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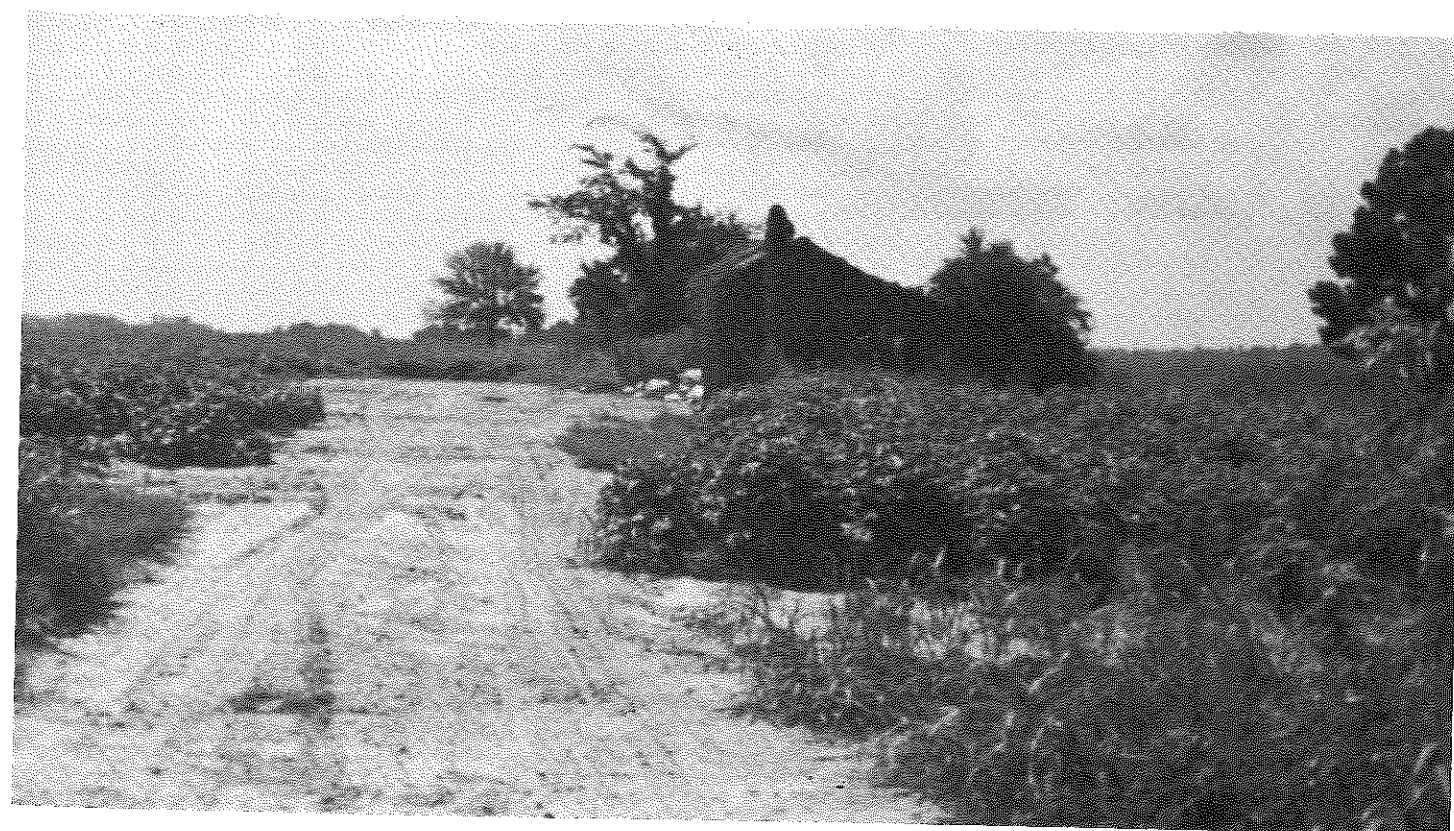
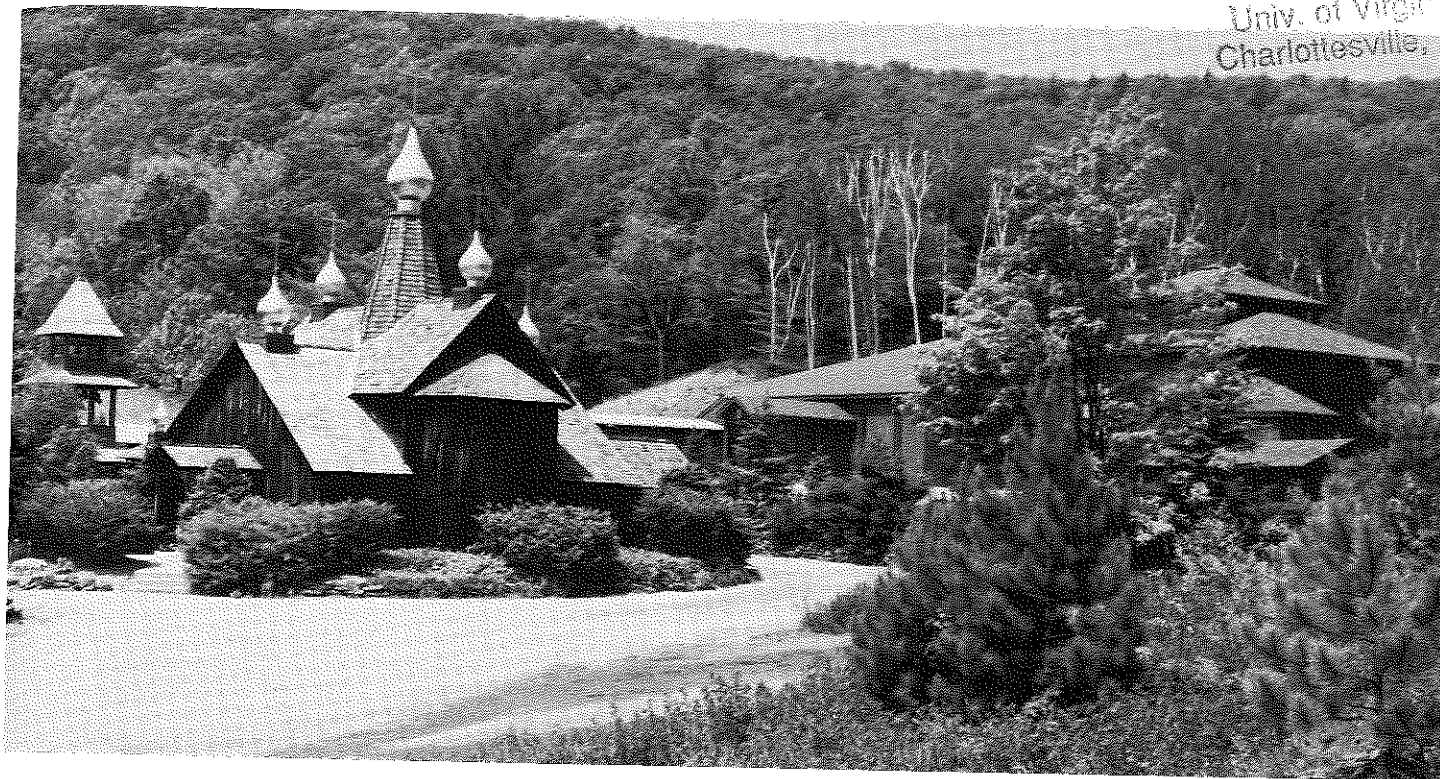
# KATA! AGETE

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<sup>11</sup>Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup>From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force. <sup>13</sup>For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; <sup>14</sup>and if you are willing to accept it, he is Eli'jah who is to come. <sup>15</sup>He who has ears to hear, let him hear.



# KATALLAGETE

SINCE 1965

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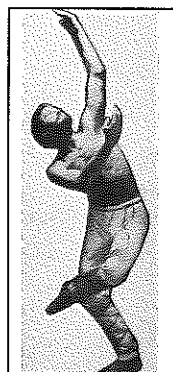
# KATALLAGETE

Box 2307 College Station  
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# About This Issue....

Gone With The Econoburger Inn  
You Cant Go Home Again Even If It Ever  
Was There Or  
Home Aint Allisway Where  
You're From or Where You Live(d)....

Mark Saderholm, old friend, student and veteran of the area came in during the winter, took up slack in KAT as if a volunteer, the Merton/Faulkner project kicked back in after we hit Gethsemani several weekends; the obvious is made, Saderholm, Chief-of-Staff. The Annual Odyssey/Search/Pilgrimage/Gettingthehelloutof The Residence began in May this time heading due West, not North by Northeast: First General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton

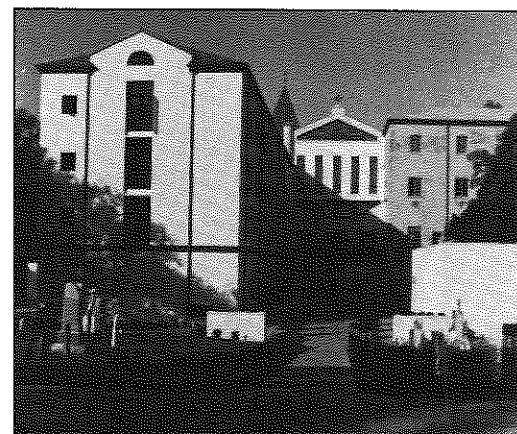


Society (ITMS): "The Pattern in the Seed: Thomas Merton's Glimpse of the Cosmic Dance" at Bellarmine College in Louisville. The conference opened with The Banquet: upon arrival, the Chicken Kiev juiced Mark's new white shirt, the Wild Rice was not and the Broccoli Normandy lay dormant. Bob Daggy, Director of The Thomas Merton Studies Center and Vice President of the ITMS, a long time friend and colleague presided; the Reverend Father

Timothy Kelly of Gethsemani was there; Bill Shannon, President of the ITMS, addressed "The Joy of the Cosmic Dance." Bob Giroux then the keynote: "The Seven Story Mountain: The Making of a Spiritual Classic." There were a dozen or so separate, off-times concurrent sessions. I fortunate to preside at the session on "Merton & Literature." David Cooper of Michigan State reported work on Volume IV of *Merton's Letters to Literary Figures*; an expanded version is carried in this issue of KAT. George Thomas came over after grinning, "Jim, you don't recognize me do you, I'm George Thomas!" George and I go back a long ways, students at Vanderbilt University's "School of Religion" (sic!). George stayed at Vanderbilt to complete a doctorate and teach systematic theology; we'd met occasionally in the years that intervened. He started out in music (a novice-oboist with the Philadelphia Symphony when Ormandy was the conductor). After seasons at Birmingham-Southern, George has been at Mount Union College, Alliance, Ohio, for years, now the "senior member" of the Department of

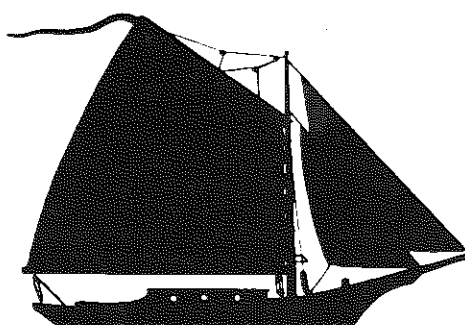
Religion (which I take to mean the curse of "administrative responsibilities" is fading). As theology students we inhabited different worlds, but the closest of friends. (I had wheels.) More evenings than twice a week I supped wholesome food at his table, away from the "Greasy Spoon," whose hospitality, rigorous meat and vegetables and easy "tab" allowed a generation of graduate students to survive Vanderbilt following WW II. (You ever ask Wendy's for credit?) George's wry, easy going manner (he smiles as he cuts your throat) puts him among the best of theological jokesters. It was good to be with him however briefly; the three of us had lunch at a fast-food Chinese joint near Bellarmine. Great news that he directs a choir in a Catholic parish he attends regularly.

The hit of the two days was seeing W. H. ("Ping") Ferry again. Merton had brought us together more years ago than we want to count and we've kept in touch since then, but this the first together since shortly after Merton's death. We set up breakfast for the next morning, the three of us held a good, long session; there was a lot to catch up, trading Merton stories and some interesting parallel and not so parallel events in our lives and the "future of KAT." Mark and I explained to Ping that our religion did not allow us to remain at any conference more than forty-eight hours. We left the Sheraton before noon and struck out for Bardstown Road and US 31E for Gethsemani, a gracious coincidence meeting Br. Pat Hart, (Merton's secretary) and Fr. Matthew Kely (Merton's last confessor); Pat had been to early sessions of the conference, Matthew had not; anyway, we spent the afternoon through Compline, to Louisville for dinner, checked out, returning late Sunday morning to The Residence to complete work on the gear and supplies for Downeast Maine.



A week or so later, we truck up to Maine and Mount Desert Island, holing up in a cottage at Hulls Cove until the cold rain ends, then to the southern tip of the Island to camp at the Seawall, a splendid spot, all the more since it was empty, The Season not begun, it is downright cold after dark. The only unpleasantness is the invasion of mosquitoes from sundown to midday, but our proximity to the coast makes it all worth while; we anoint heavily with bug juice. We hang around to enjoy the views and the sounds and smells of the rocky seashore, especially the incoming tides around midnight. On a whim based on firm foundations we sail around Northeast Harbor in the restored "Friendship" Sloop *Blackjack*. Check it out; it turned me

# SAIL



33 ft. Friendship  
Sloop

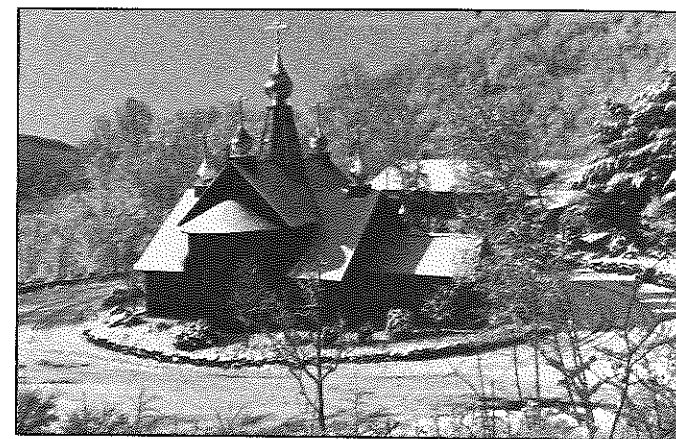
Sailing Since 1900

# "BLACKJACK"

around about the sea; Jim likes to talk about his love for the sea, having crossed both "Big Watuhs," several times a guest of the American taxpayer. The owner/skipper and his daughter cut the sails out of Northeast Harbor heading into the Bay for what turns into a good voyage. This guy's authentic, he won't volunteer a godam thing even the name of the islands; think before you ask something, so we think before we ask about restoring and keeping the *Blackjack* afloat which is expensive and complicated. As we leave, You ever heard of Pitcairn Island? The skipper scowled then smiled, "Yaaa, I know Pitcairn Island." Can the Sloop take us there? "Yaaa . . . Need plenty groceries . . ." As we hit the dock he hollers "Yaaa you bring the groceries . . ." Maine is impressive, it retains charm; there are eating places to satisfy Nero Wolfe.

The pretense of a schedule moves us out of Mount Desert Island and Bar Harbor making for New Skete Monastery outside of Cambridge, New York. Jim had spoken often and fondly over the years about the place, his long and close relationship with the brothers and sisters and especially Father Laurence, going back to the early 70's. Jim's third-born (Brother Paul) had worked there intermittently for several years and entered as a novice in March '88.

[Some "facts which are true:" New Skete began in 1966 when twelve young monks under the leadership of Fr. Laurence sought to establish a small family-type monastery ("skete"). They first lived together in northwestern Pennsylvania, moved to a farm outside Cambridge, a small village in upstate New York, sixty miles from Albany, then to their present home on Two Top Mountain, outside Cambridge. The land could not be cultivated, so the monks began to breed German Shepherd Dogs and board and train dogs of all breeds. (Their *How To Be Your Dog's Best Friend*, published in 1978, has been reprinted seven times; a companion volume about raising puppies will be published soon). The monks also support themselves with their smoked meats and cheese products (this work includes all the monks); they translate and compose liturgical music and books and a few years ago published a translation of *The Psalms*. In 1969 some Poor Clares came to New Skete hoping to found their own monastery; they became the Nuns of New Skete and with the help of the monks constructed their own monastery. They worship with the monks, make church vestments, paint icons and bake cheese cakes and fruit cake. In 1983, married couples and widows formed the Companions of New Skete, residing at Emmaus House, a half-mile from the monastery. They follow a rule consonant with the monasteries, owning nothing as individuals. They support themselves by sewing, weaving, working with the monks and on jobs outside the monastic communities. Each community participates in the magnificent choir. Families and individuals in the area have been attending their worship services from the earliest days, so they are now an informal parish community. All of these expressions are under the direction



of Fr. Laurence, the spiritual father of New Skete. There is a small guesthouse, usually filled year-round; the guests share meals with the monks and nuns. The original church, dedicated to the Transfiguration, was designed and built by the monks in 1970. It is rough hewn exterior, topped by gold domes ("banyas"). By the early 1980's it was no longer sufficient to support the worshipping communities. The larger Church, designed and largely built by the monks, dedicated to Christ the Wisdom of God (Hagia Sophia), follows the pattern of the early churches of Constantinople, U-shaped altar screen; light filled, consecrated in 1983.]

I don't know what to expect about and from an "Orthodox" monastery; one engaged in liturgical renewal and breeding German Shepherd Dogs. After setting up in town, we head up one of Two Tops for Vespers. I doubt even Jim could have prepared me for the experience, and he didn't try. He kept reminding me during the trip that we were carrying Niebuhr's sermonic-essay "Humour and Faith," saying, Wait till we get to New Skete, there's the incarnation of what Niebuhr was getting at. Watch what I say: four-five days in a setting among the brothers and sisters without one moral banality uttered, not one piety fired in love or spite, not one (not *one*, I tell you) religious look. But I took this if I thought about it at all as well-known Holloway-hyperbole.

Risking sacrilege, I compare New Skete to what I shall call the best of theater, which when it works, points not to itself (which is narcissism) but beyond itself (which is theological drama). A mixed choir of a capella voices sings the liturgy and chants the texts in twentieth century English.



The music best as I can describe it is based in Russian (Slavic) folk idiom. The effect is beautiful and simple, refutes pomposity and is always expressive. It is never arcane, but inviting without being solicitous or "contemporary" (in the worst sense of that word, that is, "relevant"). I am taken. Worship came to and from us in thanksgiving. After the service we are greeted as if returning prodigals. I discover that not only do they sing well, they eat well! The rule here: if you're gonna do it, do it right! When was the last time you saw Cornish hens (one for each celebrant) resting on trays basted and baked in a sauce prepared for the gods of Alhambra, accompanied by germaine, beautifully prepared salads, vegetables and breads? And the atmosphere? One of good humor without banalities. We slip into the rhythm of Matins and Vespers and Liturgy easily, unselfconsciously. I'd known one of the novices as a secular, but over the next several days we renew and increase our friendship without religious talk or pious looks. The spirit is alive and not on retreat! Amen, Brother! There is a plaque from New Skete in Jim's study "How Good And Pleasant It Is For All To Live Together Like Brothers!" Yeah. Amen.

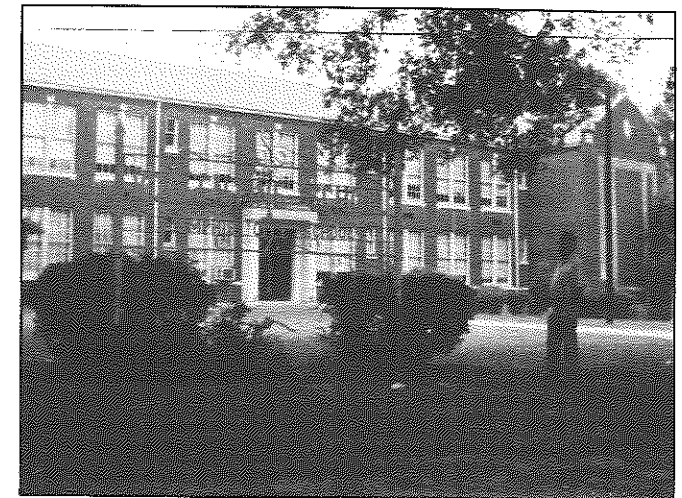
Our departure like our arrival (except for some purchases from The Farms), a lot of laughing, joking and get-back-up-here-soons.

The Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha Conference at Ole Miss in Oxford, "Faulkner & Religion," required no rationalizations or accountings to check it out. We'd worked a solid hard week at the Merton Center at Bellarmine College in early June almost completing the transcription of Merton's holograph notebooks on Faulkner, a project I accepted a couple of years earlier at the invitation of the Trustees of the Merton Legacy Trust and the Merton Annual: transcribing Merton's holograph notebooks on Faulkner. Mark had the results of all the work to date on the Macintosh a couple of weeks before we left for the conference in late July. We figured by then we knew where to take Merton's stuff; it'd take another summer or so but two or three articles could result bringing what we were convinced important contributions to understanding Faulkner. We'd begun with Merton's reflections on *Light in August*.

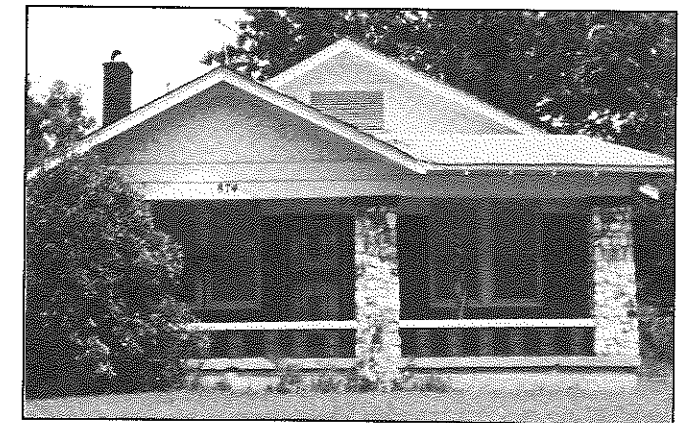
In route to Memphis, an especially violent thunderstorm forced us off the Interstate, costing two hours; not possible to make Memphis. What about Bucksnort, Tennessee? It turned out to be a truckers' haven, we liked the place, the proprietors were obsequious but efficient; the service in the restaurant for dinner and breakfast was poor, the fare

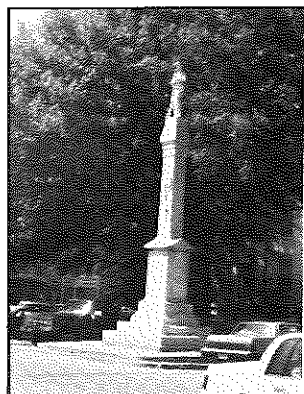


mediocre-minus, the post-cards one of a kind. Bucksnort did not originate with a "buck" in the area that had "snorts." It happens that before any one's current memory an old geezer, a moonshiner sold his "snorts" for a "buck." ("Let's go to Buck's for a snort.")



Mark's responsibility around Memphis was navigating traffic. We located Vollen School and 874 N. MacNeil Street without delay off the beltline from the the insert we had from Rand McNally's account of Tennessee. Vollen, the public school I began as a first-grader; six blocks away where we lived until the late 30's, 874 N. MacNeil. From Memphis, south to Oxford, AAA routed us on the skirts of Graceland. Jammed. Merciful God!

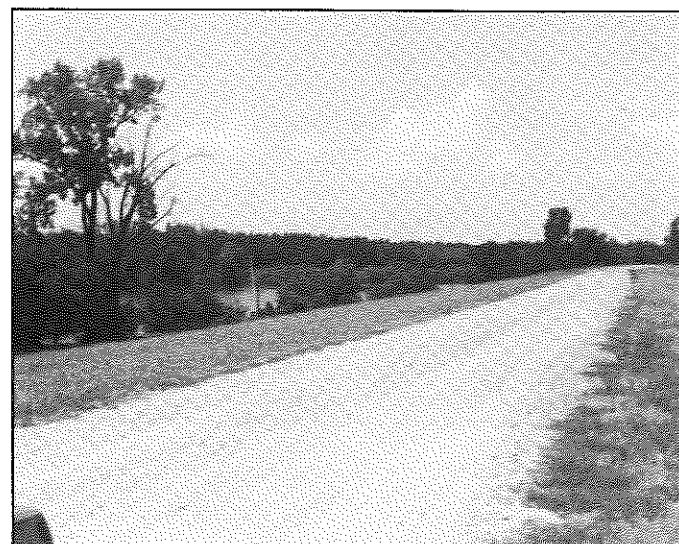




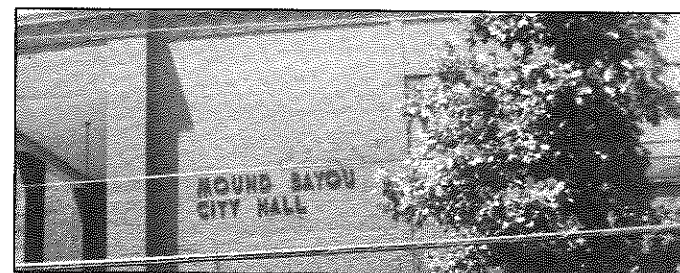
It took a day or two to get settled in Oxford, I had not been there in years. Downtown Oxford retains a charm for a deepsouth Southerner no longer a young man. The conference opened with Sr. Thea Bowman, "Faulkner and that Ole Time Religion." The conference never recovered. It was not only that Sr. Thea began with the subject of the conference ("Faulkner & Religion"); she never strayed from it. Sister's singing the spirituals and her commentary relating them to Faulkner's novels broke Kierkegaard's "The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle." Thea is a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration and directs a program of intercultural awareness for the Catholic Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi. Other high points, Virginia Hlavsa's "The Crucifixion in *Light in August*," an expansion and revision is carried in this issue; Giles Gunn, "The Heterodoxy of Faulkner's Christian Imagination: Faith and Family in *The Sound and the Fury*," Alfred Kazin, "Determinism, Compassion, and the God of Defeat," not unexpectedly broke new ground. William Styron's reading, introduced by Willie Morris, of *Sophie's Choice*, related Polish Catholicism to the religion and culture of the South. Saderholm and I talked about the inability or unwillingness of the conference to come to terms with the theme "Faulkner and Religion." The exceptions to this made our point. There was a lot of lecturing locked into deconstructionism, traces of the "criticism" which is not "new" anymore. That is why we



say the Conference never recovered from Sr. Thea's "Faulkner and That Ole Time Religion." We suspect the conference was too long with too many diversions that threaten *Elderhostel*. Leaving Oxford West for Old Man through Clarksville to pick up Mississippi Rt. 1 at the levee, driving south.



We keep going deeper into Mississippi. Along the two-lane marked "scenic" by AAA and Rand McNally paralleling Old Man and sometimes crossing and driving atop the levee (we talk about Faulkner's "tall convict" of *Old Man* seeing "a slowly and heavily roiling chocolate-frothy expanse broken only by a thin line a mile away as fragile in appearance as a single hair, which after a moment he recognised. *It's another levee*, he thought quietly. *That's what we look like from there.*") Being here re-defines "wilderness" for me as endless miles of cotton fields, interrupted only by kudzu-covered ruins of abandoned share-cropper cabins and sparse, dirt-poor villages. And Mound Bayou. (Mound Bayou is a striking exception, sporting an



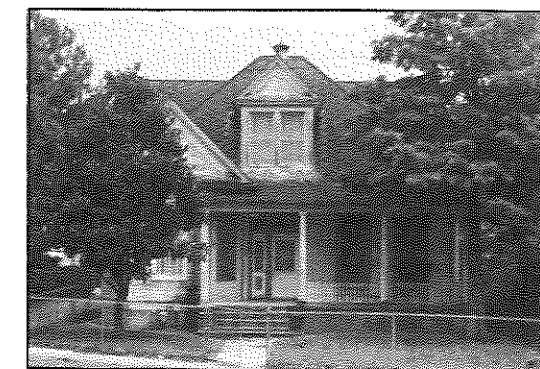
obviously new City Hall and Fire House and a water tower with a fresh paint job, possibly paid for by Kentucky's own Colonel Chicken; Jim explains Mound Bayou is special because Kelly Miller Smith was from here. If my memory is correct some decade or so ago a foundation gave Mound Bayou a grant for improvements, you're not looking at taxpayers' dollars. The last time I was through here, if my

memory serves, there was one service station/grocery and that was it, that and the shacks toward the river like we've seen since we hit Rt. 1. Mound Bayou must be distinguished as the only all-black town in the United States. It sure ain't now). We roll past millions of acres of cotton in our little air-conditioned Japanese time machine. What enslaved an entire peoples' hands and backs is tended today by a few machines and airplanes and their pilots. The pilgrimage through this country included sanctuaries and shrines of the *Move-ment* as Jim keeps putting it, Ruleville, Parchman (Mississippi State Penitentiary), Itta Bena, Belzoni, Tchula, Lexington.



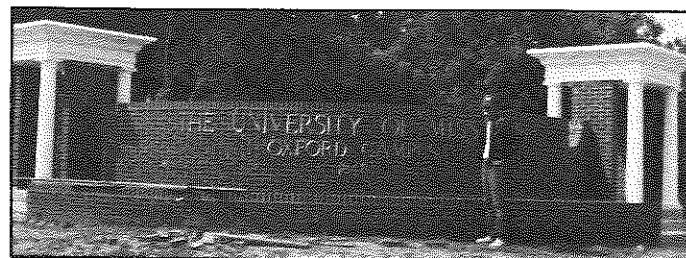
Somewhere (Jim remembers it north of Natchez) we make the requisite afternoon coffee/coke stop at a McDonalds, as is our tradition when traveling. Jim reiterates his vague threats to show me "some more scary little towns." Once again I make like it was more empty threats. Anyway, we find the McDonalds, maybe to avoid risking local fare, (if there was any left), maybe out of habit and the momentum of modern travel. (Motifs of modern travel are vinyl, climate control, speed. All invented by McDonalds.) Anyway, we run the gauntlet between air-conditioned environments, go to the counter, order, re-order as per McDonalds requirements, finally we take our vinyl Ronald McDonald seats and soak up the atmosphere. The tide of eaters, drinkers, bikers, couples, black, white, "other groups" flows easily through Ronny's ambience. Yeah, Jim it's like I was saying—there ain't no scary little towns any more; I got more in common with these folks than you do, I've never been here before, and you sound like them when you talk; I sure as hell don't—it's not Faulkner's South anymore, it's not Mrs. Hamer's, it's not even yours. The future is today, Jim, not tomorrow, godamit I'll jam down your throat that Ellul "commonplace" you've been jamming down mine for years "We are left with an organization of objects run by objects . . . there is no history anymore and we're thrashing the air with our fists." K-marts and Wal-marts and McDonalds and Wendys and Holiday and Red Roof Inns with Turnervision on the tube tuning out the local

stations. On the road again, we are reminded of a recent interview with Walker Percy because we were close to Percy's region if not Percy's South. " . . . The country is so homogenized now through the media, particularly through the television that my grandchildren in southern Louisiana are probably much more like the kids in Dubuque, Iowa, or Springfield, Massachusetts, or San Luis Obispo, than they were like each other a hundred years ago on isolated plantations." Jim puts the same thing before his students: "I know more about my grandparents and great-grandparents than you do and it's not your fault. It's the 'technological society.' Why *should* you know your history!"



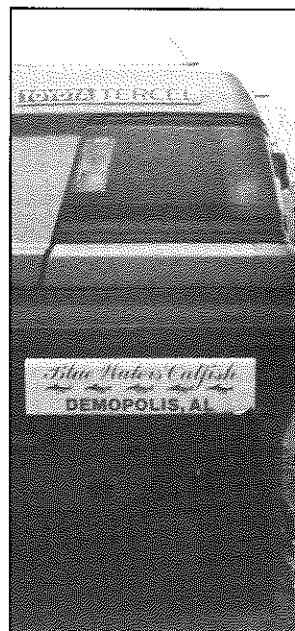
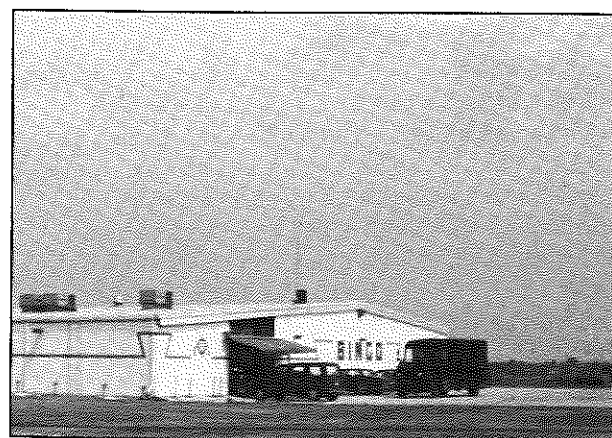
We stay in Natchez, which we like, then a side trip through St. Martinsville, Louisiana, to Morgan City, the village where Jim often spent part of the summers as a kid. We checked out the impressive home his grandfather had built the early part of the century. The house timbers were cypress to withstand the hurricanes. We walked down the adjacent alley which cut into a black neighborhood; *Brother Ray Charles' Alley*, Jim explains. I swear to you every evening a blind woodchopper would return home through the oyster-shelled road. Or, *Voodoo Alley*, this bent old woman would come every evening timed by dusk seven days a week carrying a a bucket full of dirt shoveled from underneath her shanty, they said, to dump it in the River. We also go to the cemetery, striking because of its size and the village so small. The Church built at the end of the last century, Jim says it always looked as if it was lifted from France and dropped in place.

We drive across the Gulf Coast of Mississippi and Alabama after we cross Lake Pontchartrain on a monument of concrete engineering. A month before we'd been camped on the Maine coast; now we "motelled" in Gulfport, a dispiriting environment. I am missing the mosquitoes. We leave for Pensacola and thirty or forty miles north where Jim had lived and worked as a young man. The population gets sparse where some of his family still lived. I suspect it hadn't changed much, but the garage where he had worked with his uncle (about whom he never tires of talking) is looking ramshackled, the "river swamp" tired and dirty, and the paper mill smells like a paper mill. Some of his re-lates



live in houses, some in house trailers. We visit the aunt with whom he'd lived, after he pulls his I'm-an-ole-Bibel-salesman-ma'am, trying to put this skinny young man thru' Bibel Skhool, can we come in a few minutes? They hadn't seen each other for years and she never me so it works about ten minutes, then, Dam you, Jim, you otta stop that stuff. He rides her about keeping the family's archives in black-plastic-garbage bags . . . Dam Granny . . . What kinda safety deposit box you got there? Its better'n keepin them in boxes under the beds if a sourkoons hit. A couple of hours devoted to swapping ribald tales about the old days, Jim and his uncle. She promises to send photographs that had turned up.

But we split again, now for the great foot-drag Northward Toward Residence. Somewhere in the wilderness of south Alabama, not designated scenic by AAA or Rand McNally, with evening approaching and foraging for accommodations becoming more intense we come upon a huge motel complex as if it had arisen out of the innards of the earth. Maybe a Best Western. We puzzle over the giant, empty oasis, until a postcard and some literature informs us that we had stumbled onto a huge Native American Bingo Palace, vacant and slumbering, awaiting the weekend raid by Pensacola, Mobile, Panama City retirees-slash-Bingo Warriors. We stay and eat and check out the phenomenon by the light of day the next morning; we and our camera were invited out by Security. We do not bingo.



A plan develops to implement the foot-dragging: go through the Black Belt and visit its capital, Demopolis. There are a lot of catfish farms in the Black Belt.

Then Northeast  
Toward Residence.

Gone With The  
Econburger Inn  
You Cant Go Home  
Again Even If It Ever  
Was There  
Or

Home Aint Allisway Where  
You're From or Where You Live(d)....

Now to a tradition with enthusiasm and thanksgiving. Thanks, low bows, sweep of the caps to, in no way following an order or priority: Berea/KAT without exception for patience and in some cases even moderate hard-work; especially Fred Oscanyan for imaginations, suggestions and implementations; Carol Falkenstine's labours and humour; Phyllis Gabbard the skilled and gracious commander of Draper Center and her staff who assumed responsibility for typesetting virtually this entire issue; we say virtually because a certain scientist Matthew Saderholm devoted three weekends plus near non-stop to typesetting and composing "About This Issue . . ." (we owe him thirty-two hours and close to 3400 words, subtracted from which are the hours lost tracing the KAT-KAR's delayed returns), Sandy Bolster Instructional Computer Programs Saves Lives; each of the contributors to this issue, for contributions and support. The Bouldins of Clarksdale, Mississippi, *pere et fils*, opened timely and cordial exchanges about Sr. Thea, Faulkner, Merton and Harvard, as if KAT/ South. Ann Abadie, Center for Southern Culture, Ole Miss, met last minute urgencies with charm, and in ways she knew not hovering "Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 1989." The monks, sisters, companions and priests and parish of New Skete for grace, graciousness, and groceries during the summer, January, and The Orthodox Superbowl Weekend. □

--JYH/MJS

--October 31, 1989

## POSTSCRIPTUM: DECEMBER 1989-JANUARY 1990

Bill Stringfellow would say . . . it happens . . . we were with New Skete during January, on retreat as it were, for the Profession of Sister Rachel and Brother Paul the end of the month. It also happens . . . the readings for Vespers on the eve of the Feast of The Theophany held passages from Exodus, the Psalms, I and II Kings (a lot to do with water and mantles). Into Vespers I gave Mark the elbow, as they say in novels, creased brows and arched eyebrows to alert him. . . . I know what's coming, I know what's coming next. It did. And I couldn't leave it alone, played around after dinner with Paul and other brothers. Mark looked at icons. Paul fired, Well if you *didn't* know what was coming, it means you're not reading The Book of Prayer . . . Well, I been awful busy laterly. . . . Too busy for The Book of Prayer ? ? ? . . . I knew what was coming. . . . damit . . . I knew what was coming. . . .

It was as if we crossed our way into the Vespers accounting the twelve-month. Yea. . . Well. . . the details ongoing, tinkering, sounds something like

The Chief-of Staff and the Centurion, engage—not "involved"—the hourly, daily, weekly, ongoing, blow-by blows in—*Katallagete*, but only as they appear, not sought. After all, there are other considerations in a fallen (or at least ambiguous) world. The Apostle reminds us we must work to eat, (II Thess. 3:10-12), Engagement may or may not include moving assorted vehicles for short, intermediate, long-distance and/or endurance drives to agreed on book-stores, grocery stores, pet stores, shoe stores, fast-food joints, motels, carefully selected restaurants, farm stores, in-

surance stores, banks, money machines. To agreed on Monasteries, Conferences, Study Centers, cathedrals and white-framed churches. Agreed on, to Oxford, and other points in Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, the Florida Panhandle, Alabama, river swamps therein but not excluding dry-lands, levees, kudzu territory, dirt poor villages, service stations, pool halls, Downeast Maine, Wrigley Field. Each and all the above.

The Chief of Staff hovers ugly disposition over the Draper Office, paper and money in route to our Comptroller. Controls the godamMac; typesets, proofs, edits, designs camera-ready boards for Bob Smith at Marshall & Bruce; writes—the Centurion has made writing heavy. Crisis-management, technical support, moral support, no-visible-means-of support. Responsibility for the assorted "phuns" and scattered "rumms" KAT-connected.

In two hundred words, Chief of Staff calmly as the Centurion engage with KAT-- never a periodical or institution, with luck, a pres-ence, an interesting way to spend time in "The Present Age," worth "the hassle," if the gift of faith keeps the sense of humour on straight.

Baptisms and Chrismations preceded Sister Rachel and Brother Paul's Profession. Not in our sentences compromised by recitation or description. Being-there is *being*. "There is humour in the vestibule, but only faith and prayer in the temple." □

JYH/MJS

February 2, 1990

Feast of Encounter



# Humour and Faith

Reinhold Niebuhr

*He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Ps. 2:4*

## I

This word of the Second Psalm is the only instance in the Bible in which laughter is attributed to God. God is not frequently thought of as possessing a sense of humour, though that quality would have to be attributed to perfect personality. Critics regard Scripture as deficient in the sense of humour and they can point to the fact that there is little laughter in the Bible. Why is it that Scripture, though filled with rejoicings and songs of praise, is not particularly distinguished for the expression of laughter? There are many sayings of Jesus which betray a touch of ironic humour; but on the whole one must agree with the critics who do not find much humour or laughter in the Bible.

This supposed defect will, however, appear less remarkable if the relation of humour to faith is understood. Humour is, in fact, a prelude to faith; and laughter is the beginning of prayer. Laughter must be heard in the outer courts of religion; and the echoes of it should resound in the sanctuary; but there is no laughter in the holy of holies. There laughter is swallowed up in prayer and humour is fulfilled by faith.

The intimate relation between humour and faith is derived from the fact that both deal with the incongruities of our existence. Humour is concerned with the immediate incongruities of life and faith with the ultimate ones. Both humour and faith are expressions of the freedom of the human spirit, of its capacity to stand outside of life, and itself, and view the whole scene. But any view of the whole immediately creates the problem of how the incongruities of life are to be dealt with; for the effort to understand the life, and our place in it, confronts us with inconsistencies and incongruities which do not fit into any neat picture of the whole. Laughter is our reaction to immediate incongruities and those which do not affect us essentially. Faith is the only possible response to the ultimate incongruities of existence, which threaten the very meaning of our life.

We laugh at what? At the sight of a fool upon the throne of the king; or the proud man suffering from some indignity; or the child introducing its irrelevancies into the conversation of the mature. We laugh at the juxtaposition of

things which do not fit together. A boy slipping on the ice is not funny. Slipping on the ice is funny only if it happens to one whose dignity is upset. A favourite device of dramatists, who have no other resources of humour, is to introduce some irrelevant interest into the central theme of the drama by way of the conversation of maid or butler. If this irrelevance is to be really funny, however, it must have some more profound relation to the theme than the converser intended. This is to say that humour manages to resolve incongruities by the discovery of another level of congruity. We laugh at the proud man slipping on the ice, not merely because the contrast between his dignity and his undignified plight strikes us as funny; but because we feel that his discomfiture is a poetically just rebuke to his dignity. Thus we deal with immediate incongruities, in which we are not too seriously involved and which open no gap in the coherence of life in such a way as to threaten us essentially. But there are profound incongruities which contain such a threat. Our very position in the universe is incongruous. That is the problem of faith, and not of humour. We are so great and yet so small, so significant and yet so insignificant. "On the one hand," writes Edward Bellamy, in *The Religion of Solidarity*, "is the personal life of man, an atom, a grain of sand on a boundless shore, a bubble on a foam-flecked ocean, a life bearing a proportion to the mass of past, present and future, so infinitesimal as to defy the imagination. On the other hand is a certain other life, as it were a spark of the universal life, insatiable in aspiration, greedy of infinity, asserting solidarity with all things and all existence, even while subject to the limitations of space and time." That is the contrast.



REINHOLD NIEBUHR'S "Humour and Faith" is from *Discerning the Signs of the Times* (1946), one of two score and more volumes in theology written over four decades of teaching and service to the church. ©Yale University Press, used by permission.

When we survey the world we seem to be the very centre of it; and our mind appears to be the unifying power which makes sense out of the whole. But reduced to the limits of our animal existence, we are a little animalcule, preserving a precarious moment of existence within the vastness of space and time. There is a profound incongruity between the "inner" and the "outer" world, or between the world as viewed from our perspective, and we in the world as viewed from a more ultimate perspective. The incongruity becomes even more profound when it is considered that it is the same man who assumes the ultimate perspective from which he finds himself so insignificant.

Philosophers seek to overcome this basic incongruity by reducing one world to the dimension of the other; or raising one perspective to the height of the other. But neither a purely naturalistic nor a consistently idealistic system of philosophy is ever completely plausible. There are ultimate incongruities of life which can be resolved by faith, but not by reason. Reason can look at them only from one standpoint or another, thereby denying the incongruities which it seeks to solve. They are also too profound to be resolved or dealt with by laughter. If laughter seeks to deal with the ultimate issues of life, it turns into a bitter humour. This means that it has been overwhelmed by the incongruity. Laughter is thus not merely a vestibule to faith but also a "no-man's-land" between faith and despair. We laugh cheerfully at the incongruities on the surface of life; but if we have no other resource but humour to deal with those which reach below the surface, our laughter becomes an expression of our sense of the meaninglessness of life.

## II

Laughter is a sane and healthful response to our innocent foibles; and even to some which are not innocent. All betray moods and affectations, conceits and idiosyncrasies which could become the source of great annoyance to us if we took them too seriously. It is better to laugh at them. A sense of humour is indispensable to those who have the duty of organizing their fellows in common endeavours. It reduces the frictions of life and makes our foibles tolerable.

There is in the laughter with which we observe and greet the foibles of others a nice mixture of mercy and judgment, of censure and forbearance. We would not laugh if we regarded these foibles as altogether fitting and proper. There is judgment, therefore, in our laughter. But we also prove by the laughter that we do not take the annoyance too seriously. However, if our fellows commit a serious offence against the common good, laughter no longer avails. If we continue to indulge in it, the element of forbearance is completely eliminated from it. Laughter against real evil is bitter. Such bitter laughter of derision has its uses as an instrument of condemnation. But there is no power in it to deter the evil against which it is directed.

There were those who thought that we could laugh Mussolini and Hitler out of court. Laughter has sometimes contributed to the loss of prestige of dying oligarchies and social systems. Thus Cervantes' *don Quixote* contributed to the decline of feudalism, and Boccaccio's *Decameron* helped to signal the decay of medieval asceticism. But laughter alone never destroys a great seat of power and authority in history. Its efficacy is limited to preserving the self-respect of the slave against the master. It does not extend to the destruction of slavery. Thus all the victims of tyranny availed themselves of the weapon of wit to preserve their sense of personal self-respect. Laughter provided them with a little private world in which they could transvalue the values of the tyrant, and reduce his pompous power to the level of the ridiculous. Yet there is evidence that the most insufferable forms of tyranny (as in the concentration camps, for instance) could not be ameliorated by laughter.

Laughter may turn to bitterness when it faces serious evil, partly because it senses its impotence. But, in any case, serious evil must be seriously dealt with. The bitterness of derision is serious enough; but where is the resource of forgiveness to come from? It was present in the original forbearance of laughter, but it cannot be brought back into the bitterness of derision. The contradiction between judgment and mercy cannot be resolved by humour, but only by vicarious pain.

Thus we laugh at our children when they betray the jealous conceits of childhood. These are the first buds of sin which grow in the soil of the original sin of our common humanity. But when sin has conceived and brought forth its full fruit, our laughter is too ambiguous to deal with the child's offence; or if it is not ambiguous it becomes too bitter. If we retain the original forbearance of laughter in our judgment it turns into harmful indulgence. Parental judgment is always confronted with the necessity of relating rigorous judgment creatively to the goodness of mercy. That relation can be achieved only as the parent himself suffers under the judgments which are exacted. Not humour but the Cross is the meeting point of justice and mercy, once both judgment and mercy have become explicit. Laughter can express both together, when neither is fully defined. But when it becomes necessary to define each explicitly, laughter can no longer contain them both. Mercy is expelled and only bitterness remains.



What is true of our judgments of each other is true of the judgment of God. In the word of our text God is pictured laughing at man and having him in derision because of the vanity of man's imagination and pretensions. There is no suggestion of a provisional geniality in this divine laughter. Derisiveness is pure judgment. It is not possible to resolve the contradiction between mercy and judgment, on the level of the divine, through humour, because the divine judgment is ultimate judgment. That contradiction, which remains an unsolved mystery in the Old Testament, is resolved only as God is revealed in Christ. There is no humour but suffering in that revelation. There is a good deal of ironic humour in the sayings of Christ. But there is no humour in the scene of Christ upon the Cross. The only humour on Calvary is the derisive laughter of those who cried, "He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the son of God let him come down from the Cross"; and the ironic inscription on the Cross, ordered by Pilate: "The King of the Jews." These ironic and derisive observations were the natural reactions of common sense to dimensions of revelation which transcend common sense. Since they could not be comprehended by faith, they prompted ironic laughter.

There is no humour in the Cross because the justice and the mercy of God are fully revealed in it. In that revelation God's justice is made the more terrible because the sin of man is disclosed in its full dimension. It is a rebellion against God from which God Himself suffers. God cannot remit the consequences of sin; yet He does show mercy by taking the consequences upon and into Himself. This is the main burden of the disclosure of God in Christ. This is the final clue to the mystery of the divine character. Mercy and justice are provisionally contained in laughter; and the contradiction between them is tentatively resolved in the sense of humour. But the final resolution of justice, fully developed, and of mercy, fully matured, is possible only when the sharp edge of justice is turned upon the executor of judgment without being blunted. This painful experience of vicarious suffering is far removed from laughter. Only an echo of the sense of humour remains in it. The echo is the recognition in the sense of humour that judgment and mercy belong together, even though they seem to be contradictory.

But there is no knowledge in the sense of humour of how the two are related to each other and how the contradiction between them is to be resolved.

### III

The sense of humour is even more important provisionally in dealing with our own sins than in dealing with the sins of others. Humour is a proof of the capacity of the self to gain a vantage point from which it is able to look at itself. The sense of humour is thus a by-product of self-transcendence. People with a sense of humour do not take themselves too seriously. They are able to "stand off" from themselves, see themselves in perspective and recognize the ludicrous and absurd aspects of their pretensions. All of us ought to be ready to laugh at ourselves because all of us are a little funny in our foibles, conceits and pretensions. What is funny about us is precisely that we take ourselves too seriously. We are rather insignificant little bundles of energy and vitality in a vast organization of life. But we pretend that we are the very centre of this organization. This pretension is ludicrous; and its absurdity increases with our lack of awareness of it. The less we are able to laugh at ourselves the more it becomes necessary and inevitable that others laugh at us.

It is significant that little children are really very sober though they freely indulge in a laughter which expresses a pure animal joy of existence. But they do not develop the capacity of real humour until the fifth or sixth year, at which time they may be able to laugh at themselves and at others. At about this age their intense preoccupation with self and with an immediate task at hand is partly mitigated. The sense of humour grows, in other words, with the capacity of self-transcendence. If we can gain some perspective upon our own self we are bound to find the self's pretensions a little funny.

This means that the ability to laugh at oneself is the prelude to the sense of contrition. Laughter is a vestibule to the temple of confession. But laughter is not able to deal with the problem of the sins of the self in any ultimate way. If we become fully conscious of the tragedy of sin we recognize that our preoccupation with self, our exorbitant demands upon life, our insistence that we receive more attention than our needs deserve, affect our neighbours harmfully and defraud them of their rightful due. If we recognize the real evil of sin, laughter cannot deal with the problem. If we continue to laugh after having recognized the depth of evil our laughter becomes the instrument of irresponsibility. Laughter is not only the vestibule of the temple of confession, but the no-man's-land between cynicism and contrition. Laughter may express a mood which takes neither the self nor life seriously. If we take life seriously but ourselves not too seriously we cease to laugh. The contradiction in man between "the good that he would and does not do, and the evil that he would not do, and does" is no laughing matter.

There is another dimension in genuine contrition which laughter does not contain. It is the awareness of being judged from beyond ourselves. There is something more than self-judgment in genuine contrition. "For me it is a small thing to be judged of men," declares St. Paul, "neither judge I myself; for I know nothing against myself; he who judges me is the Lord." In an ultimate sense the self never knows anything against itself. The self of to-day may judge the self's actions of yesterday as evil. But that means that the self of to-day is the good self. We are able to judge our actions through self-judgment. But we do not become aware of the deep root of evil actions in such judgments. We may judge our sins, but we do not judge ourselves as sinners. The knowledge that we are sinners, that inordinate desires spring from a heart inordinately devoted to itself, is a knowledge which is never achieved except in prayer. Then we experience with St. Paul that "he who judges us is the Lord." There is no laughter in that experience. There is only pain. The genuine joy of reconciliation with God, which is possible only as the fruit of genuine repentance, is a joy which stands beyond laughter—though it need not exclude laughter.

To suggest that the sense of humour is the beginning but not the end of a proper humility, does not mean that the final fruit of true contrition destroys all vestiges of the seed from which it sprang. The saintliest men frequently have a humorous glint in their eyes. They retain the capacity to laugh at both themselves and at others. They do not laugh in their prayers because it is a solemn experience to be judged of God and to stand under the scrutiny of Him from whom no secrets are hid. But the absence of laughter in the most ultimate experience of life does not preclude the presence of laughter as a suffused element in all experience. There is indeed proper laughter on the other side of the experience of repentance. It is the laughter of those who have been released both from the tyranny of the law and from the slavery of pretending to be better than they are. To know oneself a sinner, to have no illusions about the self, and no inclination to appear better than we are, either in the sight of man or of God, and to know oneself forgiven and released from sin is the occasion for a new joy. This joy expresses itself in an exuberance of which laughter is not the only, but is certainly one, expression.

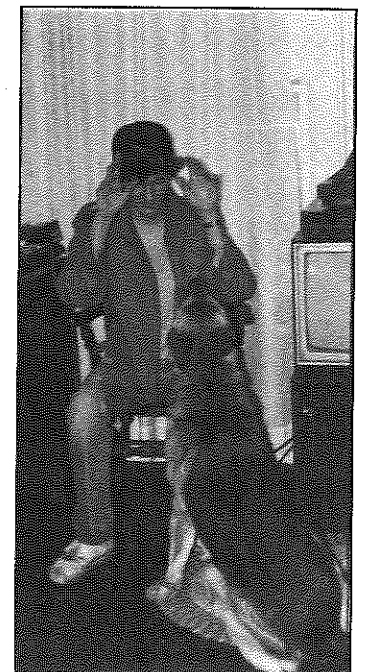
### IV

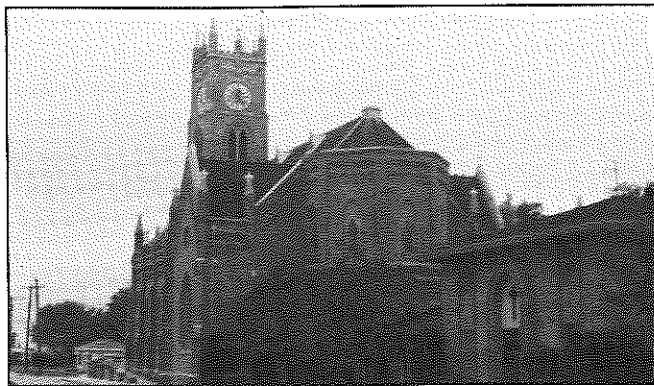
Humour is a reaction to the incongruities in the character of self and its neighbours, a healthy, but an ultimately unavailing, method of dealing with the evils of human nature. But we face other incongruities than those which human foibles and weaknesses present. Human existence itself is filled with incongruities. Life does not make sense as easily as those philosophers, who think they have charted and comprehended everything in a nice system of rationality would have us believe. Our life is really based upon a vast incongruity.

We are creatures who share all the weaknesses of the other creatures of the world. Yet we are sublime creatures who hold the ages within our memory and touch the fringes of the eternal in our imagination. When we look into the world within we find depths within depths of mystery which are never completely fathomed. We are spirit not a body and soul; and among the qualities of our spirit is the capacity to regard ourselves and the world; and to speculate on the meaning of the whole. We are, when we are the observer, the very centre of the universe. Yet we "bring our years to an end like a tale that is told." We "groweth up like grass in the morning which in the evening is cut down and withereth." The brevity of human existence is the most vivid expression and climax of human weakness.

The incongruity of our greatness and weakness, of our mortality and immortality, is the source of our temptation to evil. Some seek to escape from their greatness to their weakness; they try to deny the freedom of their spirit in order to achieve the serenity of nature. Some seek to escape from their weakness to their greatness. But these simple methods of escape are unavailing. The effort to escape into the weakness of nature leads not to the desired serenity, but to sensuality. The effort to escape from weakness to greatness leads not to the security but to the evils of greed and lust for power, or to the opposite evils of a spirituality which denies the creaturely limitations of human existence.

The philosophies of the ages have sought to bridge the chasm between the inner and the outer world, between the world of thought in which we are so great and the world of physical extension in which we are so small and impotent. But philosophy cannot bridge the chasm. It can only pretend to do so by reducing one world to the dimensions of the other. Thus naturalists, materialists, mechanists and all philosophers, who view the world as primarily a system of physical relationships, construct a universe of meaning in which we in the full dimension of spirit can find no home. The idealistic philosophers, on the other hand, construct a world of rational coherence in which mind is the very stuff of order, the very foundation of existence. But their systems do not do justice to the large areas of chaos in the world; and they fail to give an adequate account of us, something less, as well as something more, than mind.





The sense of humour is, in many respects, a more adequate resource for the incongruities of life, than the spirit of philosophy. If we are able to laugh at the curious quirks of fortune in which the system of order and meaning which each life constructs within and around itself is invaded, we do not at least make the mistake of prematurely reducing the irrational to a nice system. Things "happen" to us. We make our plans for a career and sickness frustrates us. We plan our life and war reduces all plans to chaos. The storms and furies of the world of nature, which can so easily reduce our private schemes to confusion, do, of course, have their own laws. They "happen" according to a discernible system of causality. There is no question that there are systems of order in the world. But it is not so easy to discern a total system of order and meaning which will comprehend the various levels of existence in an orderly whole.

To meet the disappointments and frustrations of life, the irrationalities and contingencies with laughter is a high form of wisdom. Such laughter does not obscure or defy the dark irrationality; it merely yields to it without too much emotion and friction. A humorous acceptance of fate is really the expression of a high form of self-detachment. If we do not take ourselves too seriously, if we have some sense of the precarious nature of the human enterprise, we prove that we are looking at the whole drama of life, not merely from the circumscribed point of our own interests, but from some farther and higher vantage point. One thinks of the profound wisdom which underlies the capacity of laughter in black people. Confronted with the cruelties of slavery, and socially too impotent to throw off the yoke, they learned to make their unpalatable situation more sufferable by laughter. There was, of course, a deep pathos mixed with the humour, a proof of the fact the laughter had reached its very limit.

There is indeed a limit to laughter in dealing with life's frustrations. We can laugh at all of life's surface irrationalities. We preserve our sanity the more surely if we do not try to reduce the whole crazy-quilt of events in which we move to a premature and illusory order. But the ultimate incongruities of human existence cannot be "laughed off." We cannot laugh at death. We do try, of course.

A war era is particularly fruitful of Galgenhumor (gallows humour). Soldiers are known on occasion to engage in hysterical laughter when nerves are tense before the battle. They speak facetiously of the possible dire fate which might befall this or that man of the company. "Sergeant," a soldier is reported to have said before a recent battle, "don't let this little fellow go into battle before me. He isn't big enough to stop the bullet meant for me." The joke was received with uproarious good humour by the assembled comrades. But when the "little fellow" died in battle the next day, everyone felt a little ashamed of the joke. At any rate, it was quite inadequate to deal with the depth and breadth of the problem of death.

If we persist in laughter when dealing with the final problem of human existence, when we turn life into a comedy, we also reduce it to meaninglessness. That is why laughter, when pressed to solve the ultimate issue, turns into a vehicle of bitterness rather than joy. To laugh at life in the ultimate sense means to scorn it. There is a note of derision in that laughter and an element of despair in that derision.

Just as laughter is the "no-man's land" between cynicism and contrition when we deal with the incongruous element of evil in our own soul, so is it also the area between despair and faith when dealing with evil and incongruity in the world about us. Our provisional amusement with the irrational and unpredictable fortunes which invade the order and purpose of our life must move either toward bitterness or faith, not when we consider this or that frustration and this or that contingent event but when we are forced to face the issue of the basic incongruity of death.

Either we have a faith from the standpoint of which we are able to say, "I'm persuaded, that neither death nor life . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," (Rom. 8: 38-39) or we are overwhelmed by the incongruity of death and are forced to say with Ecclesiastes: "I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men—that they might see that they themselves are beasts, for that which befallth the sons of men befallth beasts;—as the one dieth so dieth the other; yea they all have one breath; so that a man has no pre-eminence above the beast; for all is vanity" (Eccles. 3:18-19).

The final problem of human existence is derived from the fact that in one context and from one perspective man has no pre-eminence over the beast; and yet from another perspective his pre-eminence is very great. No beast comes to the melancholy conclusion that "all is vanity"; for the purposes of its life do not outrun its power, and death does not therefore invade its life as an irrelevance. Furthermore, it has no prevision of its own end and is therefore not tempted to melancholy. Man's melancholy over the prospect of death is the proof of his partial transcendence over the natural process which ends in death. But this is only a partial transcendence and man's power is not great enough to secure his own immortality.

Our problem, perfectly and finally symbolized in the fact of death, can be solved neither by proving that we have no pre-eminence above the beast, nor yet by proving that our pre-eminence is a guarantee that death has no final dominion over us. We are both great and small, both strong and weak, both involved in and free of the limits of nature; and we are a unity of strength and weakness, of spirit and creatureliness. There is therefore no possibility of extricating ourselves by our own power from the predicament of our amphibious state.

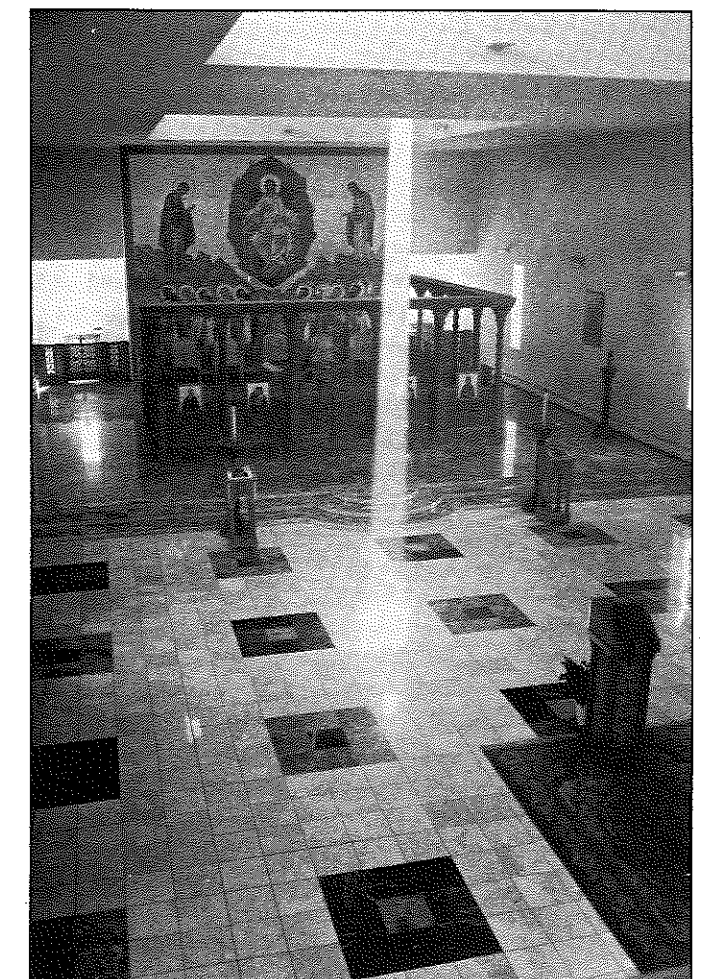
The Christian faith declares that the ultimate order and meaning of the world lies in the power and wisdom of God who is both Lord of the whole world of creation and the Father of human spirits. It believes that the incongruities of human existence are finally overcome by the power and the love of God and that the love which Christ revealed is finally sufficient to overcome the contradiction of death.

This faith is not some vestigial remnant of a credulous and pre-scientific age with which "scientific" generations may dispense. There is no power in any science or philosophy, whether in a pre- or post-scientific age, to leap the chasm of incongruity by pure thought. Thought which begins on one side of the chasm can do no more than deny the reality on the other side. It seeks either to prove that death is no reality because spirit is eternal, or that spirit is not eternal because death is a reality. But the real situation is that each of us, as a part of the natural world, brings our years to an end like a tale that is told; and that we as a free spirit find the brevity of our years incongruous and death an irrationality; and that we as a unity of body and spirit can neither by taking thought reduce the dimension of his life to the limit of nature, nor yet raise it to the dimension of pure spirit. Either our incomplete and frustrated life is completed by a power greater than our own, or it is not completed.

Faith is therefore the final triumph over incongruity, the final assertion of the meaningfulness of existence. There is no other triumph and will be none, no matter how much human knowledge is enlarged. Faith is the final assertion of the freedom of the human spirit, but also the final acceptance of the weakness of man or woman. It is the final solution of the problem of life through the disavowal of any final solutions in our grasp.

Insofar as the sense of humour is a recognition of incongruity, it is more profound than any philosophy which seeks to devour incongruity in reason. But the sense of humour remains healthy only when it deals with immediate issues and faces the obvious and surface irrationalities. It must move toward faith or sink into despair when the ultimate issues are raised.

That is why there is laughter in the vestibule of the temple, the echo of laughter in the temple itself, but only faith and prayer, and no laughter, in the holy of holies. □



# Waking Up:

## Quixotic Homily on Education and Social Class

James H. Stam

*The Lessons:* The first lesson is a fragment from Heraclitus the Ephesian: "For those who are awake there is one common world (*kósmos*) but every sleeper wanders aside into a private [world] of his own (*idiôn*)" (§89).<sup>1</sup> A more recent word is from Bishop Herluf Jensen: "Commit yourselves to quality education; but don't define 'quality' by the way students come into the college; define it by the way they go out."<sup>2</sup>

Our text is from Plato's *Republic*, Book VII, the "cave story." "Imagine," says Socrates, "our nature with respect to education (*paideia*) or the lack of education as being something like this. Picture human beings as though in an underground cave-like dwelling. . . . They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bonds to turn their heads all the way around. . . ." Behind them is a fire, before that a bridge over which conjurer-puppeteers carry dolls and models so as to cast moving shadows on the far wall and ventriloquists make these sound alive. The people enchained below, like television viewers and mediated publics, are manipulated by images. They are not dumb or untalented: they carefully name the figures and measure the directions of the moving shadows and make generalizations and predictions. Today Plato might give them pocket calculators, more likely fully automated data processing systems. Their problem is not lack of intelligence but a lack of education: they apply their skills to shadows only. One of the prisoners is released. Having lived only by indirect lighting, when she—we do know names of women in Plato's Academy<sup>3</sup>—turns around, she is blinded by the fire: the first effect of real education is confusion and pain. Gradually adjusting, she sees the exploitation. There is a "philosopher-teacher" present, but it requires no teacher to say, "Don't you see what is going on?" The liberated prisoner sees it, because she is in a position to see it, not because she is told. She wants to go up on the bridge, where the action is—whether to join the ma-

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While composing this, Professor Stam was teaching a freshman writing course to a "rainbow coalescence" of students: one Haitian, a Puerto Rican, a Jamaican, a Greek-American, an Italian-, Scandinavian-, German- and Slovak-American, two Irish Americans, a Jew, and several other American blacks and whites—a "class class" to whom he fondly dedicates this piece.

nipulators or to overthrow them, Socrates does not say. But the teacher drags this half-emancipated one out of the cave and into the sunlight, and there is again blindness, but gradual adjustment to the light of the outside world and, finally, contemplation of the sun itself. But—I now quote Allan Bloom's literal translation, perhaps the best thing he has published<sup>4</sup>—"if such a man were to come down again and sit in the same seat, on coming suddenly from the sun, wouldn't his eyes get infected with darkness" and "wouldn't he be the source of laughter. . . ? And if they were somehow able to get their hands on and kill the man who attempts to release and lead them up, wouldn't they kill him?" (516e-517a).

### Glosses on the text

- 1) "Philosophy," "literature," "science," "art" I will always use in the general sense. Plato never took philosophers to be a "class" or philosophy a department. He openly embraced all "lovers of wisdom" with that term.
- 2) The cave represents, among other things, the world of images and experience without theory, also the realm of the city or society. Philosophical education is, initially, out of society, not into it.
- 3) You can't tell people things they can't see in the first place. Philosophical teachers help students to change perspective and not too much more.
- 4) Real education is painful; real teaching involves the risk of death.

### Some inspirational stories, edifying discourses

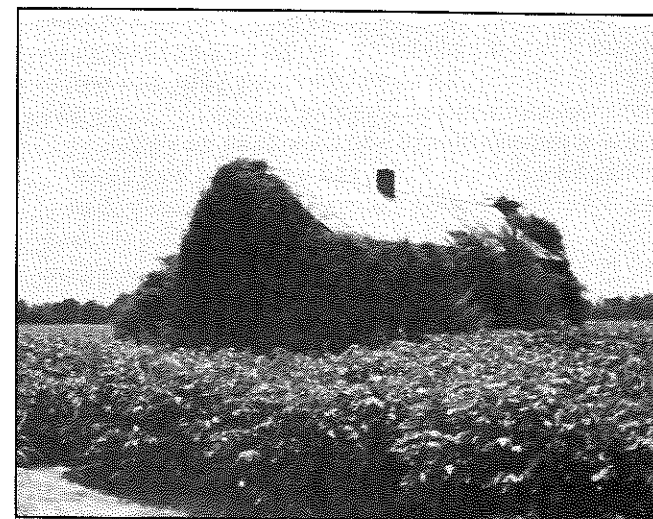
In 1966 Ernesto Cardenal went from a Trappist monastery in Kentucky to the island of Solentiname in a remote corner of Lake Nicaragua. Sunday mass, communion, became shared discussion of the contemporary relevance of the Gospels with the unschooled, illiterate peasants. The Reverend Cardenal enjoined: "You are made in the image of God and that means you have talents and creative powers: Among you there are poets, artists, and musicians. Try these things and find out who you are." From his encouragement came, in addition to literacy, a now famous group of painters, activists in a national school of poetry, and fighters in a bloodied revolution, people for whom education meant life and liberty.<sup>5</sup> It helps for the story, of course, if the teller believes in the contemporary relevance of the Gospels.

In Louisville, Kentucky, in the early 1980s, some kindergarten teachers remarked that many pupils came to school with some ability to read. They tried an experiment: assume five-year olds already know how to read and write, ask them to, and see what happens. They were astonished at the number of children who had done their own "reading readiness," who used letters in phonetic combinations: many were quite fluent readers. (Incidentally, this had less to do with *Sesame Street* than soup can labels.) The remarkable thing about this experiment was that the relative abilities of the children were not class-bound or race-bound: a roughly proportional number of blacks and whites, rich and poor, could read or write or read with some fluency. Given the fact that average S.A.T. scores, after schooling, correlate with nothing so much as zip codes—relative affluence, class—one wonders whether education hurts.

Joe Murphy, now Chancellor of the City University of New York, came to Queens College as President in the mid-1970s, after the introduction of "open admissions." He decided that he would best understand his institution if he taught Basic Skills students. And so he did, using as his text the first five books of Plato's *Republic*. According to his own report, there was nothing in that text which those students could not relate to life in New York City and they were "high" on the fact that they were doing something "real" and reading something "tough."

The story of Jaime Escalante in *Stand and Deliver* can restore one's faith in teaching and is not so much a lesson in how to teach or how to teach math as it is in how to be a teacher. It should at least lay to rest the common prejudice of our profession: it's the students' fault, or the parents' fault, or the students' fault, or the administrators' or legislators' or society's fault. But never, never, ours. *O tempora, o morons!*

*Preliminary exegesis.* What makes this story of inner-city Chicanos so inspiring? First, the kids learn, successfully, something most of us consider difficult, the calculus. We would not go see a movie about a high school teacher who taught college math readiness, attitude adjustment, and study skills. It has to be "real." At the same time, informal support systems play a part in the ultimate success, as does the fact that Señor Escalante is from the Hispanic community. Second, his repeated message is: "This is simple." When we understand the simplicity behind a system, we can elaborate its complexities—and not until. Third, the style is no-nonsense tough love. No sweet pep or coachly sermons: "Everybody can do the calculus who really wants to—it's like swimming." There has already been preselection, but not based on sex, race, class, or good behavior. In Louisville, not all children had equal ability, but their ability was not foreordained by advantages of class or determinants of race. The Educational Testing Service is understandably defensive about its role in the A.P. Calculus story, but the double-edged moral was stated by Escalante: "The kids can now distrust the system they have just qualified to be a part of." That can be a positive lesson.



So much for noble stories. But, if education is such a potent weapon for justice and equality, why do the American poor get poorer and the rich get richer despite universal education? Why do kids go into the educational meat grinder with signs of equal abilities across classes and races and come out in pricey grades of prime and choice down to the barely employable cut-ups and cut-outs? An answer to the question, "What are we doing wrong?"—or, perhaps, "What are we doing exactly right for certain class-interested purposes?"<sup>6</sup>—would be interesting, but I will leave that rhetorical.

We can nonetheless try to get straight—and honest—the terms in which we talk about our goals for our students: We who teach in urban America, we who have the disadvantaged as our students, perhaps all of us who are not teaching in the dozen or two institutions which, according to Allan Bloom's repeated formula, are the ones that really count: the ivies, the little ivies, the state ivies, and a couple of cousins, at one of which Bloom teaches. Presumably the rest of us just get educational blood transfusions, I.V.'s from the ivies. Neither we as teachers, nor the poor, nor blacks, nor other groups of the oppressed or alienated will be helped by nice talk and terms clanging with good intention and echoing no result. Thus I would speak briefly, should readers humor my ill moods, of

### Shibboleths, Buzz Words, and other Redundancies

*Empowerment:* The term is from Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator, exiled and threatened, whose methods were used in Nicaragua in the Año de Alfabetización, 1980—a campaign led by Fernando Cardenal, Ernesto's brother, also a priest—the year in which Nicaragua nearly doubled its literacy rate.<sup>7</sup> Impressive stuff.

But let us be clear that the formulators of this position would have limited sympathy with what most of us do, that we cannot enjoy our bourgeois comforts and occupy their

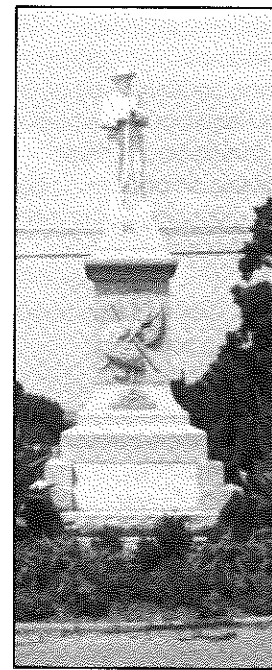
platform simultaneously: radical chic works better at cocktail parties than in classrooms. Before quoting Freire or the Cardinals liberally, we should remember what their revolutionary dedication meant. Some of us have had happy satisfaction at students of ours who came from the ghetto, worked through Basic Skills, and went on to Wall Street jobs. Liberation theologians would not necessarily share that joy: they might say that we are compounding the problem. Not that the language of "empowerment" was dishonest from its first framers; but we cannot buy into costly rhetoric at bargain commitments.<sup>8</sup>

*Education as liberation, liberal learning as liberating.* I believe in this and will return to it, but it too can be an empty slogan on a wind-swept banner. The most coherent version, with most fresh air and least flags to be pledged allegiance, connects liberation with play.<sup>9</sup> The original true form is from Plato, who puns on the word for "culture" or "education" (*paideia*) and (*paidea*), "child's play." Real, philosophical, education is a game. English "knowledge" combines two roots, one going back to Greek and Latin words for "know" — *gignōsko*, *gnōsis* [agnostic]; *cognosco*, [cognition]—and the other from Anglo-Saxon *-lāc*, "play, sport, dance."

*Multi-cultural education and the global village.* Before pouring pious praise, let us realize that the terms are self-contradictory: the "global village" — McLuhan's vision of a revival of pre-polis unities in a post-historical age — depends not only on instant telecommunications but on mass markets and linguistic imperialism: let everybody have English at least as favored second language. Multi-cultural education worth the name, however, would start with the serious study of languages in their polychrome variety, perforce more than the two-year whiff and sneeze of college requirements. After the language, the exploration of the art, literature, music, politics, and other aspects of a culture. The present platter for multi-cultural education seems to be a secular inverse of old Roman emperor worship. The *Pax Romana* assured that every tribe or nationality could maintain its language, gods, laws, and customs so long as token worship was accorded to the emperor; the modern version guarantees this bill of fairness: no one shall abridge the right to eat pirogis once a month at church suppers so long as the entire congregation has Burger King as standard fare.

*Information.* It is ironic that the term "data" — literally "the given things," which should thus be beyond dispute — has come to refer to more or less any tidbits fed into something by somebody which may or may not have any relevance to anything. "Information" is over-rated in any case. Lyndon Johnson used to plead: "If you had all the information I do, you would accept my Vietnam policy." Perhaps so, but the *Pentagon Papers* would show that half his information was wrong. Information, data, tell us nothing about what is true or false, valid or invalid, relevant or irrelevant. It was not increased information that led to the Galilean

revolution but new ways of looking at things — and not so much through telescopic lenses as from a new perspective. Correctness is also over-rated: Aristotle's biology is incorrect, but contains principles his dethroners are still unable to escape; Margaret Mead's erroneous version of growing up in Samoa is more important than Derek Freeman's correction of it; controversial, but real, texts are more instructive than textbooks. E. D. Hirsch's critique of American education may be broadly justified and he may be right that it was a fatal error to move from "content" to "skills" in teacher education programs, but a list of "facts" we all should "know" is a popcorn solution.<sup>10</sup> Let us remember the word of Heraclitus: "Much learning [polymathy] does not teach one to have understanding..." (§40).



Sexism. Along with racism and imperialism, sexism has been a source of systematic injustices in Western Civilization. It has not only been in Western civilization, of course, but we need not answer for others. Allan Bloom fumes special venom on feminists who, he says, attack the whole humanist tradition, and who, trying to expurgate it, indict all Western literature, art, and even science as not just flawed, but vicious.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps such diatribes led William Bennett to call revisers of humanities programs "trashers of Western civilization." Sexism and racism are momentous issues, and the canon should, I would stipulate, mirror all the colors and colorations of humankind and "manunkind." But both "racism" and sexism are heavy charges that should never be made lightly. There are no easy check-off lists or quick-fix lexica of purist purities, clean language laving dirty hearts and minds, dividing good he/she's from bad schoolmen and neutral scholarspersons. As a criterion for the material and authors acceptable to teach, tests of sexist bias are highly problematic. To damn the Bible, Augustine, Rousseau, Mark Twain, Günther Grass as "racist" or "sexist" poses peculiar quandaries. It is a first principle of literary criticism that we must not identify the words of a character with the thoughts of an author. After all, Ibsen wrote the lines of both Nora and Torvald Helmer in *A Doll's House*. We presume his sympathies, but should not over-simplify. Great writers have voices; they don't just write preachy tracts or sermons. If Shakespeare were held to the ever-cited "wisdom" of the doddering Polonius, he'd be as great a fool as all those pompous orators whose quotations of Polonius are to their own shallow selves so true.

*Eurocentrism.* It is true that programs in Western civilization and national histories have been used as marching music to send young men to war and as the high-falutin' version of the white man's onus. There is much to be chagrined at in European and American history, but it is not particularly the literature, art, scientific theory, or philosophy of the West that requires our contrition. Fifth-century Greece produced a bloody civil war — as well as Euripides' protest, Aristophanes' mockery, and Thucydides' exposé of it and of all power politics. Pace William Bennett, a critical approach to Western philosophy is not a "trashing of the West," it is philosophy; and the critical analysis of history is what historians are supposed to do. If faintly Fabian Stanford faculty are "trashers," then what, Great God of our Fathers! does Mr. Bennett think of Amos and Jeremiah?

*Elitism.* Elitism is a real issue, but those who level the charge often misunderstand what the problem is. Since most of our students are relatively poor and working-class, one version goes, they should not have the same curriculum once offered to a classier clientele. That course of study, it is said, embodied and fostered an elite culture inappropriate or inaccessible to the new students. But hear the objector's condescension: Italian immigrants cannot read Dante or Slavs Tolstoy and blacks will want to do something practical, not read great literature. Typically these arbiters of other people's taste are non-Italian, non-Slavic, non-black.<sup>12</sup>

Another version asserts that Western art, music, literature, and philosophy have been sustained by social elites: court, church, big business. Non-elite students should be immersed instead in their own, popular culture. In its worst version popular culture is identified with the pap manipulations of the mass media. But something is odd: though American schools and other places of artistic and intellectual life may never have provided fully open access, our public libraries are still not arranged into sections of snob literature for the wealthy and junk for the proletariat.

In one sense all education is "elitist": some individuals emerge doing some things better than they did before and better than others ever do them. Education doesn't leave people homogeneous: it separates those who know from those who don't. The real issue is the relation of this "betterment" to social class and native potential. Is education limited to those who constituted an "elite" in the first place? Is education open to the non-elite, but only in such a way as to give them entrée into higher class position, a means of preserving the system?<sup>13</sup> Do the educated reap unfair advantage? Does education safeguard prior privilege?

How then reconcile these things? How balance greatness with equality? It is worth remembering that some of the more successful early racial integration in the United States was in athletics and in the arts? Why? Because greatness is hard to deny when you are staring at it — whether a Giant in the outfield, or other giants playing jazz or singing at the Met. Even in Nazi Germany Hitler looked silly trying to deny Jesse Owens his race. The gods have

not seen fit to distribute talent equally among us; but they have contrived a great variety of gifts and have not allotted excellence along racial or class lines. Recognition of greatness can have real democratic force.

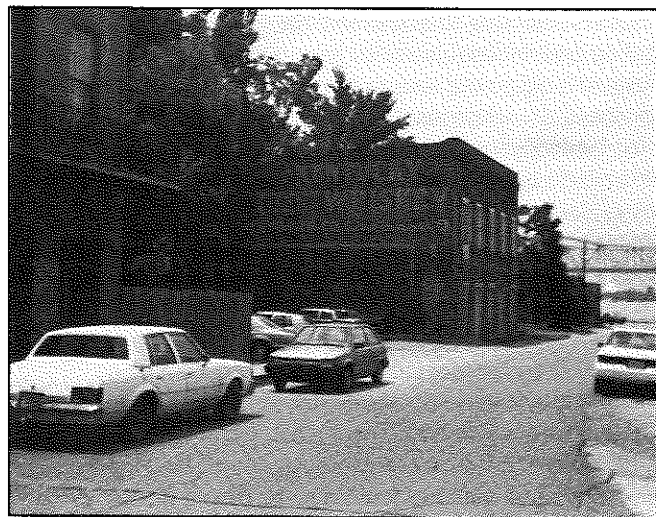
The question of "elitism" raises both serious and spurious issues about the relation of education to society. The cave story suggests that the relationship is peculiar: Philosophical education — broad sense — requires forsaking or transcending society and its power structures and later returning back into it. Marx's concept of "ideology" has been compared to Plato's notion of "opinion" (*dóxa*). Ideology is the "superstructure of society," from its basic social units through politics and institutions to its art, religion, and philosophy — Marx's little joke on Hegel's "Absolute Spirit." It is contrasted with the "substructure of society," material conditions and economic relations. In a sense, ideology is a society's cave-life, its shadow-world, its cosmetic self-beautification and soporific self-justification. But Marx saw that art and philosophy could be revolutionary forces as well, rousing from the opiates of ideology or opinion. Ernst Bloch and liberation theologians, unlike Marx, argue that the same holds true for religion.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the relation of art, science, and philosophy to socio-economic class is not the same kind of relation as that between politics or social institutions and class. A kind of freedom may be possible in the former even while societies remain unfree.

We are left with a dilemma. When we speak of education as "liberation," do we refer to individuals liberated from social bondage? Or to societies themselves liberated from their seen and unseen chains? Politics and politicians, today for sure, have more capacity for harm than they do for good: politicians may, after all, destroy the world; but politics cannot save the world. Real education takes place behind the back and usually against the will of those providing funds and facilities for it and despite the advocacy of its political supporters.

So why not leave it there? The only liberation is private, freedom from society: education is release out of the cave into a non-political, supra-historical world. "But"—as that great moralist Richard Nixon said to John Dean for tape recorder and posterity to hear—"But that would be wrong!"<sup>15</sup> Education as solitary liberation would go untuned, unhone, untested—education with a pretty view of things precisely because it looks away from all injustice. If art, religion, and philosophy let us see both good and bad, ugly and beautiful, then education calls on me to do what I can. I see things in my society that could be better, some that could be worse. I see some things that *could* be changed, some that *must* be changed. The lofty vantage outside the cave may help me see the difference. But the high-minded isn't always the ethical and my viewpoint remains only "transcendent" if I do nothing: I pretend, as it were, that I have become a god. The first commandment of all human education is the Delphic maxim, "Know thyself"; and the original meaning of that was "Know that you are mortal; know that you are not a god."

More than hybris is at issue here. There can be no education—at least none beyond technical finesse—unless knowledge and science are possible in some sense. And there can be no science or knowledge without something like “objectivity”—not necessarily according to modern “scientific” formulation, but some sort of detachment. At the same time, there is no knowledge without knowers, and we are the knowers. Science or knowledge seems to put on us self-contradictory conditions: We can have no scientific knowledge unless we forget and get out of ourselves; but we can have no knowledge at all unless we remember and get into ourselves.<sup>16</sup> We only come to know ourselves if we can listen to “other voices,” yet we only understand what we hear if we know “our own” as well as “the other.” The first thinker to see this tension, I believe, was Heraclitus, who modeled his writing on Delphic oracles. Consider two of his most terse aphorisms: the enigmatic two-word “I searched out myself” (§123) and the playful three-word “Nature loves hiding” (§101). Knowledge of nature, like that of ourselves, never quite ends. With both we play a game of hide-and-seek. If the knowledge we seek is biological, say, the science of life, then we must be mindful that we, the knowers, are life. The problem about the “objective” stand-point is the same as its virtue: it is uninvolved. There is no education without exit from the cave; but no enduring human life in unshaded sunlight. The educated person returns down, at the risk of further confusion and possible death.

Outside the cave liberated prisoners see a “world of truth.” It is plausible, sometimes powerful, when skeptics deny all possibility of truth and knowledge. What is not possible is to be a skeptic and a teacher at the same time.<sup>17</sup> The other common translation of the word for “true” (*alethēs*) is “real,” the freedman enters realms progressively more “real.” Education must be “for real.” The difference between reality and fake is dimension. As the difference between a shadow and, say, a doll is the third dimension, and the difference between a “fact” and history is like the fourth, so the difference between a doll and a person is another sort of added dimension, and so that between a person and humanity, and, depending on one’s metaphysics, so on or not so on. The power of art, religion, and philosophy—taken in either Hegelian spirit or Marxian idea—is their ability to give dimension to the mundane. As Paul Tillich used to say, “There is more spirituality in a teacup by Cézanne than in the Riverside Church.” “Real” education involves theory, because it is changed perspective which lets us see what was behind our backs and is in front of our eyes once we turn around, and it is theory which enables us to envision the dimensions beyond that.<sup>18</sup> To say that the poor need the practical *instead of* the theoretical is to imply that the poor are only partially educable.



There are many instructive points in the Platonic dialogues on the relation of education to class. Plato may not have had the modern notion of a socio-economic class, but Thrasymachus in *Republic* I interprets “justice” as something like ideology and in terms of something like class advantage. In the *Republic*, Socrates counters vested interest in several ways: 1) Education is for all and advancement through it open to all, with progress and future opportunity based on merit alone. 2) Socrates maintains, to his interlocutors’ amusement, that women have equal capacity for science and philosophy with men. 3) He brakes class interest by proposing that every step up the educational system must be matched by divestment of property, family ties, and advantage: philosophers rule, but rulers can have no private property. Thus Plato gives an answer to one of the real questions about elitism: education should not become a basis for economic privilege.

In the *Laches*, Socrates discusses courage with a mediocre general, who defines it as “sticking to one’s post” (190e). Socrates punctures this self-centered explanation—Laches’ men fought in phalanx formation, where endurance would be crucial—by saying that courage can also be seen in retreats, among cavalymen and sailors; outside warfare altogether in those three great ills of human life—poverty, politics, disease: note that threesome; and can also be exhibited by slaves and women (191b-d ff). Courage knows no class or gender boundaries. And Socrates here plays deliberate havoc with the “prejudices” of the Greek language, since the word for courage, *andreia*, literally means “manliness,” and rings of machismo.

The *Meno* is a stunning example of Socrates’ breakdown of class lines. A wealthy Thessalian educated by sophists, Meno puts to Socrates a direct question: “Can virtue (*aretē*) be taught? Or is it not learned, but the result of practice, or is it neither of these, but men possess it by nature or in some other way?” (70a). Socrates replies that he cannot answer how virtue is acquired unless he first knows

what virtue is, to which Meno offers that he studied with the great sophist Gorgias and therefore *he* knows what virtue is. Notice the quasi-military appeal to authority and the class-bound understanding of education: I had money; I paid Gorgias; I purchased the goods; the goods were a definition of virtue; I possess that. Asked for the definition, Meno says that “a man’s virtue consists of being able to manage public affairs . . . ; the virtue of a woman [is to] manage the home well, preserve its possessions, and be submissive to her husband . . .” (71e)—the male-chauvinist definition of “virtue.” Socrates says it is not a definition at all, that there can be only *one* virtue. After discussion, Meno is refuted and his slave, unlettered and unschooled, is brought into the conversation. The slave, on Socrates’ questioning, comes up with some geometric demonstrations. He makes mistakes, but, unlike his master, has no difficulty in admitting errors. The scene is said to illustrate knowledge as “recollection”; the slave need only use his own inner resources, the clear mind that God or Nature gave him. Without property, the slave has nothing to defend and is therefore more open-minded and capable of real education than is his master.

My fulminations have barely sounded the deepest issues of education in our society. One is the degree to which we have come to think of education narrowly in terms of schooling. Greek *paidieia* (literally, “childing”) and German *Bildung* (“forming” or “picturing”) refer to something more general and more human.<sup>19</sup> Second, we need to come to terms with research suggesting that there are different, overlapping, types of intelligence: verbal, mathematical, musical, mechanical, social, personal, etc.<sup>20</sup> A broader education would cultivate and enrich talents in diverse areas. And we must learn from the best neurological and psychobiological research. Diversity need not translate into discrimination. Different kinds of schooling or other kinds of educating outside school might revive playful education: “leisure” was the meaning of Greek *scholē*, from which comes our “school.”

We need to learn *from* other societies and cultures and different “ways of knowing,” not just *about* them. Progressists examine “primitive cultures,” translate their thought and social patterns, and take discreet delight in the advancement of our knowledge, that we are not they; relativists examine the same societies and say there is no scale for evaluating intellectual and cultural differences, they are but another we. Who probes the possibility that “they” “know” things that we have forgotten? Isaac Newton defended modern scientific progress in cautious metaphor: even a dwarf on the shoulders of giants can see further than the giants. To which Sir William Temple quipped: “Unless he is near-sighted.”<sup>21</sup> Liberal education should teach a proper attitude toward giants, ancient or modern, Western or foreign, ours or other: Giants are easy to spot once we’re out of the woods; giants just have to be looked up to. Even Gulliver learned that giants are less threatening than Lilliputians.

“All discussion of the *details* of curriculum,” Peter Caws has said, “is pointless.”<sup>22</sup> I take him to mean that without a clear concept of general education, arguments about curriculum are turf warfare as well fought with hatchets as with words, a backroom classroom version of “Let’s Make a Deal.” My own examples have tended toward the ancient Greek and have been heavy in philosophy and literature. That need not have been so; alternatives from the sciences and other arts could be put to the same purpose. Maybe I place undue stress on language study. Unlike artificial languages—algebra, Russellian logic, Fortran—natural languages are more than means, yet they are less than final ends. But the willingness to pursue foreign languages—the way people talk of and among themselves, not the way we talk about them—remains a kind of “reality test” of our seriousness: are we self-advertised “multi-cultural,” but really monoglot imperialists? In the *Cratylus* (400e ff) Socrates says that we know nothing of the gods, and they have different names for things than we do; although their names for themselves must be true, we don’t know those, so we should just call them by the names they seem to like. I’ll let that be my guide when I am uncomfortable with language purism. There was a time when well-meaning whites thought it odd that respectable Negroes wanted to be called “black,” but it was a matter on which they were “boss.”

I was once told a Zulu story which I have never seen in print. Thus I cannot say whether or not it is true. A widower was consoled by an ancestor who appeared to him at the edge of the fields where his cows grazed. He fell in love, and asked whether they could not live together. “No,” she said, but she would visit him if he would keep for her a box, into which he must never look. Their happiness lasted some time, until his curiosity compelled him. He looked into the box, saw nothing, and ran to her: “I don’t understand. What was so important? Why couldn’t I look into the box when there was nothing in it?” “Well,” she insisted, “I must leave you.” “Why?” “No, I must leave.” “That’s silly.” “Well,” she said, “I will tell you this. I am not leaving because you opened the box. I am leaving because you didn’t see anything in the box when you opened it.” That Bantu cowherd, we might say, lacked liberal education.

The story about Solentiname is only interesting if we believe that the Gospels are in some way relevant. That does not require us to be “Believers”; but it requires humility, willingness to take texts on their own terms, even if the language is not particularly ours. Whether we call the “forest people” “pygmies” or “BaMbuti”—as Bantus call them—or whatever they call themselves, they are not Lilliputians and they too can be our teachers. Whether we teach Greek or Pascal, gender politics or genetic science, even the theology of Hopi, bad puns or grand comedy, whatever—if we teach these as museum pieces to be observed through a glass posted “Do not touch!” then it is a stepchild museum existence we foster and we endanger the very species whose dying out we say we fear. Let us make our fields homes for

all the muses, open playparks of greatness. But let us have no class, race, or gender price tags on admissions tickets, only commitment to a continuing involvement which will attempt both to preserve and to adapt. Even when some of these peoples, cultures, languages, and sciences are extinct, they remain a text alive and speaking. □

<sup>1</sup> The numbering is according to the Diels-Kranz edition. *idiōn* is Greek for "private." An *idiōtes*, "idiot," moves about in a private world of his own.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Jensen, New Jersey Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, speaking to the faculty of Upsala College, Dec. 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*. . . (III, 46; IV, 2) names two women at the Academy, Lastheneia of Mantinea and Axiothea of Phlius. There were also women in the school of Epicurus.

<sup>4</sup> *The Republic of Plato*, Trans. with Notes and an Interpretive Essay by Allan Bloom (New York-London: Basic Books, 1968).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978 [1975]), 4 vols.

<sup>6</sup> Cf., for example, Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, *Education under Siege: The Conservative, Liberal, and Radical Debate Over Schooling* (S. Hadley, Mass: Bergin & Garvey, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, intro. Henry A. Giroux, trans. Donald D. Macedo (S. Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> George Bush's use of the term "empowerment" in recent speeches on education illustrates "price-less" co-optation and linguistic devaluation in a single rhetorical stroke.

<sup>9</sup> One version is in Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. E. D. Hirsch, Jr. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*; "Appendix: What Literate Americans Know," by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph Kett, James Trefil (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), esp. pp. 65-66. Note also Bloom's comments on the "equality of women" in

the "Interpretive Essay" with his translation of the Republic (op. cit., p. 381).

<sup>12</sup> Consider what black women writers (Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison) say on this.

<sup>13</sup> George Orwell's "Such, Such Were the Joys" [found among posthumous papers and first published in 1950] is a moving account of the way in which British public schools tried to buy up talent and buy out souls. *A Collection of Essays* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1954).

<sup>14</sup> Even Mikhail Gorbachev now seems undecided on this point.

<sup>15</sup> The motivation for the return back into the cave is not directly explained (516e) in the text, but is presumably related to the prisoner's seeing of the sun and its blinding character as representation of the good, which is "beyond being" (509a).

<sup>16</sup> Sandra Harding, philosopher of science and Director of Women's Studies at Delaware, raises interesting questions about modern science and objectivity in relation to class and gender. Cf. *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, N.Y. — London: Cornell University Press, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> Radical skeptics of antiquity were clear that if there is no knowledge and no truth, then there is no meaningful communication either. Consequently, they left the city, became hermits, fell silent.

<sup>18</sup> *Theoria*, literally means "seeing" or "vision" and is cognate with the Greek and Latin words for "god" (*theos*, *deus*).

<sup>19</sup> In German one can refer without contradiction to someone with a doctorate as "ungebildet" and to someone with no university education as "gebildet."

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> "An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning", in *Works* (Edinburgh, 1754), II, 159.

<sup>22</sup> "The Unity of Knowledge," Conference on Core Curriculum, Fairleigh Dickinson University, April 5, 1989.

# Report On Work In Progress: Thomas Merton's Correspondence to Literary Figures David Cooper

Readers of *Katallagete* know the ongoing project to edit and publish the correspondence of Thomas Merton. General Editor, Monsignor William Shannon, edited the first volume, *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux in 1985. The second volume as edited by Robert Daggy, Director of the Merton Studies Center, has just appeared as *The Road to Joy: The Letters of Thomas Merton to New and Old Friends*. Before me is Br. Patrick Hart's Table of Contents for Volume III on religious renewal and spiritual direction. Br. Patrick is Merton's long-time friend and secretary. My responsibility is Volume IV: *Merton's Letters to Literary Figures*.

Merton's contributions to *Katallagete* in its formative years concerned literature and literary figures. A provisional report on my work seems appropriate to readers of *Katallagete*. Indeed, given Merton's relationship with KAT until his death, I would like to spend two or three paragraphs on the role of letter-writing in Merton's life as a writer/poet, monk, spiritual director, social critic, and friend. Time and space do not permit further comment. Bill Shannon wrote about this in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, as did Bob Daggy in his introduction essay to *Encounter*, the exchange between Merton and D. T. Zuzuki. Bob Giroux, editor-publisher of Farrar, Straus, Giroux has written and spoken about correspondence in Merton's life and literary efforts (*AMERICA* October 22, 1988). Pat Hart will no doubt touch on this in his introduction to Merton's correspondence on religious renewal.

Aside from the sheer bulk of letters Merton cranked out mostly from his hermitage after 1964, the most striking feature of his capacities as a letter writer is the astounding variety of interpersonal relationships he sustained and nurtured through correspondence. That diversity is reflected in the ecumenical climate of *The Hidden Ground of Love* and its effortless segues between such correspondents as Amiya Chakravarty, Abraham Heschel, Abdul Aziz, Daniel Berri-gan, Martin Marty, Edward Deming Andrews and D. T. Suzuki. Throughout Merton's letters to new and old friends, he seems as ingenuous to a teenage editor of a high-school

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underground newspaper, with whom he trades critiques of the rock group Moby Grape, as he is to long-time friend Dan Walsh when sharing insights on Anselm and the metaphysics of faith. Merton's eclectic literary interests are important in explaining the diversity of his "literary correspondence" to a fascinating contingent of contemporary artists, writers, and intellectuals.

Volume IV aims to bring together that richly diversified correspondence into a uniform edition while connecting Merton's various literary personae (anti-poet, social critic, monk, ecumenist, etc.) to correspondents all over the aesthetic, ideological, and national maps. Such an edition should free future scholars from the burdens of archival research and advance Merton scholarship, especially among American literature specialists just recognizing Merton's unique contributions to twentieth-century American letters as well as his place in their history. Merton's letters to art-



ists and writers will appeal to the ever-widening and always-enthusiastic interest among the general reading public in the life and writing of Thomas Merton, an audience to whom literature scholars must direct their work. I can think of no figure better suited to bridging the distant byways of literary scholarship and the open avenues of public life today than Thomas Merton, a writer who recognized the writer's role in the world and not apart from it.

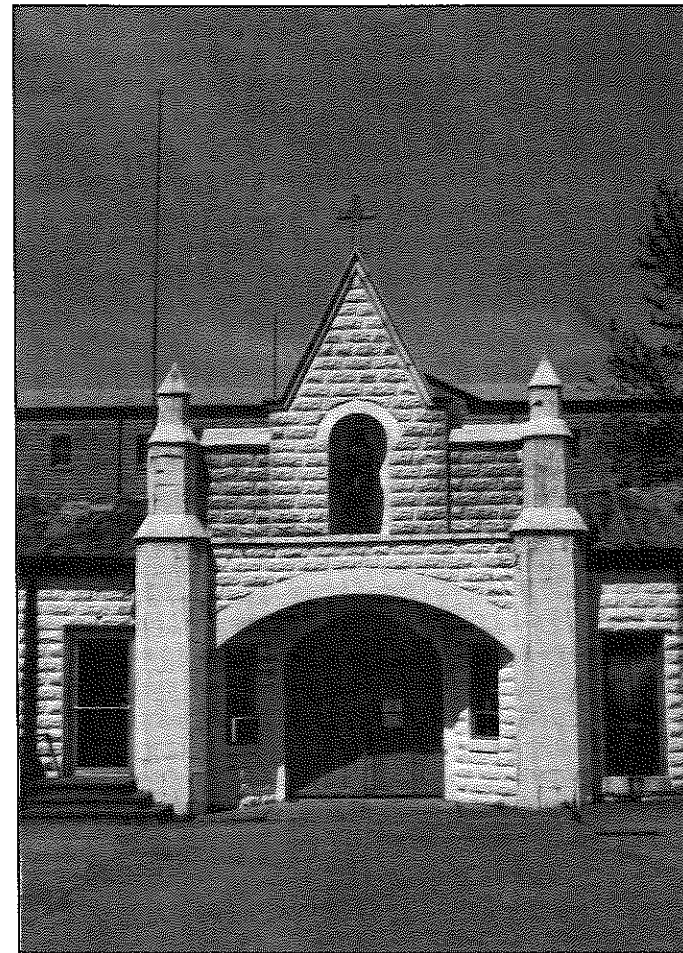
Most literary scholarship on Thomas Merton has drawn heavily on his extensive correspondence. Writers such as George Woodcock, Ross Labrie, Therese Lentfoehr, Anthony Padavano, Victor Kramer, Michael Mott and others recognized the centrality of letters to the Merton opus. Merton not only used letters to sustain important friendships outside the monastery, but also recognized the letter as a genre in its own right: an extension of his art as well as a viable proving ground for his message, seen most obviously in *The Cold War Letters* and the letters Merton selected for *Seeds of Destruction* in 1964.

Drawing together Merton's "literary correspondence" into a uniform volume may help future Merton scholarship assess Merton's legacy as an American writer and establish his place—at once central and peripheral—in the modern American canon. In addition, Merton's letters to artists and writers will round out previous critical editions focusing on Merton as a literary figure: *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (1977) and *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton* (1981). Additional primary source material is especially timely in light of a new refereed journal of Merton scholarship, *The Thomas Merton Annual*.



It seems appropriate that letter volumes focusing on Merton as Christian and monastic and social critic appear subsequent to one centering on Merton as a writer. Thomas Merton's stature as a significant twentieth-century religious personality—what he referred to, somewhat disparagingly, as a "Famous Believer"—often overshadows his considerable accomplishments as a man of letters. The Merton bibliography extends well beyond his prolific writings on Christian spirituality and Eastern and Western monasticism. He was a poet, a novelist, an essayist, and autobiographer in the tradition of American forebears from Jonathan Edwards to Henry Adams, and an editor of a literary quarterly. He was a life-long student of William Blake, a Faulkner scholar, a reviewer of contemporary American and Latin American poetry. He was a calligrapher, a photographer, a translator of Chinese and Sufi and Latin American and Portuguese poetry. Apparently, he never mastered the art of woodchopping, nor did he play the bongo drums very well or do windows. But he was a literary critic whose essays on Flannery O'Connor, James Joyce, William Styron, Roland Barthes, Edwin Muir, Simone Weil and Julian Green, to name but a few, appeared in such magazines and journals as *The Seawannee Review*, *Saturday Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Commonweal*, and *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*. Merton's penetrating and sensitive monographs on Boris Pasternak and Albert Camus remain important contributions to the critical dialogue of twentieth-century literature.

For a man whose own literary interests spanned from St. John of the Cross to Bob Dylan, it is not surprising that Merton corresponded with writers and artists as diverse as Jacques Maritain and Henry Miller or the abstract expressionist Ad Reinhardt and the classicist Victor Hammer. To horizontal categories suggesting such aesthetic and ideological diversity among Merton's writer/artist friends, we can add a vertical spectrum of letters written by a working author. This latter group encompasses letters to a literary community including editors of journals and magazines big and small, popular or obscure, specialized and general, to whom Merton constantly parried requests and favors addressed to a best-selling author. Merton usually responded promptly, dutifully and, on occasion, with studied insight and personal reflection. His reply, for example, to *San Francisco Examiner* publisher Otis Chandler's circular letter to contemporary authors asking for information about reading habits, interests, and influences, turned into a retrospective narrative bibliography for Merton, a chance to pause and reassess the books that had shaped him, from William Blake's *Poetic Works* to *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin. For those who know Merton well, this single letter selected from hundreds written in 1963 reads like a bibliographical metaphor for the paradox of mysticism and acute social consciousness that constitutes Merton at his best and most complex. When in May, 1965, a South American editor asked Merton to describe a "typical day,"



he obliged by return post and used a carbon of that letter as a prototype for *Day of a Stranger*—pound for pound, it seems to me, Merton's quintessential autobiographical statement. So Merton used letters, and he used them well!

Other letters addressed to Merton as a writer poured in from students, small independent press publishers, young left-leaning academics and crackpots of all ages. Merton's great literary charity nudged him into doling out bits and pieces of poems, responses, statements, manifestos and advice. Along with many others of my generation, I owe my introduction to Merton's poetry to just such generosity on his part. When browsing through the Unicorn bookstore in Isla Vista, California, 1967, I stumbled upon Merton's very un-monk-like broadside poem "Originators" that he had given Alan Brilliant and Teo Savory for the Unicorn Press Folio Series. From there it was a short stroll to *Original Child Bomb* and the turgid "Chant to be used in processions around a site with furnaces," all read just a few doors down from the Bank of America, a site incinerated a couple of years later amid chants of student unrest.

Merton's literary correspondence charted along what I am calling a vertical axis also includes letters to *Monks Pond* contributors and, not surprisingly, a constant in-flux of fan mail. A comment Merton makes in a letter to Henry

Miller captures something of the letter writing demands on a working writer with Merton's capacity for language, his charity to the literary marketplace, and especially his need to sustain contacts outside the monastery.

I am sure you must get much the same kind of mail that I do, including the poets who send you their collected works in weekly installments, and the anonymous painter who, today, sent me a large abstraction. This is all fine, but where does one get the time to collect his thoughts and come up with some kind of an intelligent word, in the presence of so many manifestations? I detest writing letters about which I do not think, at least when thought is called for. It is perhaps fortunate that there are some letters one can write without thinking: business letters. They come out like sweat.

That trailing comment hints that Merton deplored writing business letters. If by "business," however, Merton meant the business of his literary career—and I suspect that is the case in a letter from one working writer to another—then nothing could be further from the truth. Merton may have complained often and bitterly about the chore of writing agents and publishers and editors. Nonetheless, he never tired, it seems, of orchestrating a formidable literary machine and using the "business letter" as a baton. Merton was a master at the economies of authorship. He often feigned coming across as bumbling and unworldly. And he had no interest whatsoever in strictly commercial affairs, although he was not above cutting a deal and routing royalties to charitable enterprises. He was, however, intimately involved in directing the traffic that flowed steadily from his typewriter. He juggled manuscripts, sometimes backlogged two and three deep. He handled most of the solicitations that poured in, rarely turning away a request for a review, a preface, or a commentary. He queued up drafts in various stages which were coming in from copy editors and going back out under deadline. He read proof and revised books for second editions. He managed, in short, to tame a hydra-headed literary monster of his own making that would frustrate, befuddle, and entangle most working writers in a cat's cradle of literary complications.

This was my over-riding feeling as I began picking my way through the jammed attic of Merton's "literary correspondence": *the feeling of being in the presence of a working writer*. Nowhere does Merton's authorial self-image clarify most fully than in his elephantine correspondence with an inner literary circle consisting of James Laughlin, Robert Giroux, and especially Naomi Burton Stone, Merton's literary agent. In 1941, Ms. Burton began her long collaboration with Merton by trying to peddle his early novels, to no avail. She forwarded the manuscript of *The Seven Storey Mountain* to Mr. Giroux, editor-in-chief at Harcourt, Brace, in 1946. From then on most of Merton's major prose

works went to Harcourt, Brace and, when Mr. Giroux left for Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy in 1955, Merton's manuscripts followed. Meanwhile, James Laughlin, publisher of *New Directions*, inaugurated a long and fruitful literary collaboration and what would become a close personal friendship in 1944, when he published *30 Poems* at the urging of Merton's Columbia University mentor Mark Van Doren. Considering Merton's decision to abandon all writing projects and to sever any contacts with the outside world when he entered the monastery in 1941, what followed his initial literary contacts with Giroux and Laughlin, often mediated by Ms. Burton, is astonishing: *New Directions* would publish twenty-four Merton titles to Harcourt, Brace/Farrar, Straus & Giroux's nineteen. For most of three decades, Ms. Burton Stone successfully managed to negotiate such literary rapids. Letters served as rafts, anchors, and, on occasion, lifelines, since Merton remained a cloistered monk safely harbored beyond earshot of the worldly turbulence often accompanying his writing projects.

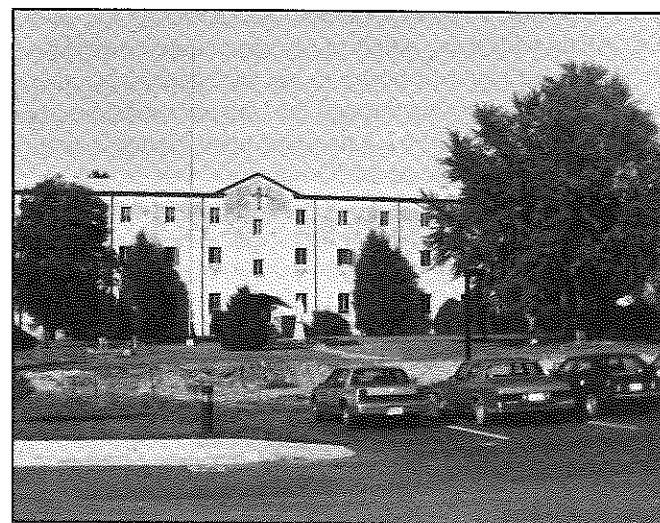
Given Merton's relative isolation in the monastery and an authorial constitution capable of grinding out at least a couple of books a year, one can imagine the central role played by his correspondence in both the on-going management of his writing projects and, from our perspective today, as documentation of Merton's extraordinary literary career. Merton's letters to his inner literary circle chronicle his life as a working writer. His literary correspondence tracks the genesis, gestation, and birthing of all his projects, from major books to the ephemera that dusts the edges of a literary life. Comments drawn from a couple of Ms. Burton's early letters to Merton capture the pitch and intensity that would occupy her, Mr. Giroux and Mr. Laughlin for many hectic and productive years ahead. "Clearly you are already involved with a good deal of correspondence which shouldn't take up your time," she wrote in July, 1952. "That is what we are for . . . I simply can't believe that your time is best employed in handling what amounts to business detail and I have asked you, begged you, to send on all business letters to us and let us save you that time." After backing into a buzzsaw of censorship problems with the second edition of *The Sign of Jonas* three years later, she pledged "from now on we are going to move at a leisurely pace . . . I was going over an old T. Merton file this morning . . . and it's clear that there's an aura of—what? frenzy isn't quite the right word, but we've had our fair share of troubles and impasses . . . I do have to smile a bit when people assume that being the agent for one Trappist monk must be child's play."

Perhaps I have dwelt too long on this vertical axis of Merton's literary correspondence that plots the contours of his own life as a working author. Merton's letters to other writers, artists, and poets occupy a central place in the correspondence corpus from which I am selecting contents of Volume IV. As I mentioned earlier, this dimension forms a horizontal axis along which I have tracked cultural, ideological, and aesthetic variations in Merton's literary friend-

ships. Perhaps as a testament to Merton's interpersonal skills, he seems as comfortable and authentic in his correspondence, for example, with Boris Pasternak as in letters to someone like Ernesto Cardenal; a common denominator transcends, in the case of Pasternak and Cardenal, the cultural and political differences otherwise separating the Russian novelist and the Latin American poet. Elsewhere, for example in his exchanges with close friends Ad Reinhardt and Victor Hammer, Merton had to mediate direct antagonisms and attacks between artists of such contrasting temperaments. It says much about Merton's skill as a letter writer to note that he successfully accommodated his friends' radically contrasting aesthetic theories without doubletalk or contradiction. He even negotiated a truce and helped establish an amicable relationship between Reinhardt and Hammer, who once accused all abstract expressionists of being sinners against the Holy Ghost.

While Merton's physical contact with other writers may have been limited—but by no means entirely prohibited—by the circumstances of a cloistered monk, he overcame such limitations by hurling himself, through the medium of letters, into lively and sustained conversations with his generation of writers. Merton may have learned the value of such narrative friendships early on, from his exchanges with religious writers Jacques Maritain and Jean LeClercq, begun as early as 1950. Another important influence in Merton's formation as letter writer is the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz, who Merton began corresponding with in 1958. Such names form the seed-bed of Merton's literary correspondence which later blossomed and yielded such rich harvests, especially after Merton moved to his hermitage in 1964—the quiet but articulate place that probably deserved its own post mark and zip code.

The following partial and preliminary roster of correspondents only suggests the astounding diversity of Thomas Merton's literary conversations: Brother Antoninus (William Everson), James Baldwin, Wendell Berry, Ernesto Cardenal, Rachel Carson, Amiya Chakravarty, Pablo Anto-



nio Cuadra, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Giroux, Miguel Greenberg, John Howard Griffin, Victor and Carolyn Hammer, Aldous Huxley, James Laughlin, Denise Levertov, Alceu Amoroso Lima, Jacques and Raissa Maritain, Ralph Meatyard, Henry Miller, Czeslaw Milosz, Louis Mumford, John Jacob Niles, Nicanor Parra, Boris Pasternak, Walker Percy, Ad Reinhardt, Gary Snyder, Walter Stein, Laurens Van der Post, Evelyn Waugh and Louis Zukofsky.

As editor of the fourth volume of Merton's selected letters, the central problem I face is preserving the lively eclecticism and spontaneity of his "literary correspondence" while unifying the volume. A secondary concern is to draw together what I have described as horizontal and vertical axes: how do I organize Merton's correspondence with fellow writers and other letters narrating his own literary career without isolating one axis from the other or obscuring each through interleaving? I believe the key to solving at least that first problem is that the letters themselves are unified by Merton's synoptic vision of the contemporary writer's social responsibility. I mentioned Merton's letters to Pasternak and Cardenal. While these writers were separated by distinctly different cultures and living in political environments at opposite ends of an ideological spectrum, Merton's letters to each share a strong feeling for fidelity to a unified artistic purpose: the novelist and the poet speak to the dignity of humans faced with political injustices, whether from the left or right. What I have referred to elsewhere as Thomas Merton's "radical humanism" enabled him to transcend, in the case of Pasternak and Cardenal, differences between writers separated by continents as well as accidents of history. Merton's description of Albert Camus' resolve as a writer applies to Merton himself:

Camus was an *artiste engage* not in the sense that he put his art at the service of a definite party program (which he certainly never did) but in the sense that he realized that his art would never be worth much without deep roots in human responsibility. One cannot be an artist, if one is not first of all human, and humanity is not authentic without human concern and real involvement in common and critical problems. The lucidity of the artist and the lucidity of the free man must be one and the same.

Like the French Algerian novelist, Merton was an *artiste engage*. His letters to contemporaries are informed by a unifying mandate: writers must liberate themselves from social, political, or religious agendas, transcend the censorious or the parochial and lock horns with the suffering, the absurdity and the mystery of the human condition in their era. I should note that this heightened sensitivity to a vision of the writer's place in the world also informs Merton's letters on social concerns, religious experience, spiritual direction and friendship.

Thomas Merton ultimately viewed the writer as a participant in history, not as a prophet/hermit insulated against currents of political and social change. I believe that therein lies the enduring message Merton has left for writers and poets today who, in the minds of some detractors, have abandoned social concerns to what Milan Kundera calls "the beetles of reduction which diminish not only [their] sense of the world but also the meaning of works of art . . . ." Merton's vision of the writer engaged serves as a bracing antidote to the malaise of contemporary narrative art diagnosed by Benjamin DeMott as a wholesale retreat into "private ego and merely personal will." "[T]his fidelity to contemporary impassivity," DeMott says, "is dehumanizing, [and] crippling to the highest literary moral value" which is, as Thomas Merton clearly understood, "responsiveness to life." Merton's vision of the writer engaged serves to redress Wendell Berry's complaint that the new way we look at language and poetry today—a way endorsed by the high priests and priestesses of literary theory—"completes and enforces the isolation of poets" and severs the "responsible connection . . . between art and experience or art and the world."

A story by Anton Chekhov helps to define the connection between art and life Berry has in mind. In the story "Gooseberries," the character Ivan Ivanych suffers increasingly "an oppressive feeling bordering on despair" whenever he encounters a happy person. He sees contented people everywhere: a man there who has attained his life's goal, a man whose dream has come true, another man "satisfied with his lot and with himself." An element of free-floating sadness gradually gives way to an oppressive, unbearable melancholy whenever Ivanych entertains thoughts of human happiness. One night, the innocuous sight of his brother eating from a plate of gooseberries sends Ivanych into a tailspin of overwhelming discontent. "I said to myself: how many contented, happy people there really are! What an overwhelming force they are! Look at life: the insolence and idleness of the strong, the ignorance and brutishness of the weak, horrible poverty everywhere, overcrowding, degeneration, drunkenness, hypocrisy, lying—yet in all the houses and on all the streets there is peace and quiet . . ." Among the fifty thousand strong, idle, contented, happy residents of his city not one would dare "vent his indignation aloud." Chekhov's point is not that we should brood over the darker side of the human condition or deplore felicity and don hairshirts at the slightest cause for personal contentment, happiness, accomplishment or success. Ivanych's despair comes with his realization that moral sensibility and social consciousness are matters of human choice, not so different from his brother's decision to eat from a plate of gooseberries as an elemental act of moral will. "We do not see or hear those who suffer" because we choose not to. The result, Chekhov writes: "What is terrible in life goes on somewhere behind the scenes."

Wendell Berry's call for a "responsible connection . . . between art and the world" is in essence, then, a moral and ethical call for contemporary writers, in Chekhov's words, to "look at life." The experience of Ivan Ivanych suggests that such moral vision does not come easily. It is as tempting for writers as it is for Presidents to shrug off the world of human unhappiness and failure and turn inward to a world, as Berry says, "totally subsumed in the self." Recognizing, however, their allegiance to traditions that have always bound poetry to "concerns and values of the [human] spirit," Berry calls on fellow poets to reconsider "the moral imperative . . . to turn outward."

I believe Thomas Merton belongs in this dialogue and that his letters to contemporary writers urge such moral vision and ethical involvement. In fact, the story of Merton's life as a writer may itself be a story not unlike that of Chekhov's "Gooseberries." The monk who for so many years chose to disengage himself from the world eventually came to realize, like Ivan Ivanych, that internal contentment distorted an honest "look at life." As he came to accept the moral imperative to turn outward both as writer and as

Christian, Merton began to engage life going on behind the scenes, behind the outer show of contentment where Ivanych confronted starkly "the insolence and idleness of the strong [and] the ignorance and brutishness of the weak." What better way to explain Merton's favorite existential image of the innocent bystander whose disengagement from human crimes of degeneration, hypocrisy, and lying is in fact complicity in those crimes? Wendell Berry's warning of the dangers which accompany disengagement applies to Merton: "Renunciation of the world," Berry writes, "may sustain religious or poetic fervor for a while, but sooner or later it becomes suicidal."

Merton's letters to artists, poets, writers are efforts to turn outward. As he invested more in the moral imperative to look at contemporary life in all its irrepressible beauty and furious ugliness, he became increasingly drawn to other writers who explored the link between the insolence of the strong and powerful and the degradation and brutishness of the disenfranchised as the quintessential twentieth-century theme: the mythic brutality, for example, of Flannery O'Connor and Faulkner's south, or the gentle humanism prevailing in the work of Boris Pasternak, or Camus' existentialism, or "the terse anger and irony . . . of the Latin American poets," as Merton writes in *Vow of Conversation*, "with whom I am united in bonds of warmth and empathy . . ."

When Boris Pasternak was swept up in a turbulence of political animosities following his Nobel Prize award for Literature in 1958, Merton wrote a letter both defending Pasternak against paranoid and unjust punishment and arguing for Pasternak's right and responsibility as a writer to speak out against insolence and power that degrade and dehumanize. Such responsibility is a moral imperative for

modern writers; it transcends the smug expediencies of *realpolitik*. It cuts across political and national boundaries. When he wrote Aleksei Surkov, president of the Soviet Writers' Union, Merton did not write as a priest or a famous American monk. He spoke rather as a fellow-writer who recognized the writer's responsibility to humanity. He wrote to Surkov out of the same conviction that ties together his sprawling correspondence with other writers and artists:

"I am passionately opposed to every form of violent aggression in war, revolution, or police terrorism, no matter who may exercise this aggression, and no matter for what "good" ends. I am a man dedicated entirely to peace and to justice, and to the rights of man whether as a citizen, a worker, or, in this case, as a *writer*."

I write to you assuming that you are, as I am, interested in the future of man. I assume that we both attach supreme importance to basic human values, in spite of the diversity in the means which we take to protect them." □



# About the Size of God: Radical Religious Ideas From the Puritan Revolution and American Literature

William Schafer

From 1640 to 1660 British culture was totally reshaped. The world was turned upside down, as Christopher Hill has told us. But it is difficult to talk simply about this period and its effects. Historians have never agreed even on a *name* for the period.

Was this the English Civil War?

Or, because there were distinct phases in the fighting, should it be Civil Wars, with an S?

Was this a clear-cut Puritan Revolution?

Or is this ambiguous and over-narrow at once and should be amended to the English Revolution?

Was it merely an Interregnum, a brief, nasty and unmemorable interlude in the otherwise stately procession of monarchical rule?

Was it a Great Rebellion, implying that participants were only "rebels" against the right order of things?

Was this the righteous exposition of The Good Old Cause?

Was the state created after the fighting a Commonwealth, a Republic or just homegrown dictatorship?

Was the entire period an episode of righteous radicalism—a godly reformation, root and branch—or an aberrant explosion of lunacy?

G. E. Aylmer, a current historian of the period, titled his latest work *Rebellion or Revolution?* However we chose to label the events of the two decades, they were cataclysmic and profoundly unsettling, leaving British culture fundamentally changed.

A number of years ago, T. S. Eliot coined the phrase "dissociation of sensibility" to describe what he felt were the effects of the era—from Eliot's Catholic, Royalist, conservative position a disastrous loss of the imaginative power of medieval and renaissance literature and art. I reject this view and prefer to borrow a term from the historian of science Thomas Kuhn, who uses the phrase "paradigm shift" to describe the process by which cultures slowly change their world-views, their basic models of the universe we inhabit.

The cosmos belonging to English-speaking culture was radically altered after 1660—most people did experience a shift in their world-view. I want to pursue some covert

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ideas inherited from that era of political, social and religious reorganization and trace them to the New World, where many Puritans and radicals settled when their attempt to rebuild Britain failed. I want to track some underground streams of radical religious thought and imagery that helped shape America and that resurfaced in America's literary renaissance of the nineteenth century.

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Out of all the explosive changes in British society that occurred during the period 1640-60, I want to consider only two basic phenomena: first, the abolition of censorship, and second, the breakdown of the basic church-and-state connection. These two experiences became basic principles restated in the creation of the United States of America a century and quarter later. Restated in American terms they are the principles of freedom of speech and the press and the separation of church and state. Built into the American constitution, they have been keystones in the development of a distinct American culture.

The disintegration of state censorship of publication in 1640, as Christopher Hill has justly emphasized, created an amazing situation: for the first time in human history, people could write whatever they pleased and have it widely distributed to a large, literate readership through a free technology of information. The Word had been a strong cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation (and of Puritan tendencies in England, especially), and suddenly that Word was absolutely liberated.

Simultaneously, the powerful sociopolitical bond of church and state that Henry VIII had created when he cut England free of Rome was severed. It was no longer a basic condition of citizenship to attend the Church of England—which did *not* mean that people stopped attending church. They were suddenly free to create their own churches, their own congregations, their own theologies.

The lifting of censorship and a mandatory state religion had an immediate effect, as one set of scholars recognize:

"Religious toleration" meant that ordinary people could escape from the parish church, from parson, squire and heads of households, to gather in congregations of their own choosing under the ministry of a "mechanic preacher," a man (or

woman) with no specialized training who worked with his (or her) hands for six days a week and was invited by his (or her) equals to preside over their discussions on the seventh day. Consumer's choice in religion replaced monopoly; and "what is freedom but choice?" Milton asked. (Hill, Reay and Lamont, 7)

It was suddenly possible—perhaps *mandatory*—to imagine and argue all views on God and the nature of things.

If you combine these two conditions, you have a unique new synthesis in culture: the opportunity to discuss, write and read any ideas whatsoever about God, Humankind, the universe, the social order. The powerful Protestant urges to read, mark and inwardly digest the Bible, to discuss it and dispute over it, to make religion a living state of experience and not a dead tissue of liturgy, were liberated. What then occurred I would call a broad antinomian revolution—that is, an attempt to break the fetters of the Law and liberate the Spirit—which created a kind of homemade gnosticism. Britain plunged back into the condition of Christianity in its first century, before the Church Fathers forced the little eastern cult into a codified, rigidly-defined mechanism of the state. One name for this idea in the 1650s was the Everlasting Gospel—the belief that we still live in Gospel times, under the rule of Christ, freed from sin and error by His example, and that no human institution can intervene to obliterate His teaching and example.

After 1640, men and women in Britain discussed and published ideas defining the universe and the church, their deepest feelings as religious beings. These ideas most often took shape as chiliastic or millenarian ones: a feeling that the world was about to end, to be destroyed and cleaned, replaced by a new, better world, a New Jerusalem or Fifth Monarchy in which Christ would rule and human government would (as Marx and Engels said later) wither away. In other words, these notions were basically about freedom and individual experience, about independence and autonomy under the rule of God. So, the idea of God became a central concern, a point of dispute and reference, and ordinary people—outside the sphere of scholastic theologians, bishops or vicars—tried to define the ineffable, to make the *mysterium majesticum* immanent.

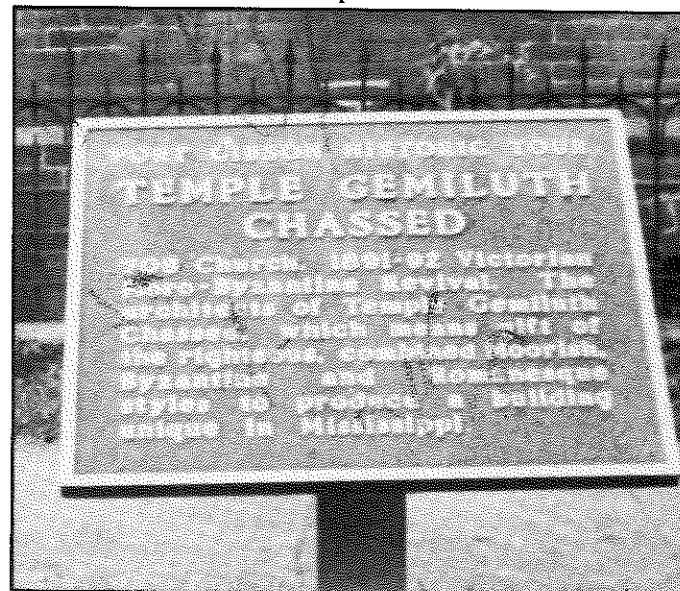
There are many ways to think of God as a figure, an embodiment, a person, as well as an abstraction or force. A full range of such ideas emerged in radical religious sects. To cite a few: the Ranters, rather mysterious proto-Quakers, seem to have imagined God in pantheistic ways, to identify God and Nature. They referred to each other as "Fellow Creature" or "My One Flesh" and insisted on being free to do or say anything, since they found no evil in their universe, only all-goodness in an all-present God. Gerrard Winstanley's Diggers seem to have felt the same impulses, channeled into communitarian agriculture. The Quakers

themselves felt humankind a divine manifestation of the Godhead, which they characterized as the Inner Light, saying "There is that of God in every person."

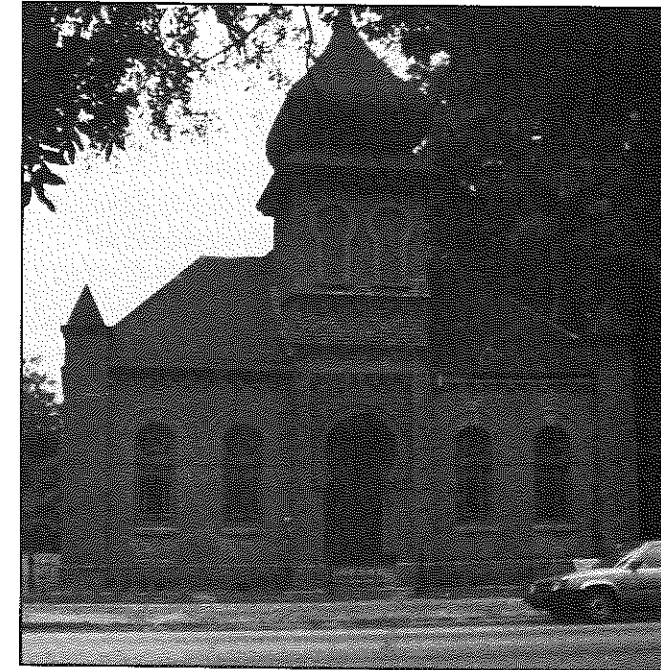
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I want to ponder the results of thinking freely about the nature of God during the mid-seventeenth century and to read a few passages from later American literature which may exist in the light of these thoughts. The freedom of choice in thought and religious experience created interesting suppositions: millenarian thought expanded into utopian planning, people questioned the nature of marriage and the family, people rejected the bizarre paradox of the Trinity, people denied the need for priests and bishops and an episcopal succession. Religion became intensely personalized and individualized. One group which emphasized this individualization was the small sect that ultimately became known as the Muggletonians. They were never a large force in shaping the period's religion and culture, but their ideas were circulated. The Muggletonians believed, in simple terms, in an external God (unlike the Inner Light or Holy Spirit of many sects), and furthermore in a simple, materialist universe in which God was resident Caretaker. They described a naive cosmology: "The sun, moon and stars are not much bigger than they appear to natural sight. The sun is about the bigness of a square chamber. Heaven is not more than six mile up . . ." (Hill, Reay and Lamont, 84-85). And they believed that God was the size and appearance of an average man, an old, wise, benevolent patriarch.

It is easy to giggle at this, but it is probably the way most children first envision God, as they first learn religion. However, the Muggletonians seriously asserted that God was a human, human-like or humanized figure. The belief of Seekers, Ranters and Quakers in a god *inside* all humans is just another way to create a new religious universe, one which is anthropocentric rather than theocentric. The human being, or the creature from the human world, becomes central in a vision of worship.



This is the "paradigm shift" I want to pursue: what happens to a culture over a long period of time when such ideas are freed? Specifically, how has American imaginative literature reflected some ideas of a man-sized (or woman-sized) God, a God within us or without us who is in some way on a human scale, a democratically-conceived member of a republican cosmos? What happened in America as notions of freedom absorbed the idea of freedom from sin, perfectionism, the achievement of the millennium and the creation of a material utopia, the building of a New Jerusalem not in "England's green & pleasant land" but in the open wilderness of the New World?



One classic early American story is Washington Irving's folk-tale-like "Rip Van Winkle" (1820), which embodies in mythic form one consciousness of the New World and its ideals. It describes an early Dutch settler of upstate New York who encounters the spirit of place in the form of malign ghosts, Hendrick Hudson's crew, who live in the Catskill Mountains and rule the landscape and control time. The New World is alive with ruling spirits. Rip embodies one idea of the new American man: he is easygoing, feckless, cheerful, preferring rambling with his dog in the woods to honest, hard, Puritan work. The New Eden or New Jerusalem of America is, to Rip, a Land of Cockaigne or Lubberland. The living is so easy he does not need to expend the sweat of his brow or to be responsible to his wife and children. His punishment in the story is to be enchanted by the elves, put to sleep for 20 years. His subsequent story is a "Back to the Future" tale of early America, celebrating the progress of the shift from colony to nation. Rip finds himself in a bewildering culture after sleeping in the nirvana of the landscape. The God ruling in the story is the eight-

eenth-century Deist's God of Reason and technical development, the God of the Founding Fathers.

The story, like most American literature of the nineteenth century, describes a New World which is a mediating force between Nature and Culture, what Leo Marx calls a "middle landscape" in which human beings find themselves. The New World is a world of new people and new creatures: Indians, black slaves, immigrants from everywhere in the Old World. And in this world God is manifest, might be revealed as an Inner Light or perhaps as something as banal as a man of average height and benign countenance.

In his stories and romances, Nathaniel Hawthorne tried to justify the ways of God to man, and manifestations of the Divine take many forms: God is ubiquitous in Hawthorne's American history, ubiquitous and polymorphic. He most often appears as a *force* within humans—the recognition of sin, the hidden force for retribution that pursues Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*, the manifested spirit of Puritanism appearing in tales like "The Grey Champion," "The Maypole of Merry Mount" or "Endicott and the Red Cross." The Puritans who appear in Hawthorne's revisionist history of seventeenth-century America are epitomized in one tale, "Young Goodman Brown."

The arch-Puritan Goodman Brown goes on an errand into the wilderness, to find that the spirits he meets in the forest are demonic, representing the elements of cruelty, suspicion and revenge in Puritan culture. After attending a divine service in the forest which becomes a witch's sabbath, this specimen Puritan loses his instinctive faith, becoming prey to a paranoid suspicion of humans and human nature:

A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night of that fearful dream . . . And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave a hoary corpse, followed by Faith [his wife], an aged woman, and children and grandchildren, a goodly procession, besides neighbors not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom.

Goodman Brown has found not God but the Devil in the forest and in his community, the Devil in manifold human shapes. If God is found in Hawthorne's fiction, He resides inside the characters, the force that makes them fully human, that allows them to understand their fears and guilt.

Significantly, Hawthorne began his tales of early America with "The Gentle Boy," a description of the persecution of Quakers by the Puritan-Separatist majority in New England. It is a sentimental portrait, but it examines seriously the Quaker beliefs in the Inner Light and the Peace Doctrine, and it deals with the ideas of persecution and martyrdom as foundation stones of the American experience.

Likewise, a later story, "The Shaker Bridal," looks sensitively at the communitarian ideals of the Shakers as more than an aberration from the mainstream of American culture. Hawthorne's fiction builds on an ambiguous admiration for the fortitude and determination of the Puritans and an apology for their brutality in dealing with dissenters. Hawthorne obviously admired both the Puritans and the religious idealists to the left of Puritanism.

American literature, beginning early in the nineteenth century, mirrors some radical religious sects in their quest for God. Where is God to be found, and what will God look like once found? The Ranters felt that God was Nature, subsumed Nature, invested humans through their participation in the creation, so that the material world was a continuous manifestation of the divine and that human actions were holy, sin and error only delusions of the mind. The divinity of nature recurs centrally in American literature, from the forests of James Fenimore Cooper to the seas of Herman Melville. The quest of Americans for the frontier is as much theological as geographical, a pilgrimage seeking limits of the divine.

In describing the Ranters, one authority's words might also apply to basic forces in American literature:

The identification of God with man and with the natural universe had two apparently opposite consequences. It might lead to a mysticism which found God everywhere: equally it might lead to a virtual materialism which in practice dispensed with him altogether. If God existed everywhere in general he could be said to exist nowhere in particular. (Morton 74)

This paradox creates an important tension in many American writers, a fuel for imaginative speculation.

One classic example of an American writer wrestling with God, seeking His embodiment in the natural universe, is Herman Melville in *Moby-Dick*. In his massive compendium novel, Melville tried both to sum up his own experience on that vast New World frontier, the South Pacific, and to draw together his readings and meditations on the nature of the divine. The result was his portrait of a huge, implacable force, an ambiguously colored and motivated God, the White Whale. This creature emerges in the story as we voyage toward him, a gradual revelation of God. *Moby Dick* possesses the pantheistic attributes of the Ranters, for example:

One of the wild suggestings referred to, as at last coming to be linked with the White Whale in the minds of the superstitiously inclined, was the unearthly conceit that *Moby Dick* was ubiquitous; that he had actually been encountered in opposite latitudes at one and the same instant of time . . . it cannot be much matter of surprise that some

whalemen should go still further in their superstitions; declaring *Moby Dick* not only ubiquitous, but immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in time). . .

The great whale is mysterious and impenetrable, like the mystery of God, and it encloses both good and evil in a strange Manichean or gnostic fashion. Melville's narrator Ishmael meditates on the whiteness of the whale and describes it in an ambiguous, paradoxical way:

...is it, that as an essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?

The whale may be God or the absence of God in nature. Throughout the novel, Melville keeps us suspended in doubts and ambiguities about the meaning of his universe, and he uses the device of the mystical leviathan as his emblem and the shape of this tension.



*Moby Dick*'s antagonist, Captain Ahab, is descended from the Quaker whaling captains of Nantucket, a representative of the Inner Light in humanity. But Ahab's spark of divinity has been smothered by a basic emotional and psychological drive, a wound the whale has dealt him. Ahab is only half a man, his leg sheared off by the whale, his mind and spirit corrupted by bitterness and egotistical needs to get his own back on the universe.

A Ranter theologian, Jacob Bauthumley, in a brilliant discourse provocatively titled *The Light and Dark Sides of God*, in 1650 speculated on God's distribution throughout creation in a way that might have fascinated Melville. Bauthumley described his vision of an all-encompassing God:

[some believe that] all creatures here below, are products of that Being, and had their Being of him, and yet distinct from him: But the spirit in me speaks otherwise, and saith, I must not ascend up to Heaven to fetch Christ thence, nor descend into the depth to fetch him from thence; for the Word is even in you, which Word is God, and God is the Word.

Nay, I see that God is in all Creatures, Man and Beast, Fish and Fowle, and every green thing, from the highest Cedar to the Ivey on the wall; and that God is the life and being of them all, and that God doth really dwell, and if you will personally; if he may admit so low an expression in them all, and hath his Being no where else out of the Creatures.

Bauthumley's discourse is ecstatic with a charged personal knowledge of God, a certainty of his immanence and ubiquity in our world.

God is found in humankind, Melville clearly agrees, in the Inner Light which the Quakers described. But God is also immanent in the world, in the mysterious, impenetrably blank whiteness of the great whale and the dark depths of the ocean on which the *Pequod* voyages.

At the moment Melville was concentrating his experience into the story of *Moby-Dick*, Walt Whitman of Long Island, a descendant of Quakers like Ahab and his fellows, was collecting his own experience in the first poems of *Leaves of Grass*. Like Melville, Whitman looked inside and outside himself at once for manifestations of God. In "Song of Myself," Whitman created a catalog of the ways God could be seen or imagined in his world, through his own mind and body and through his sensual contact with the world and its people. With a unique mock-naïve questioning voice, Whitman takes us into a self-created theology, new psalms from the New World. He asks fundamental questions:

A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands.

How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,  
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,  
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners,  
that we may see and remark, and say *Whose?*

The grass is the central symbol in the poem, linked explicitly to Whitman's consciousness, his sense of self, mind and body linked in a unity, and the omnipresence of God in his universe. He later says in the poem:

I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,  
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?  
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,  
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass,  
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's name,  
And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,  
Others will punctually come for ever and ever.

Whitman finds in himself and his experience of the external world plentiful proofs of God's existence and of his own immortality. The sense of exaltation, running almost to megalomania, infuses the most lyrical lines from "Song of Myself":

I believe a leaf of grass is not less than the journey-work of the stars,  
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,  
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,  
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,  
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery.

The ecstatic conflation of self and universe continues as Whitman becomes both immensely large and immensely small, a microcosm and macrocosm at once:

I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots,  
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over . . .

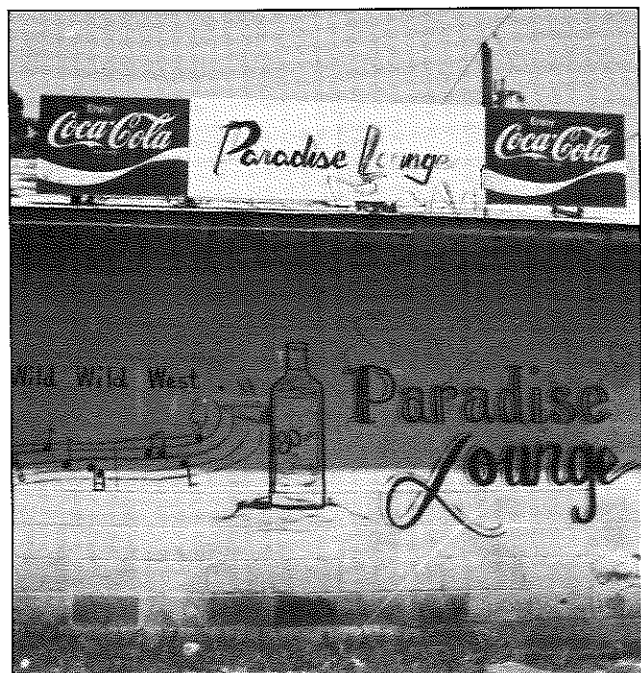
And the identification of self with the animated, animal world around him leads finally to a confession:

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained . . .  
They do not sweat and whine about their condition,  
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,  
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,  
Not one kneels to another, nor to his own kind that lived thousands of years ago,  
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

God is found inside Walt Whitman, Kosmos, son of Manhattan—but God is also manifested in his full creation, in the living holiness of the world around and beyond Whitman. This dual realization, he insists throughout *Leaves of Grass*, is the fullest mystical revelation he has to share with us, the sense of at-one-ness or at-one-ment with the immutable force of Life itself.

A final example of the embodiment of God in classic American literature comes from William Faulkner, from a section of his novel *Go Down, Moses*, the long, complex tale often separately printed as a short novel called "The Bear." In its context, the story is a detailed criticism of chattel slavery, a description of Mississippi as a wilderness frontier and a complex defense of humanity's stewardship of the earth. In the middle of the story, Faulkner tries to depict the relationship between hunter and hunted in the wild, and to do so, he invokes a God not too far removed from Melville's depiction of God through the great White Whale. Faulkner's incarnation comes through an old, wily bear named Old Ben, who incarnates the law of the vanishing wilderness.



In the story, a young man named Isaac McCaslin discovers his heritage, his relationship to the black people and red people around him and his instinctive bond to the sacred ground his family once pretended to "own". Isaac is sent into the deepest woods on a rite of passage by his Indian/black mentor, Sam Fathers. He is told to leave behind his gun, and he learns that he must also leave his watch and compass and walking stick. He must seek the hidden God in the big woods alone and emptyhanded. He waits, and Old Ben manifests himself in a mystical instant of revelation:

As [Isaac] sat down on the log he saw the crooked print—the warped, tremendous, two-toed indentation which, even as he watched it, filled with water. As he looked up, the wilderness coalesced, solidified—the glade, the tree he sought, the bush, the watch and the compass glinting where a ray of sunlight touched them. Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear; it was just there, immobile, solid, fixed in the hot dappling of the green and windless noon, not as big as he dreamed it, but as big as he had expected it, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him where he sat quietly on the log and looked back at it.

Then it moved. It made no sound. It did not hurry. It crossed the glade, walking for an instant into the full glare of the sun; when it reached the other side it stopped again and looked back at him across one shoulder while his quiet breathing inhaled and exhaled three times.

Then it was gone. It didn't walk into the woods, the undergrowth. It faded, sank back into the wilderness as he had watched a fish, a huge old bass, sink and vanish back into the dark depths of its pool without even any movement of its fins.

A specific bear in the delta region of Mississippi in the 1880s here is transformed into a vision of a peculiar American God: an avatar for the vanishing wilderness itself and a personal totem animal for Isaac McCaslin. The episode is central in the novel, a revelation that shapes Isaac McCaslin's life. The bear is finally killed in a sacrificial manner which tests the courage of men and animals at the camp, and Isaac McCaslin goes on to lead a life of Christlike poverty and self-denial to atone for his family's role in slavery and destruction of the land.

The bear, then, is internalized and reincarnated in Isaac himself, in a resurrection that moves it from an external embodiment to an internal inspiration. Faulkner's God is transmogrified from one a little bigger than a man (as in Muggleton's vision) to a fount of Inner Light (like the God of the Seekers, Diggers and Quakers).

To return from classic American literature to some analogues in the writings of the Puritan revolution: ideas that flowed from the tremendous social upheavals of the decades between 1640 and 1660 entered American culture directly with the New World settlers. They were rekindled in the eighteenth century with the documents of our own revolution. An early Leveller pamphlet by Richard Overton called "An Arrow Against All Tyrants" (published in 1646) sounds remarkably like the U.S. Declaration of Independence. It begins with a noble explanation of the human condition:

... by natural birth, all men are equally alike and borne to like propriety, liberty and freedom, and as we are delivered of God by the hand of nature into this world, every one with a naturall, innate freedom and propriety (as it were writ in the table of every mans heart, never to be obliterated) even so are we to live, every one equally and alike to enjoy his Birthright and priviledge; even all whereof God by nature hath made him free.

This is at once a political and a religious declaration.

From the radical sects of the period, American culture inherited a stubbornness of heart and mind and a sense of questing, of what Perry Miller called America's "errand into the wilderness," that have never totally deserted it. From a group as small and powerless as the Diggers comes a sense of the sanctity of the earth itself, a feeling that God is revealed in *land*. From groups as marginal as the Seekers and Ranters come a strong sense of skepticism, the resolve to ask impertinent questions about divinity, to value the freedom to be brash, to the "libertines" in the old sense of unfettered intellects. From the Quakers (and later from the Americanized Shakers) come the sense of reality of the Inner Light, beliefs that we are all invested with bit of God, elements of divinity that give humanity inherent and inestimable value.

These groups, as bizarre and obscure as they may seem today, contributed to the egalitarian, millenarian drive behind the founding of the United States in 1770s. As ancestral visions still felt by nineteenth-century writers like Washington Irving or Nathaniel Hawthorne, the embodiments of God emerge in our fiction and poetry as powerful mythic and mythopoeic images.

American literature has been shaped by a native-bred gnosticism—a sense of knowing God's mysteries through firsthand contact with the Almighty in intelligible shape. It has also often taken an antinomian form—a position outside the letter of the law that killeth, a sense of freedom from sin and error, a belief in the perfectibility of the human creature. It has often developed in the progression described by Søren Kierkegaard in *Either/Or*, from an esthetic stage to an ethical stage and finally to an ultimate theological stage.

These attitudes, I believe, were inherited from the Puritan Revolution and from its furthest-out fringes of radical-

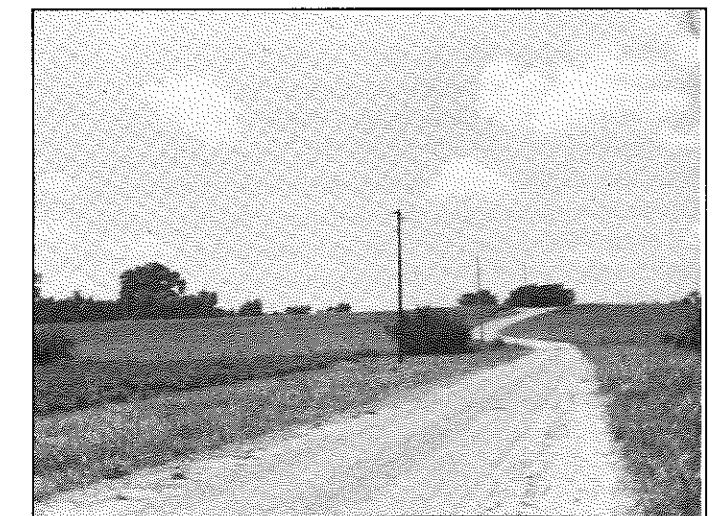
ism. They account for the imaginative freedom and emotional energy of much American writing. They also account for a sense of unfinished business that haunts our literature—a return to the past concurrent with a search for new frontiers, a need for some glimpse of God at work in the Garden of the New World. Since these feelings raise the oldest and biggest questions that face human beings, transcending particulars of time and place, they help give American literature its sense of breadth and universality.

These finally are not American questions or British questions or Puritan questions but human questions raised by the sudden reality of free discussion about the nature of God. And they are questions left unanswered, because each answer is ultimately discovered within each person, from each individual quest or pilgrimage in our world. Like Walt Whitman, we continue to try to decipher those cryptic messages embroidered by God in the green fabric of the planet, messages with urgent meanings for us all. □

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# Beginning With The Word:

## Faulkner's Use of the Fourth Gospel

Virginia V. Hlavsa

A Southern country boy, William Faulkner was one of the most biblically literate American writers of his day, but when he came to use the bible in his novels, his method was taken from the Modernists.<sup>1</sup> Modernism arose in the early part of the century from a new view of human beings provided by Darwin, Frazer and Freud. Evolution suggested that we have the same physical ancestry. Comparative religion suggested that we have similar beliefs and behavior. Psychology suggested that the unconscious governs our whole mammalian family. These ideas led writers to explore not our littleness in the vast universe, but our unity, physical, social and psychic. But how to call on that unity when Western civilizations were ending and world wars were beginning.

Given this dilemma, artists sought to structure their works to reach the reader on the unconscious or perhaps, primitive level of understanding. Stories were often disjointed on the surface, reflecting structures beneath which used ancient myths and archetypal themes. Joyce's *Ulysses* is organized according to eighteen episodes from the *Odyssey*, with each chapter further systematized by parts of the body, disciplines of the mind, times of the day, or techniques of discourse.

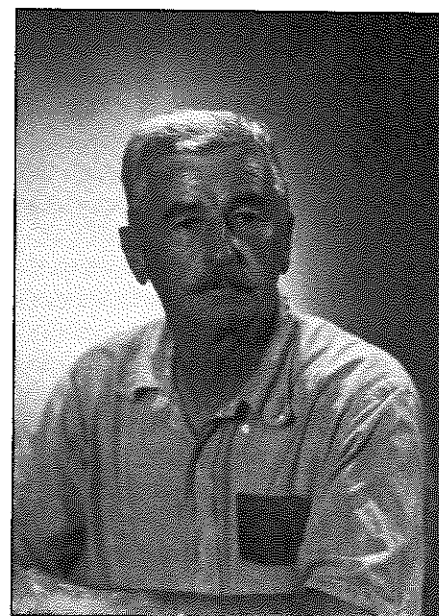
Even more potent was the Modernist's awareness of the word to reveal our most private despairs and deceptions. Studying dreams and slips of the tongue, Freud had discovered four types of word play that protect us from our unconscious thoughts: displacement (shifting emphases), condensation (compressing meanings), representation (making symbols) and misrepresentation (garbling and gainsaying with puns and adversatives). So Modernist writers began, like John, with the word, embedding themes by calling on our unconscious ability both to recognize patterns connecting these fragments and to weave them into familiar materials.

When Faulkner discovered the Joycean technique of using word clusters to organize his story according to external structures, John was an early choice.<sup>2</sup> Of course, he did not need John to name a character Joe Christmas or to allude to the Christ story. But he did parallel the twenty-one chapters

of *Light in August* with the twenty-one chapters of the St. John gospel. Consider some prominent stories. Echoing John's "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," is Lena's insistent faith in the "word" of Lucas, who is, after all, the father:

I said for him to . . . just send me word. . . . Like as not, he already sent me the word and it got lost. . . . I told him . . . "You just send me your mouthword." . . . But me and Lucas dont need no word promises between us. . . . He [must have] sent the word and it got lost.<sup>3</sup>

Or to parallel the opening of John 10: "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber," Faulkner's 10 begins with Joe's guiding himself out the door, saying, "It [his body] never would have opened a window and climbed through it" (210), and it ends with his entering Joanna's house through the window, feeling (as he later thinks) "like a thief, a robber" (221). Or, just as in John 14, where the end of the Last Supper is signaled by the words, "Arise, let us go hence," so in Faulkner's 14, Joe "rises" (317) and goes to turn himself in, at peace because he "dont have to



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bother about having to eat anymore" (320). Most important, the crucifixion occurs in the 19th chapter, the chapter in which Joe, slain and castrated, soars into memory like a "rising rocket" on the "black blast" of his breath.

Moreover, Faulkner expanded John's chapter themes with related material from the Modernist sourcebook on myth, *The Golden Bough*, even using Frazer's unabridged edition. For example, John 17, known as the "Priestly Prayer," has the only recorded long prayer by Jesus. His petition asks that his disciples be protected by God's name, speaks of God's having given His name to Christ, and includes the anomaly of referring to himself by name. Such naming borders on the taboo, with Jesus using the solemn I-Am substitution for God's name.

In Faulkner's chapter 17, we read of "the I-Am . . . the relinquishment of which is usually death" (372), along with many word avoidances. Byron fumbles for the word "midwife" (371) or switches over to pronouns; Hightower queries Lena, "You wont say the word?" (389); and most amusingly, everyone "talks funny," with Hightower "whining" or "clicking his tongue" (382); Hines "winking," "squinting" and "squincing" or his wife jerking her head, whispering, questioning "with a gaze dumb, inarticulate, baffled" (376). When Lena's baby cries, Mrs. Hines "seemed to answer it, also in no known tongue"; she glares "as though she did not understand English"; she makes "a hoarse, whimpering noise" and nods, "pawing lightly at the child" (381).

Faulkner is not making fun of Jesus' prayer in John; rather he is reflecting Frazer's discussions of the sacred naming that surrounds incarnate human gods. The king of Siam had

a special language devoted to his sacred person and attributes. . . . Even the natives have difficulty in mastering this peculiar vocabulary. The hairs of the monarch's head, the soles of his feet, and breath of his body, indeed every single detail of his person both outward and inward, have particular names.<sup>4</sup>

But even an ordinary mortal could be god-possessed, in which case "the presence of the spirit would be revealed by convulsive shiverings and shakings of the man's whole body, by wild gestures and excited looks" (I. 377). One eyewitness reported that when

the priestess sat beside the sick man, with her head covered by a cloth, she began to quiver and shake and to sing in a strident tone, at which someone [said] "Now her own spirit is leaving her body and a god is taking its place." On removing the cloth from her head she was no longer a woman but a heavenly spirit, and gazed about her with an astonished air. (I.379)

Thus, in Faulkner's 17 all speak in tongues, but especially Lena, giving birth, "looking down at the shape of her body beneath the sheet with wailing and hopeless terror" (376-77). Suffering himself, Byron hears her "moaning wail, loud, with a quality at once passionate and abject, that seemed to be speaking clearly to something in a tongue which he knew was not his tongue nor that of any man" (377-78).

That Faulkner would have chosen John will not surprise biblical scholars. John is not only distinguished for his word play, he is the most literary of the four gospels. His gospel is also the only one with a real sense of "plan,"<sup>5</sup> a plan which *Light in August* echoes. John is often outlined as follows:

Prologue: the beginning of chapter 1  
Chapters 1—12: the Book of Signs  
Chapters 13—20: the Book of Glory—the final days  
Epilogue, chapter 21: not by John

So, too, *Light in August* may be outlined as follows:

Chapter 1: the coming and history of Lena  
Chapters 1—12: the crime signaled and explained  
Chapters 13—20: the final days of Joe's life  
Chapter 21: Lena and Byron, described by a new narrator<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, understanding that Faulkner is following John's lead can explain some of the book's anomalies. Take the wildly disparate depictions of Bobbie, from the wayward girl in chapter 8 to the screaming whore in chapter 9. Many scholars treat the story of the adulteress in John 8 as an interpolation, because the language, grammar and especially the tone are more like Luke than John, more gentle and compassionate (Cambridge 175-76). So in Faulkner's 8, not just Bobbie, but all the characters—Max, Mame, McEachern and even Joe himself—are presented in a much kinder light than elsewhere.

Or take the placement of chapter 5. Covering the day before the murder, it seems to come at an odd moment, *after* the discovery of the body and *before* the flashback to the murderer's childhood. This could reflect the questionable placement of that chapter in John, since Jesus' movements at the beginning of 6 seem geographically to follow his location at the end of 4.

Furthermore, John's and Faulkner's texts contain parallel stylistic anomalies. The gospel's last chapter, not by John, has repeated "thats" and "whiches":

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.

Likewise, in Faulkner's last chapter, even the introduction to the new narrator is amusingly slowed by its "whiches":

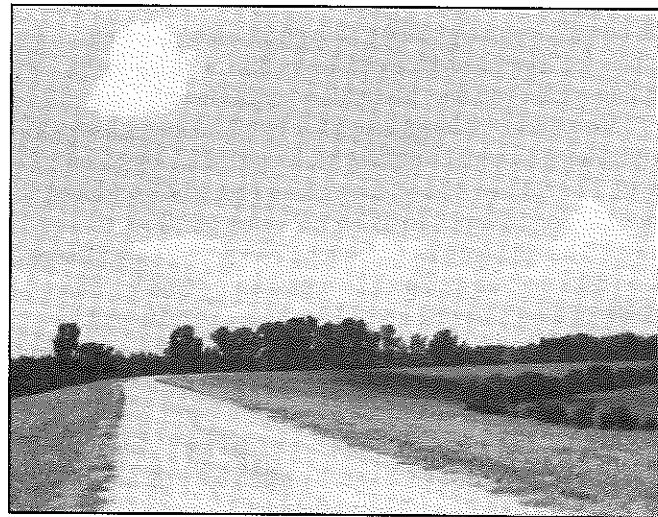
On his return home he told his wife of an experience which he had had on the road, which interested him at the time and which he considered amusing enough to repeat. Perhaps the reason why he found it interesting and that he felt he could make it interesting in the retelling is that he and his wife are not old either, besides his having been away from home (due to the very moderate speed which he felt it wise to restrict himself to) for more than a week. (468)

These findings raise many questions for biblical scholars. Which biblical commentary or commentaries did Faulkner read? Did he himself make the connections with Frazer's themes or was he following another source? Above all, how much is he responsible for discovering the particular unities in John's chapters, those themes which he chose for his parallels? Of course, in some of John's chapters, the unifying themes are obvious. Chapter 9 focuses on the story of the blind man who comes to see both spiritually and physically, while his adversaries become increasingly blind;<sup>8</sup> chapter 10 continues the Good Shepherd discourse even after the scene changes to the Feast of the Dedication. But other chapters are disjointed and present many textual problems. Often unities in John only became clear when I understood Faulkner's development of themes from Frazer.

Chapter 12 may illustrate this point. John features three stories: Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the thundering voice from heaven. Because the material suggests Christ's public ministry is coming to a close, Faulkner focuses on the fact that these are the last hours before the betrayal. Both Joe and Joanna are at the mercy of this sense of imminence: he is full of "foreboding and premonition"; she experiences a "dawning of halfdeath." In a setting like the Agony in the Garden, Joe repeats Joanna's imperative, made all the more powerful by its irrationality:

And as he sat in the shadows of the ruined garden on that August night three months later and heard the clock in the courthouse two miles away strike ten and then eleven, he believed with calm paradox that he was the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe. He was saying to himself *I had to do it already in the past tense; I had to do it. She said so herself.* (264)

Jesus expresses this imminence in a singular metaphor: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Faulkner uses this agricultural imperative to link John's sto-



ries by echoing Frazer's discussions of the weather controls needed for a corn of wheat to ripen and bring forth fruit.

Consider the rain-making. When the primitive wishes to make rain, he imitates its look, feel, or noise. If a sacrificial animal is used, it will be black like storm clouds, and when it is beaten, its cries will signify the thunder and its tears or blood, the rain. East African tribes "sacrifice black fowls, black sheep, and black cattle at the graves of dead ancestors, and the rain-maker wears black clothes" (I.290-91). Elsewhere women will sprinkle or roll naked in water or mud, pray, weep, sing obscene songs, anoint some magical figure such as a stranger, "often taken for a deity" (I.277), or twins, thought to have magical power over rain (I.262). In Sumatra, "all the women of the village, scantily clad, go to the river, wade into it, and splash each other with the water. A black cat is thrown into the stream and . . . allowed to escape to the bank, pursued by the splashing of the women" (I.291). The women of Bengal make two images and carry them to the fields by night. "There they strip themselves naked, and dance round the images singing obscene songs," although, Frazer notes, the "link between ribaldry and rain is not obvious to the European mind" (I.284n). In Armenia, the children carry a figure from house to house, singing "*Bring water to pour on her head / Bring butter to smear on her ear*" (I.275). In India, "naked women drag a plough across a field by night while men keep carefully out of the way, for their presence would break the spell" (I.282). On occasion, "they discharge volleys of abuse at the village officials," and even though Hindu women ordinarily "never engage in agricultural operations," yet "in drought it seems to be women of the highest or Brahman caste" (I.283). But then "noble matrons" of Rome "used to go with bare feet, streaming hair, and pure minds, up the long Capitoline slope, praying to Jupiter for rain" (II.362).

Faulkner features these elements in Chapter 12. To be-

gin with, Joe is more of a black here than in any other chapter. Everywhere else there is doubt about his parentage. Here, although he begins thinking of himself as entering "that house which no white person save himself had entered in years" (245), soon he is whistling "something in minor, plaintive and negroid" (258), while Joanna calls him "Negro! Negro! Negro!"; speaks of his "bastard negro child"; determines he should become "a nigger lawyer"; or insists that he kneel and pray, the black savage.

Repeatedly, Joe finds himself in dirty or corrupt liquids,



"as though he had fallen into a sewer" (242). He is "like a man being sucked down into a bottomless morass" (246). Joanna's body, is "ready to flow into putrefaction at a touch, like something growing in a swamp" (247-48), or she has two sisters within that body, the one "damned" and the other "drowned" (the water puns intended), with Joe "watching the two creatures that struggled in the one body like two moonlighted shapes struggling drowning in alternate throes upon the surface of a black thick pool" (246). Their relationship is presented in terms of water: "At first it had been a torrent; now it was a tide, with a flow and ebb" (248). Including Joanna's tears: "she cried, wept" (245).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Joanna uses the "forbidden wordsymbols," forcing Joe to run through the house and woods, where he would

find her naked, or with her clothing half torn to ribbons upon her, in the wild throes of nymphomania, her body gleaming in the slow shifting from one to another. . . . She would be wild then, in the close, breathing halfdark without walls, with her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like octopus tentacles . . . (245)

The final, dry, phase of their relationship also reflects

weather-controls, but in societies that must contend with too much rain. There rain doctors will practice sexual continence, since it is widely held that "adultery or fornication has a powerful influence to injure the harvest" (II.107). They also fast or eat dry food with unwashed hands, avoid waters of all kinds, and build a fire, itself a fertility symbol, which they never allow to go out (I.270-71).

The manner of Joanna's death is itself a weather-control, related to harvesting the Corn Mother, a spirit "believed to be present in the handful of corn which is left standing last on the field; and with the cutting of this last handful she is caught, or driven away, or killed" (VII.133).<sup>10</sup> As the Old Woman, the Great Mother, or Maiden, the last bound sheaf may be made into a puppet, adorned with flowers and ribbons, then beaten or drenched with water or thrown on a pyre and burned. And the spirit of the corn is transferred to the person who "gets her," the one who cuts or binds the last sheaf at threshing (VII.204). Such a person is subject to rough treatment and taunts, like getting the Old Maid in cards. "He has the Old Woman and must keep her," the others jeer, blackening his face or binding him to the Old Woman and throwing them in the water.

The Corn Spirit may have a double form. When bride and bridegroom, "dancers pluck the bunches of oats one by one from the Oats-bridegroom while he struggles to keep them, till at last he is completely stript of them and stands bare, exposed to the laughter and jests of the company" (VII.163). When mother and child, the harvesters call out to the woman who binds the last sheaf, "You are getting the child!" (VII.151).

Still other avatars include the "neck," which all reapers try to "cut through" (VII.268); or the "cat," which makes the last reaper the "Tom-cat" (VII.281); or the dog, which means he "has the White Bitch" (VII.272). Another variant, the Stranger, involves a man or woman who, appearing at harvest time, is seized and wrapped in sheaves, in some places merely handled roughly, in others, killed, the head cut off, the body burned or drenched (VII.216ff). Although some figures are shown reverence (VII.211), generally the one who personifies the Corn Spirit has lost some competition (VII.253), because the role forebodes marriage to an old person (VII.139) or the birth of a baby (VII.145); a misfortune (VII.218) and even death (VII.254).

As suggested, Joanna goes through numerous avatars. First she is found "hidden, in closets, in empty rooms, waiting, panting, her eyes in the dark glowing like the eyes of cats" (245); then she is the two sisters, the "damned" and the "drowned." then she is the stranger, staring at Joe "with the wild, despairing face of a stranger" (247); then she is "with child," which proves to be as fanciful as "getting the child"; and then she is just the Old Hag, whom Joe beats because she is "not any good anymore" (262).

But Joe, too, is bound to her every stage. As she is cor-

rupt, in six months "she began to corrupt him." He, too, is called the stranger, along with their supposed child: "he would go to her now with reluctance, a stranger, already backlooking; a stranger he would leave her after having sat with her in the dark bedroom, talking of still a third stranger." Yet they are married, bound together: "As though by premeditation, they met always in the bedroom, as though they were married" (249). Receiving her note, he "should have seen that he was bound just as tightly by that small square of still undivulging paper as though it were a lock and chain" (257). And specifically, he is bound by shame: "He would have died or murdered rather than have anyone, another man, learn what their relations had now become" (256). In other words, becoming the last to thresh or bind the Bitch, the Old Woman, the Stranger, the Cat, Joe becomes the "Tom-cat" (259), the one who is dirtied, made black, thrown into the water, suffering the laughter and abuse of other men.

Now—remarkably—when we look back at John for specific parallels, we find it is possible to read his three stories not only as forecasts of death, but also (whether John knew it or not) as having connections with rainmaking. In the first, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with a costly ointment, which she wipes off with her unbound hair. But biblical commentators note that the anointing of the feet is odd. Usually the head is anointed, or the feet of the dead. Even odder is Mary's wiping off the ointment, and with her hair unbound, since loose hair would have been considered immodest.<sup>11</sup> Faulkner hints at the wiping off of feet in a metaphor regarding Joanna's surrender: "as when a defeated general on the day after the last battle, shaved overnight and with his boots cleaned of the mud of combat surrenders his sword to a committee" (242). But universalizing John's story, he also relates Mary's "loose" behavior to rainmaking rituals in the depiction of Joanna, behaving immodestly, like the high caste Hindi women or the barefooted "noble matrons."

In John's next scene "Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt." The original reads like some kind of animal trick: "riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. 9:9). Faulkner hints at this oddity in the rather fanciful analogy of Joanna, looking animal-like, "her plump body . . . more richly and softly animal than ever" (251), carrying the "trick," the "bastard negro child" within. But this story also has connections with rainmaking, for the people wave palm branches and cry, "Hosanna," a prayer for rain at Tabernacles (Anchor 457); the theme is explicit in Zechariah: "and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea and from the river even to the ends of the earth. As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water" (9:10-11).

In John's version of the Agony in the Garden, when Jesus prays, "Father, save me from this hour," he is answered

by "a voice from heaven," which some thought was an angel, while others only "said that it thundered." The petitions are suggested in Joanna's "notes" to Joe, which bind him inexorably to her, and to her prayers, "talking to God as if He were a man in the room with two other men" (265). But both the petitioning and the thunder are weather controls, mock thunder being a rain charm (II.181).

To be sure, these "tricks" of Faulkner's words only reinforce his central purpose: to echo John's stern inevitability. In each scene Jesus takes the behavior at hand—the anointing, the entry, and the voice—and turns it into a forecast of death which operates like a command. The cup shall not be passed. So also for Joe and Joanna, the corruption, the carrying of the child, and the prayers: each forecasts imminent death, binding them both to the "flat pattern" of tomorrow when their union of black and white must be harvested as a message to the town and as an imperative to all.

But the point is that although such examples of Faulkner's use of John may be found throughout his twenty-one chapter parallel, none of the biblical commentaries I have read identify quite so thoroughly such unities of theme in John's chapters. And none of the commentaries I have read so systematically relate John's individual chapter themes to mythic beliefs or primitive practices in general, let alone relating them to Frazer in particular. This means either that the right sources are still to be found or that Faulkner himself, sharing the genius of his fellow-writer, John, grasped his gospel as no other commentator had, and that Faulkner himself, armed with the Modernist's new unifying view of human beings, grasped the universal patterns of behavior behind John's stories as no other commentator had.

What have biblical scholars themselves to say on this? □



<sup>1</sup>See Hlavsa, "The Mirror, the Lamp, and the Bed: Faulkner and the Modernists," *American Literature* 57 (1985): 23-43.

<sup>2</sup>See Hlavsa, "St. John and Frazer in *Light in August*: Biblical Form and Mythic Function," *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities*, 83 (Spring 1980), 9-26. Carl F. Ficken ["The Christ Story in *A Fable*," *Mississippi Quarterly* 23 (1970)] speculates that Faulkner used the synoptics for *A Fable*. Margaret M. Culley believes that Faulkner's vision is closest to John's because for both, final judgment has been shifted to the present. Discussing *Go Down Moses* and *Requiem for a Nun*, she argues that Faulkner reflects John's view that the choices man makes now will determine his judgment at the apocalypse: "Faulkner's insight is that we become our choices." See "Judgement in Yoknapatawpha Fiction," *Renaissance* 28 (1976), 67.

<sup>3</sup>William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Random House, 1968), 16-17. All subsequent references to this edition are given in the text.

<sup>4</sup>James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3d ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1911-15), I. 401. All subsequent references to this edition are given in the text.

<sup>5</sup>See the Cambridge Bible: *The Gospel According to St. John*, ed., A. Plummer (Cambridge, England: At the UP, 1923), 36. All subsequent references to this edition are given in the text.

<sup>6</sup>Although sub-divisions of John vary, even these differences may be found in Faulkner. For example, B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1882), groups the latter part of 1 with the chapters up to the end of 4, an organization which might be reflected by Lena's echoing words at the end of chapters 1 and 4:

My, my . . . now I am in Jefferson already. My, my. A body does get around. My, my. Here I have come clean from Alabama, and now I am in Jefferson at last, sure enough.

But the Cambridge Bible groups John's chapters 1 through 5, an organization which might be reflected in Faulkner's Jefferson setting, before the shift to the orphanage, in chapter 6. In *The Time of William Faulkner: A French View of Modern American Fiction*, trans. George Reeves (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1971), 36, Maurice Coindreau sees a three-part structure, with 5-12 in the middle. In Faulkner's *Light in August* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1973), François L. Pitavy would also separate 1-4 because the reiteration of Lena's words is put in the mouth of Byron, who did not witness her Jefferson arrival. "The author's artistic intention is therefore obvious: he wishes the first four chapters to form a perfect circle in themselves" (16).

<sup>7</sup>That Faulkner read biblical commentary is suggested in Laurence Stallings's 1932 report from Hollywood: "Unlike practically everyone else, he has remained cold sober. He bought one book to read over his lonely nights. It is a second-hand twelve-volume . . . Cambridge edition of the Holy Bible." See Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974), 1:777. Since no such bible was found in Faulkner's library at the time of his death and since no Cambridge edition is twelve volumes, Glenn Meeter ["Quentin as Redactor: Biblical Analogy in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Faulkner and Religion*, ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, in press)] believes Stallings's story is insufficient evidence that Faulkner read this commentary. Moreover, I have no reason to assert that Faulkner did use the Cambridge over any other commentary. Still, it could be that Stallings simply got the number of volumes wrong and that Faulkner gave the Cambridge edition away before leaving Hollywood. The bible which was found in his library (autographed: William Faulkner/Rowan Oak, 1932) is the fourteen-volumed Merrymount Press edition [*The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha* (Boston: R. H. Hinkley Co., n.d.)] without commentary or even verse numbers, so it reads like a traditional narrative. Meeter also notes that because "it prints verse as verse," interpolations are more readily apparent. Of course, during the writing of *Light in August*, Faulkner had available the University of Mississippi library and even, for some months, the New York City Library.

<sup>8</sup>See the Anchor Bible: *Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., ed. Raymond E. Brown (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), 376-77. All subsequent references to this edition are in the text.

<sup>9</sup>These words at paragraph's end suggest the simple verse in John 11, "Jesus wept." Regina Fadiman's study of the manuscript [Faulkner's *Light in August: A Description and Interpretation of the Revisions* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1975), 87 & 109] indicates that Faulkner wrote chapters 11 and 12 as one, composing the Burden flashback separately, with present-time interruptions on base pages, so there may be some overlap.

<sup>10</sup>Amusingly, "short cut" and "cut short" appear frequently in this Faulkner chapter, including the odd "The blow cut his voice short off . . ." (259). The echo of John's words, "corn of wheat," in Faulkner's choice of the Corn Spirit is no accident.

<sup>11</sup>In Luke's account, she is the "woman sinner" (7:37-8). The Anchor Bible suggests an oral cross-influence between Luke and John (451).

# Two Homilies

Matthew Kelty

Two-handed cups from the pottery shop in the refectory suggest something. It is supposed to be that way. Our context for living tells us who we are and reflectively makes us what we are. There is unending dialog between very many parties.

This is so true that if monks make monasteries in a certain way, it is because they are monks, or better, want to become monks. And because dialog is perhaps central in a monk's life, dialog becomes a theme of his monastery, the place where he lives, or works, or prays, or spends his time.

The abbey church is a double or triple row of choir stalls facing one another. The heart of the monk's prayer is the psalter, a book of poetry which lends itself beautifully to antiphonal chant or recitation, verse by verse, back and forth across the chasm. The dialog between us and you, you and us. We face one another, see you as you are, receive your seeing, chant back to you in an exchange that is stylized, ritualized, to lend it credibility, beauty, elan. And God is on each side and in between.

The scene around the altar is something else. Here centrality is expressed in gathering around the altar, the force that pulls the monks together, identifying the One around whom the whole life finds focus. God is the point. Here is Calvary, Upper Room, priest, victim, bread and wine, body and blood, the universe. Here time dissolves and we enter into another kind of time in which yesterday and today and tomorrow are one. And day by day in small portions fit for us, we ponder through the year and mysteries of Christ's life, relive them, enter into them, each his allotted span—some ten times, some twenty, some even fifty times, before the curtain parts and reality becomes real.

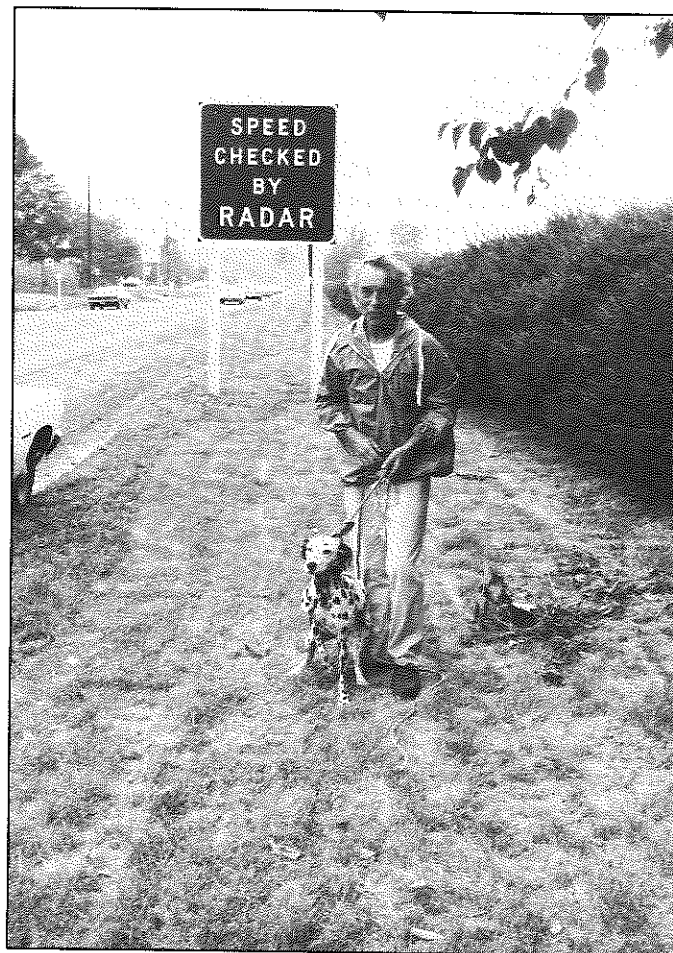
But the chapter room repeats the original theme: two facing rows before the abbot. The principle once again clearly stated. The monks dialog. The abbot listens, adds a word, directs a trend, but does not dominate. The dialog done, and sometimes long in getting done, he sums it up, expresses the consensus, and replies to it. Better than democracy, for it is not majority rule: better than autocracy, for all have a voice. It is rather the fruit of genuine exchange done in purity, poverty, simplicity. Chaste love makes chaste dialog possible. The Spirit then can emerge.

In the refectory we sit in choir-form in long rows, the tables facing each other; we are seated at one side of the table only, not that such sitting was never intended for conversation, not that this makes serving easier, but that the notion of dialog is essential. I live in touch with reality. And reality is my

brother across from me. And me across from him. I accept him as I know him, truly, and he me. Because God is in us. Otherwise the Incarnation does not matter.

These three: church, chapter, refectory, are the basic places of a monastery, the regular places, as they are called, and their form is not accidental. It is deliberate. They tell us who we are, who we should be.

And of course, this is but an echo of God's world, full of contrast, full of dialog: day and night, summer and winter, darkness and light, here and there, time and eternity, life and death, male and female. It never is and never can be one or the other; it must be both somehow. Lacking that desire to use both hands and take both aspects makes a deprived life, an improv-



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erished life.

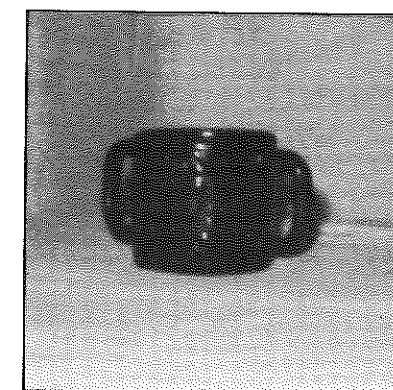
So a monastery is an endeavor in reality. It is called—this place, this life—a contemplative monastery, a contemplative life. But that is only because of the darkness of our times. The one-sidedness of our disastrous culture would make us one-sided and so we are weird because we are balanced; in other words, would build a life of dialog in which eternity matters as well as time, death as well as life. God as well as human kind, woman as well as man, prayer as well as action. It is a balance we seek to achieve, a neat response to the other side.

For example, who better than the celibate expresses the duality of the human person—the union of male and female aspects is so deep, so rich, so fruitful? And what better proof of the sickness of our times than the endeavor to force one-sidedness of the human? And what more cheering than the return to acknowledgement that we are, all of us, dialogical? We are two. And we two must relate.

And so we talk to one another, we pray with one another, we eat facing each other, we argue, we discuss, we discern the Spirit in communion. And we all of us gather around one Lord, one faith, one cross, planted in the midst of our ground, one world.

So take this home with you. The solitude of the human is a duality. We are never, can never be alone. That is why monks love solitude. It proves that what we've been saying all along is true. There's always two. There's always the other.

About the cups. Actually we never knew why they traditionally had two handles. For how many centuries. Until concelebration came back. At first we used a large number of chalices for the Precious Blood for the monks' Communion, but this was clutter. So one of the monks made a very large cup of hammered silver. A beauty, but it was awkward to handle. He made a second huge cup and put two handles on it. It was simple to use, safe. And then we knew why we had two handles on our refectory cups: to link table and altar, human drink and divine. So you see what I mean. We use two hands. Amen.



A few afternoons ago I was out back burning trash when I heard the unmistakable call of geese from far away to the north. It took me a while to find them high in the sky against the dark clouds, mysterious, impressive, flying in splendid formation in that sweep of wing which is so majestic, so deliberate, a flock headed south with purpose. But then, when they were just over Gethsemani, the V shape fell apart for some reason, and where there had been order was chaos and a mess. Dissension. I thought: some want to stay over here like they did last year, some want to keep on going, or maybe it was just that the leader tired and no fresh one was forthcoming. So they wheeled about, several hundred of them, with great noise, each telling others that something had to be done. Now and then a single goose would take a try at leadership and wing off with a few following him, but no more would take him up on it and so that would peter out, only for another to try it. It took ten or fifteen minutes for them to reach a consensus, and then suddenly, one gander took the lead, the others followed, and in a matter of moments a great echelon appeared in the sky, the honking happiness resumed, and they were off to Nashville and the Gulf and Mexico and beyond. And I went to Vespers thinking about it.

The readings in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the Eucharist these past several weeks have been pretty heavy. Grim stuff, most of it, about the end of all things at the end of time, wild imagery and fiery horsemen carrying out the orders of an angry God. One brother asked me: Why do they read such? The visitors must be very upset to hear all that. Well, I said, they are perhaps not the only ones to be upset. Maybe it is a matter of something we ought to hear and think about. For however you describe it, and it's a challenge to the imagination, the end is to come one day, soon or late. The lesson is: this place, this earth, this uni-

verse, is temporal. It is not forever. Tennyson's brook that goes on forever, the eternal mountains and the everlasting seas are poetry, not reality. It is all going one day. That much is certain. How, we are not so sure. When, certainly not. And what will follow too is a rather vague scenario, but something new, renewed, that we know. And, most strange of all, we are a part of it. What makes such readings rather hard listening, it seems to me, is that we live in an age in which the end is very possible. If we cannot destroy the universe, we are capable of bringing an end to the one that is home to us. Hence, the Scriptures do not sound nearly as wild as they once did. And an angry God is a possibility. And He is our God.

And if there is to be a final disintegration, we deal also with the collapse of a culture that we live in. When whole cultural patterns fall apart, then we have a preview of the final act and it is no less trying to men's souls than the actual performance. I do not spell out the details of this scene. Things do change and they change enormously fast. We live in the midst of disintegration. New things come, are in the process, yes, but they have not come yet. No consensus.

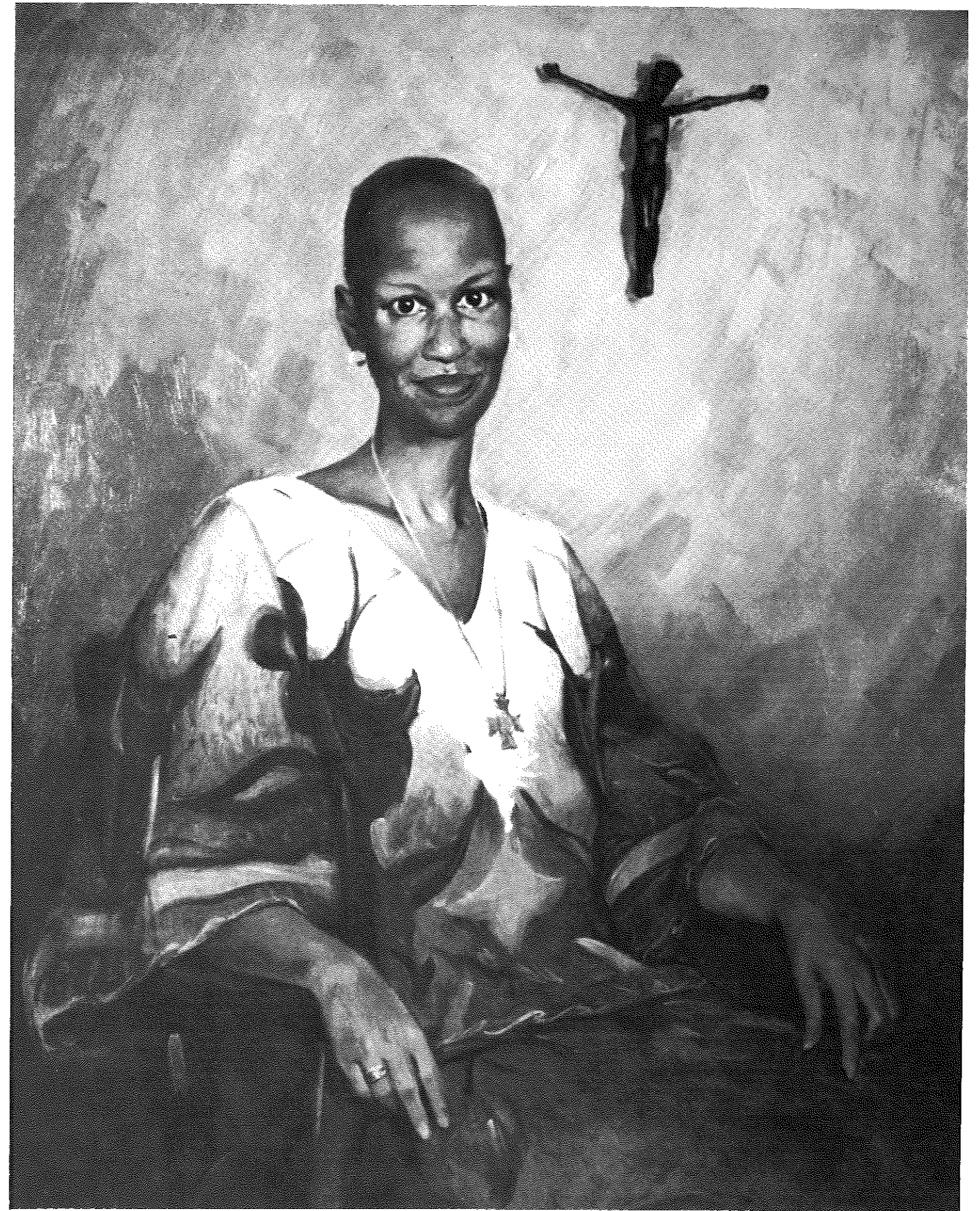
And there is another: the personal apocalypse which is death. If the days of the world and the universe we know are numbered, if cultures shift and fade, so our days too. Come early, come late, the end will come, and the stars will fall from our heaven and the earth shake beneath our feet, the angels of God will come to announce the end of all things for us. Death the great mystery is closer than today's sunset, for any one of us could be gone before the sun goes down this afternoon.

When the delightful order of the flying geese fell apart and confusion, chaos, took over, how fitting a revelation of our own feelings about the ultimate destiny of the world, how like the cultural confusion we know when patterns of our behavior break down, values disappear, codes and cults collapse, everything loose and wild and crazy. Like the music that tells it, the world rocks and reels. Which again is the way we feel, I suspect, when death comes down our corridor, to our door, opens and enters: everywhere we knew and loved slips away and we approach the edge of the cliff and know we are going over it in some mad dream.

The geese stayed together. No one took off on his own. That for one thing. So, no panic. Second, they knew there was a leader among them and they knew he would emerge. A leader all would accept, no one impose. Nor could one take the honor to whom it is not given. And when he emerged, something electric happened, they all agreed, they all followed, order returned, the journey began again, the happy honking told their peace. The leader emerges from consensus and when emerged there is communion. Without the communion you can never get anywhere. The geese would still be wheeling around Gethsemani skies if they did not know this. No community gets anywhere without leadership and without the fellowship which is consensus in action. Fellowship without fellowship is fraternity house theology, not Christianity. And fellowship without leadership is a kindergarten, for there is no commun-

ion of action. And if every bird is not flying full with all he has, the pattern falls apart: no free loaders. There is no beauty without the harsh dedication to the common, to the love of Jesus with one another and for a dying world that so needs the witness of men who believe what they say. Who can make a pattern against the dark skies of our times. Can be a marvel of beauty to restore hope to the wondering and confused: we know where we go and we know how to get there, and honey, we are on our way.

Faith, then, in the face of ultimate apocalypse. Faith in the midst of mixed times. Faith in the face of our own disintegration. This is no magic, secret formula. Not a solution to your problems. It is rather to affirm that God is in us and in our midst. Who guides geese guides us. We believe that. We mean it. □



*Sr. Thea Bowman*

1938 ~ 1990

# KATALLAGETE

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