the sidelines. Again, the key figures are 87 per cent and 50 per cent. Much depends upon the rate at which Negroes continue to register. In the months and years ahead, it is likely that there will be more *new* Negro voters than *new* white voters.

All that the May primaries proved is that the new voters—Negro and white—knew their way to the polls. What is proved beyond that is not clear.

KATALLAGETE

In the last issue of this journal we printed a sermon by the Reverend Kelly Miller Smith. Mr. Smith is pastor of the First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill, Nashville, Tennessee, a predominately Negro congregation. That church was organized following the Civil War, when the Negro members of First Baptist Church, Seventh and Broad, discovered that they were free in law but still second class in church.

That was a hundred years ago. Mr. Smith's sermon was the end of a centennial celebration. In the sermon he called upon members of his congregation and the other First Baptist Church (white) to begin discussion looking toward a re-union of the two groups. They had once been one congregation. They are both downtown churches. Both are in a building program.

The response of the white pastor was as follows: "We believe there are too few good churches in Nashville, not too many."

Four months later that pastor was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Mr. Smith continues to minister to his First Baptist, Capitol Hill congregation with the hope that the second hundred years may bring different responses, and that we "all might be one."

Can Death Come Where Life Never Was

DALLAS BLANCHARD

Most of us feel that it is not fair to speak too directly from the pulpit. It is all right for the minister to imply, but it is not all right for him to just come out and say it; for this would be washing dirty linen in public. There is some truth in this attitude. Certainly every minister knows some quite personal things about members of his congregation which should never be revealed, especially from the pulpit. It is not fair to single people out.

On the other hand, a church service is not a public meeting. We are the gathering together of the Body of Christ, and this is an intensely private gathering. Here it is that we lay ourselves open to one another, to admit what we are, what we are doing, and what is happening to us.

It is the minister's task to interpret what is happening to us and in us. Indeed, most, if not all, preaching worth hearing must have this quality of interpreting the intensely personal. This sermon this morning is an attempt at this kind of personal preaching.

Perhaps I am saying this from the pulpit partly because I am not able to say this to you individually. To say this face to face would be painful, and I do not enjoy pain either. But it has to be said.

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It starts with Paul when he asserts in the fifth chapter of Second Corinthians that man's basic problem is also man's basic need, his need for reconciliation with God and his fellow man. For the fact is that we are strangers to God and therefore to one another. We suffer from an estrangement which takes many forms.

One expression of estrangement is indifference. The sad thing is that the indifferent is not aware of any estrangement. We see this in the church in the person who resents prayers of confession because "I have no need to confess." For this person God is merely a Void.

Or our estrangement may take the form of resentment—God the Void becomes God the Enemy. Such resentment

About the time that proposal was made, another member of the Committee of Southern Churchmen was making a similar one. Dallas Blanchard is white, and so was his Toulminville Methodist congregation in Mobile, Alabama. For reasons similar to those given by Mr. Smith, he proposed that his church enter into a functional merger with the Warren Street Methodist Church, a downtown Negro congregation whose members had moved into the Toulminville suburb.

Through some skillful planning the mechanics of such a "merger" were accomplished. But a few weeks before the two were to worship as one body, Mr. Blanchard became sadly aware that few of his original sheep would graze in the combined pasture, for by then most of them had plans to transfer to other, all-white, meadows.

The sermon that follows is the last word of Dallas Blanchard to the Toulminville flock, few of whom would be present two weeks later to hear the two pastors, now co-ministers, say as one to the body: "This cup poured out for you is the new covenant sealed by my blood."

But then a few of them would be there, for a few understood when he preached the words that follow.

More tragic still are a significant number who continue to support financially what was done but say, "It was the right thing to do, but it just isn't for me."

may not be directed openly toward God, but may simply express itself in resentment of life and its circumstances. Or it may see God's will as something to be endured. Our resentment expresses itself when we say, "God took my child," or, "Why did God let this happen to me . . . or to my church?"

Estrangement is also expressed through selfishness, which is basically defiance of what we know is right. It may be self-will, self-indulgence, self-pity, self-complacency, or self-righteousness, but essentially it means we just do not want the will of God. When the Master of Ballantrae was asked why he was such a rascal when he was so well versed in Scripture and the Catechism, he blamed it on the "malady of not wanting." In the church we have learned tragically and too late that studying the Scripture is not enough, for persons who have steeped themselves in the Bible are now standing naked, with their selfishness bared to the world. And they are saying openly, "I don't care what is right, I don't want my church serving people of another race."

Whatever its form, estrangement is real for all of us. We hide it, hide from it, and try to bury it, but it is there; and any crisis can strip it bare. This is one function of crisis: it reveals us as we are.

We have seen this happen in our midst. We had assumed, because we of the Toulminville Methodist Church have known one another all our lives and have been part of the same church for fifty years, that there was no estrangement here. Now in an extreme crisis, the estrangement which was always there has come boiling to the surface.

As a result our dominant mood now is not sadness at the death of a church, but a sense of guilt and shame at our stark realization of our failure—that we never have been the Church. We have sung our Songs of Salvation, preached our revivals, held our prayer meetings, and taught our Bible Classes. And now we hear and we say, "I know what is Christian, but I just can't do it." We have used the words and performed the pious duties, but we have com-

municated precious little reconciliation with God and man. Our mood is one of guilt and shame because the Church has failed in its only excuse for existence.

Estrangement is a reality with us. It is part of us and walks into our classes and the sanctuary with us. Desperately we need reconciliation.

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But Paul tells us that the reconciliation we say that we need, to do what ought to be done, has already taken place. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." The reconciliation, the healing, happened at the Place of the Skull. You don't have to make yourself likable; indeed, you cannot. You don't have to make yourself lovable, and you cannot do that either. You cannot create reconciliation; it is already given in the activity of God in Jesus Christ.

Then Paul carries what happens to its inevitable conclusion: "God has already reconciled us, therefore *be* reconciled." Just be what you are by the grace of God, by what the grace of God has made you. The only way to be reconciled is to act and live on the basis of it. In the controversial play *The Deputy*, the priest feels the only way he can be reconciled with the Jews' being destroyed by Hitler is to join with them in their suffering and the only way he can express reconciliation to the Nazis is to suffer at their hands. Reconciliation is a reality only in deeds.

Which means that to be reconciled is to be an agent of reconciliation. This is every Christian's task: to be an evangelist or, in Paul's word, an "ambassador" of reconciliation. As evangelists and agents of reconciliation, it is not our job to get people into a church or to change men's

lives. It is our task to unmask their estrangement and simply to announce the reconciliation which is already here.

It is precisely this point which has aroused the most hostility among us. It is not that we must, as Methodists, welcome anyone who comes through the doors of the church, but that we will go outside the doors and seek the lost, of whatever race, to announce to them God's forgiveness and love. It is ironic that in a church which prided itself for its evangelism, the only reason for the existence of the Church (the evangelization of the world, "to seek and save that which is lost," to be agents of God's reconciliation) has become the focus of our rebellion and excuse to leave the Church.

Can you hear the Word which came to Jonah, coming to you? "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should I not pity North Mobile, that great city, in which there are more than 40,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left?"

There is no nice, optimistic note on which to end this sermon. There is only one ending, Jesus' parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21:33-43). His message is clear: if we will not be evangelists, then the vineyard will be given over to others who will bear the fruits of God's kingdom, who will be the agents of reconciliation.

Then we can no longer cry or complain because a man in a classroom has said that God is dead. But we will weep because with our lives we will have said, "He is dead indeed!"

Statement Adopted by

Committee of Southern Churchmen

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

FEBRUARY 6, 1964

"For the love of Christ leaves us no choice when once we have reached the conclusion that one man died for all and therefore all mankind has died. His purpose in dying for all was that men, while still in life, should cease to live for themselves, and should live for him who for their sake died and was raised to life. With us therefore worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of any man; even if once they counted in our understanding of Christ, they do so now no longer. When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone, and a new order has already begun.

"From first to last this has been the work of God. He has reconciled us men to himself through Christ, and he has enlisted us in this service of reconciliation. What I mean is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding men's misdeeds against them, and that he has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation. We come therefore as Christ's ambassadors. It is as if God were appealing to you through us: In Christ's name, we implore you, be reconciled to God!" (II Corinthians 5:15-20, *The New English Bible*)

We confess this message of the faith and life of the Christian community speaks directly to the broken relationships between and among men. The Church is the Church, when by the gift of grace, it lives this faith and proclaims this message in obedience to its Lord. In dying for all men, Christ destroyed every barrier which denies fellowship, brotherhood, and community between and among all men. Beginning in the Church, therefore,

worldly standards must cease to count in relationships among men, or Christ's death and resurrection are mocked.

But we in the South have counted worldly standards and have made distinctions of our own creation between men. Most grievously, men of one race have set themselves apart from men of another, and we in the Church have connived and acquiesced in the profanation of God's will for human life. Thereby, we have contradicted in our faith and life the unity of all men created by God's act in Christ; we have crucified Christ anew; we have led the Church to become like the nations, instead of being a light to the nations.

But "when anyone is united in Christ, there is a new world . . . From first to last this has been the work of God." He has reconciled all men to himself through Christ, and he has entrusted us in the service of reconciliation. Having been entrusted with this service of reconciliation, we, as a Committee of Southern Churchmen, covenant to proclaim in faith and with our lives that Christ's reconciliation of all men is neither social stratagem nor political expedient, but the gift of God that has and does and will liberate men from bondage and death—forevermore, but also "while still in life" here and now.

"In Christ's name, therefore, we implore you, be reconciled to God!"



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