

Dec. 1975
BL
1
.K37

DUV - 5 - 8 - 15

513

BE RECONCILED KATALLAGETE

But seek ye first the kingdom of
God, and his righteousness; and all
these things shall be added unto you.

Journal of the Committee of Southern Churchmen

SUMMER 1975

Non-Profit Organization
U. S. Postage



But seek ye first the kingdom of
God, and his righteousness; and all
these things shall be added unto you.

"Take therefore no thought for the
morrow: for the morrow shall take
thought for the things of itself. Suffi-
cient unto the day is the evil thereof.

KATALLAGETE BE RECONCILED

Journal of the Committee Of Southern Churchmen

EDITOR

JAMES Y. HOLLOWAY
Box 936, College Station
Berea, Kentucky 40403
(606) 986-8218

PUBLISHER

WILL D. CAMPBELL
for the Committee
of Southern Churchmen

EDITORIAL BOARD

ANN BEARD
JAMES G. BRANSCOME
AL CLAYTON
DUNCAN GRAY, JR.
FRED W. HALL
JOSEPH M. HENDRICKS
JULIUS LESTER
JOHN LEWIS
WALKER PERCY
KELLY MILLER SMITH
ELLA VANDER HORST

The Committee of
Southern Churchmen, Inc.

GIDEON FRYER

President

WILL D. CAMPBELL

Director

Post Office Box 2215
Nashville, Tennessee 37214
Telephone (615) 758-7862

SUMMER 1975

Volume 5, Number 3

Faulkner Meditations: The Wild Palms	3	Thomas Merton
Christianity Against History: Franz Overbeck's Concept of the Finis Christianismi	15	Robert B. Luehrs
How the Kings of the Earth Land in the New Jerusalem: "The World" in the Book of Revelation	21	Vernard Eller
Reflections on Monastic Experiences	28	Matthew Kelty

Published by the Committee of Southern Churchmen, Inc. Individuals
receiving KATALLAGETE forward a contribution of \$2.00 to \$5.00 for
four issues to cover the cost of printing and mailing. Correspondence
relating to subscriptions and mailing should be sent to the Committee
of Southern Churchmen, Post Office Box 2215, Nashville, Tennessee
37214. Editorial correspondence should be sent to James Y. Holloway,
Box 936, College Station, Berea, Kentucky 40403.

Third class mailing privileges granted to The Committee of Southern
Churchmen of Nashville, Tennessee © 1975, The Committee of
Southern Churchmen, Inc.

Front Cover by Al Clayton.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, not about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day."

"Therefore I bid you put away anxious thoughts about food and drink to keep you alive, and clothes to cover your body. Surely life is more than food, the body more than clothes. Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow and reap and store in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You are worth more than the birds! Is there a man of you who by anxious thought can add a foot to his height^a? And why be anxious about clothes? Consider how the lilies grow in the fields; they do not work, they do not spin;^b and yet, I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendour was not attired like one of these. But if that is how God clothes the grass in the fields, which is there today, and tomorrow is thrown on the stove, will he not all the more clothe you? How little faith you have! No, do not ask anxiously, "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What shall we wear?" All these are things for the heathen to run after, not for you, because your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well. So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has troubles enough of its own.

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Söl'o-mon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gën'tiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

FAULKNER MEDITATIONS: THE WILD PALMS

Thomas Merton

Editor's note: These "meditations" belong to the conferences between Thomas Merton and the community of the Abbey of Gethsemani, in Kentucky, recorded on tape by the brothers, as was their custom. The informal quality of the conferences on Faulkner needs emphasis: Merton used few notes and moved his own concerns by directing questions to and eliciting comments from those participating in the conferences. For publication, he may well have rearranged the order and gone into more detail and depth on matters touched here only in passing. For a number of years, Merton had been studying Faulkner and spoke of bringing the work together in a book. Had he lived to do so, he would probably have related other Faulkner novels and themes to his consideration of *The Wild Palms*. The opening section hints of this in the reference to "The Bear" and other stories in *Go Down, Moses*.

This printed version of the informal talks is a studied effort to maintain the continuity of Merton's informal presentations and preserve his own phrasings. One or two awkward sentences may slip in,

THOMAS MERTON, a member of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, the Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky. His many works of theology, literary and social criticism, poetry and devotion include *The New Man*, *Seeds of Contemplation*, *The Waters of Siloe*, *Seeds of Destruction*, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, *Raids on the Unspeakable*, and *The Asian Journal*.

With the permission of and © 1975 by The Merton Legacy Trust. *The Wild Palms* © 1939 by William Faulkner, copyright renewed 1966 by Estelle Faulkner and Jill Faulkner Summers. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

but not many. Merton's speaking about Faulkner was as clear as his thinking about him. To retain the direction and language of these talks and avoid an overlay of editorial judgements was an obvious decision. That is why these "meditations" hold the power of Merton's insights despite the minimum of editing necessary to prepare it for print. The chief regret editorially is the failure to be able to include all of Merton's "asides" — those splendid examples of his robust humor and humanity.

These conferences on Faulkner were held on January 22 and 29, 1967; the indication by Roman numeral II marks the break between the two.

The best introductory words for what follows remain those of Brother Patrick Hart, of Gethsemani, written for the publication in Katallagete [Summer 1973] of another of Merton's talks on Faulkner: "Time and Unburdening and the Recollection of the Lamb: The Easter Service in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*." "Merton resigned his post as Master of Novices in mid-August 1965 and entered a more solitary life, living in a small, cinder block hermitage in a wooded area overlooking the old abbey in Nelson county, Kentucky. Each Sunday, however, he could be seen hiking down through the woods and jumping over the creek in blue jeans with an empty water jug hung from his shoulders. He was returning to continue his conferences, or informal talks, to novices and young monks. Later, he opened them up to the entire community, where the attendance grew as he began to explore more literary themes . . ."

The Wild Palms! A rough, but an excellent book. Actually, as we shall see, it's best to read it as a meditation. Yes: a meditation! For *The Wild Palms* is another of Faulkner's symbolic presentations of deep, classic truths about man and life and human values. Strangely enough, the novel has never been widely appreciated. Many critics have failed to realize just how marvelous it is. O.K. So it's a rough book — and not refectory reading for a monastery! But it is nevertheless a profoundly moving work.

Faulkner's "The Bear," you'll remember, was concerned with the archaic world of nature, a world no longer with us — the world of man the hunter, man in direct contact with the wilderness, man brought up to understand nature, to live in direct contact with it and so be deeply united with God's plan for the world. The boy, Ike McCaslin, was initiated into this real, natural wisdom of the values of creation by the episodes Faulkner relates in "The Bear." And what was the result? What effect did this have? What was the value of this in his life? Well, Ike made a kind of monastic renunciation when he gave up his property. That renunciation was his response to the conviction that the South was under a curse, that to own land in the South was to be part and parcel of a system built on salvery, making money and destroying nature. Ike wanted no part of this. The fourth part of *Go Down, Moses* (where "The Bear" appears) contains a long discussion between Ike and a cousin which one critic says is the traditional argument between the contemplative and the active life. The cousin argues against Ike's decision to give up his property, insisting that it's a useless gesture; no matter what he does he is still part of the South and should work his land like everybody else. So a big question of "The Bear" cycle of stories is where Ike finally comes out? Is his renunciation "successful"? Does he become, as it were, a kind of saint? Or is he a kind of failure?

Keeping this in mind we want to pass to another kind of world — the world of *The Wild Palms*. Actually, this book is a "double-novel," two novels-in-one, two apparently unrelated stories which open up some new themes for Faulkner while continuing others we have already considered: monastic vocations (at least, in Faulkner's "world"), time, nature, man, honor, duty and love. First of all, we need to underscore "apparently unrelated stories," for good critics have argued that these two stories ("The Wild Palms" and "Old Man" are the titles given to the two stories published as one novel, *The Wild Palms*) are in fact unrelated and each novel must be dealt with as a unit. (Malcolm Cowley's famous *The Portable Faulkner*, for example, carries only "Old Man," and it comes off pretty good but in the final analysis "Old Man" is insufficient if it stands alone.) When the connection between the two stories that Faulkner was trying to bring about is grasped, the

double-novel takes us to a much deeper level of meaning than if we tried to deal with each one by itself.

Now what are these two stories? They are pitched on entirely different levels. Faulkner gives us a little of one story, then a little of the other, piece by piece, one on top of the other, and I'll try to do something like this for our considerations. Suddenly, you realize that there's a real "counterpoint" at work (and "counterpoint" is the word Faulkner used to describe what he was trying to do in *The Wild Palms*). While they are pitched on two different levels, they have one fundamental thing in common: each is the story of a man and a woman thrown into situations where they are completely alone and isolated from the rest of the world, engulfed in a flood, a "tidal wave" that threatens to destroy them.

With a theme like that, we can be sure Faulkner is going to do something very basic! It's man's solitude, the story of the cosmic, existential solitude of man. Not just man-as-an-individual, but man in the complete sense; that is, man-and-woman, the complete human being. For "man" is never alone. The complete human being is man-and-woman: the message of Genesis. God made man in his own image, man-and-woman-he-created-them. What we have in this double-novel is a meditation on the first chapter of Genesis: the mystery of evil, sin, even a Genesis-type paradise theme, but Faulkner paints it with deeply ironic hues, a paradise-in-disaster from two levels of disaster. One goes deeper and deeper into despair; the other becomes more and more a story of hope. On the one hand are two modern, extremely vulnerable and ultimately wrecked people; on the other, two totally indestructible people, the "tall convict" and the woman from Mississippi. In one sense, it is the old Faulkner contrast between city people and those less touched by modern civilization, but it is not simply that. The two utterly wrecked are modern bourgeois people, the other two are Mississippi woods people. One level is the modern, psychological, social novel; the other is on an almost preternatural level, becoming more and more myth. The thing that begins to emerge as Faulkner moves the two stories is that these mythologically-cast woods people are even more real and human than the modern ones. They're the ones who are totally human! In them Faulkner seems to be presenting a sort of quintessential humanity: they are man-and-woman and the other two, the moderns, are simply a couple of poor, beat-up, ruined people.

So what Faulkner has going here is a very interesting story. But beyond that is the solitude of man-and-woman — man completely human — against destiny; and beyond that the many contrasts between two stories of two people facing destiny. Let's get into this fantastic Faulkner meditation by treating the two levels as he does, in a sort of counterpoint.

Behind the story in "Old Man" is a monastery, namely a penitentiary. The "tall convict" is out of his monastery because of the great 1927 Mississippi river flood. The convicts in the monastery-penitentiary are turned out to help in the disaster of the flood. The one idea, the one passion of the "tall convict" is to get back into that penitentiary and away from the woman who had been cast into his life by the flood. In the penitentiary everything was quiet, peaceful and well-ordered, no surprises, no great events. The tall convict and another one ("short, plump, hairless, quite white") are ordered out in a rowboat to rescue a woman stranded in a tree and a man stranded on the roof of a cottonhouse. But one of them, the "tall convict," gets caught up alone in the rowboat and carried off in the currents of the flood, around in circles, getting bashed up at every turn. He rescues the woman by accident, coming up under the tree where she is perched, and she says simply, "you took a long time getting here"! Then they are swept off together in the rowboat, down one river, up another, since the rivers are running backwards in the flood, and several times they are almost killed. On top of all this, the woman is pregnant, and has her baby with the help of the "tall convict" on the top of an Indian mound covered with cottonmouth moccasins. They bathe the newborn with flood water from an old tin can and tie the umbilical cord with one of his shoestrings. They are then washed up and down the Mississippi, end up in Louisiana where they live for a time with some Cajun alligator hunters. By this time, the tall convict had been officially registered as dead, and so "free." But his one determination has always been to get back to the penitentiary. So after many months, with all these fantastic adventures up and down the floodwaters, he returns with the boat and woman and child and gives himself up to a sheriff, saying, "yonder's your boat, and here's the woman. But I never did find that bastard on the cottonhouse"! A strange, fantastic story that Faulkner builds up with his tremendous description of the river and the two indestructible people in the boat. That is the level of "Old Man."

"The Wild Palms" story is quite different. It is not as the other a Mark Twain tall-story, or a heroic story, rather just a sordid tale of modern, urban people. Faulkner pitches this one on the psychological level. An intern in New Orleans meets a married woman; they fall in love and decide that they are going to have the perfect life of love. It's going to be love, not marriage. Just love. The well-known modern pitch: "We are going to live in 'sin' for it does not matter what anybody says, we have one life to live come what may," etc., etc., etc. That is what they do, and you see as Faulkner builds the story up that they are wrecking themselves. This story begins with a characteristic Faulkner twist of time-sequences: the beginning of the

story of "The Wild Palms" (in fact, the first scene in the book) is actually the end of the story of these two wrecked people. It begins on a beach on the Gulf coast. Two people (Harry and Charlotte) are in a run-down beach cabin. Faulkner lets us see them as driftwood washed up on the beach, through the eyes of their neighbor, a doctor who by his agent rented them the cabin. The doctor wonders who these people are, for they obviously have little money, appear to be trash, obviously not married, the woman "in them pants that was just exactly too little for her in just exactly the right places." At the end of this first section of "The Wild Palms" the man Harry comes to the neighbor, without knowing he's a doctor, seeking help, because the woman Charlotte is bleeding. The doctor goes to see about her and discovers that she is bleeding because of a failed abortion. And that is where Faulkner cuts off this story and begins the story in "Old Man" about the tall convict and the woman in the flood. But the beginning is that Charlotte is bleeding to death because she insisted that the intern she had been living with during the months recorded in other sections of "The Wild Palms" perform an abortion on her. He is reluctant but finally attempts it, makes a complete mess of it, and they rent a shanty on the Gulf coast to wait out the consequences. In the last section of "The Wild Palms" Harry is sent to the same prison the "tall convict" finally gets back to after his adventures with the woman in the Mississippi flood. Faulkner moves the two stories in counterpoint ending, so to speak, at the same station.

Now: the important thing about the way Faulkner moves these two stories together in a counterpoint is that the convict story is the account of the tremendous power of the River ("Old Man") which becomes a kind of mythical, symbolic expression of the tragedy of life itself. It is Faulkner's expression in symbolic terms of the forces that have been let loose in the lives of these other, modern, bourgeois people in "The Wild Palms." Where the novel gets interesting is in the correspondence between the material on a cosmic scale in "Old Man" and the modern man and woman in "The Wild Palms" who are also engulfed in a flood, a deluge, a tragedy of their own making, but they don't realize it. They are typical, modern people who don't believe in anything, are convinced that death is the end of it, we live our lives since that's all there is. This is the basic faith of modern man! This is what people today think! I want to get something out of life before it's too late! This faith is what Faulkner's two-level novel finally torpedoes as he describes its shallowness and stupidity: *That's not the way to live!* People who try it let loose in their lives a titanic flood, a tremendous force, without even knowing what they are doing, without even knowing they are also in a "flood."

Reading these two stories together, you get from

Faulkner a far more effective description of how these two modern people, with their modern faith, without realizing it are gradually destroying their lives by their own willfulness. On this level of the psychological, modern story, there are no "cosmic" events, yet we witness the meaning of the willfulness of this man and woman as we see it in counterpoint to Faulkner's cosmic descriptions of the tall convict and the woman in "Old Man." There are many, many correspondences. One example, the themes of life and death. On the one hand the fantastic birth story of the child in the flood on top of an old Indian mound and the baby living and thriving amidst all the events of the flood sweeping them from Vicksburg, Mississippi to Louisiana and back again. And on the other level, the denial of life in the abortion of "The Wild Palms" which takes the woman's life (and the child's) and brings the man to the penitentiary. The novel as a unity is loaded with correspondences of this sort. That is why the two stories must be read together.

To read a book like this, to see how Faulkner refers things back and forth in counterpoint is a fantastic way of understanding life. In a certain sense, it's like a *meditation* on the Bible, or parts of the Bible. We know Faulkner was full of the Old Testament. Flood is an eschatological symbol, and Faulkner is saying that *our life* is like being in the flood. *We are in the deluge.* The novel is dominated by this eschatological deluge theme. Once you see it in the tall convict and the woman from Mississippi, the deluge which overwhelms Charlotte and Harry is seen more deeply, with more significance. On the near-mythological, Faulkner presents one level of dealing with the deluge in the episodes faced by the tall convict and the woman; on the other level, in the behavior of the two modern people who try to defy everything to live together for life and love alone. Faulkner is saying that *this too is the deluge!* Charlotte and Harry are living in it and don't know it — the counterpoint to the tall convict and woman in the flood of "Old Man." Charlotte and Harry have been judged by God; they are, so to speak, living under divine judgement and in disaster.

This is a great, as well as unique, statement for a modern writer to make. In fact Faulkner continually excels in saying things just like this. His novels and stories are far more prophetic in the Biblical sense than the writings of any theologian writing today (at least, any that I know!). Faulkner doesn't express himself in terms that can be easily used in the pulpit. O.K. But in *The Wild Palms*, as in other Faulkner meditations on life and nature (as in "The Bear"), I am convinced that we have before us a better idea about man and nature and values and God than can be found in the whole Spiritual Directory, and everything else

on the Mystical Theology Shelf as well. That is why it seems to me so important to read *The Wild Palms* as a meditation.

Let's begin with the archtypical deluge in "Old Man" and read Faulkner's wonderful description of the convicts being removed from the penitentiary — which is actually more like a prison farm, no walls or fences, only guards with shotguns — and into the deluge of the 1927 Mississippi River flood. He describes how they get further and further into this void of the flooding River. They go by truck and by train to find themselves on a levee. Here they see water for miles in all directions, houses and buildings floating by, some convicts jump into the water and tear a barn apart until it disappears. Much of this section reminds you of a picture by Hieronymus Bosch: strange things happening — a plantation unaccountably burning in the middle of the flooding water, this flame going up and no human being there: just the flame in the middle of the water.

Faulkner creates an atmosphere with these apocalyptic signs. The convicts get deeper into the situation created by the flood and finally arrive on a levee for rescue work. Here, the tall convict becomes aware of the tremendous force of the *flow* of the water. Before that time, it had simply been a lot of water. Now, all of a sudden, in a manner typical of Faulkner, the tall convict realizes something more than just a lot of water. An immense *power* is at work!

The convicts arrive by train:

Sometime after dark the train stopped. The convicts did not know where they were. They did not ask. They would no more have thought of asking where they were than they would have asked why and what for. They couldn't even see, since the car was unlighted and the windows fogged on the outside by rain and on the inside by the engendered heat of the packed bodies. All they could see was a milky and sourceless flick and glare of flashlights. They could hear shouts and commands, then the guards inside the car began to shout; they were herded to their feet and toward the exit, the ankle chains clashing and clanking.

• • • • •

When they reached the top of the levee they could see the long line of khaki tents, interspersed with fires about which people—men, women and children, negro and white—crouched or stood among shapeless bales of

clothing, their heads turning, their eyeballs glinting in the firelight as they looked quietly at the striped garments and the chains; further down the levee, huddled together too though untethered, was a drove of mules and two or three cows. Then the taller convict became conscious of another sound. He did not begin to hear it all at once, he suddenly became aware that he had been hearing it all the time, a sound so much beyond all his experience and his powers of assimilation that up to this point he had been as oblivious of it as an ant or a flea might be of the sound of the avalanche on which it rides; he had been travelling upon water since early afternoon and for seven years now he had run his plow and harrow and planter within the very shadow of the levee on which he now stood, but this profound deep whisper which came from the further side of it he did not at once recognise. He stopped. The line of convicts behind jolted into him like a line of freight cars stopping, with an iron clashing like cars. "Get on!" a guard shouted.

"What's that?" the convict said. A negro man squatting before the nearest fire answered him:

"Dat's him. Dat's de Ole Man."

"The old man?" the convict said.

"Get on! Get on up there!" the guard shouted. They went on; they passed another huddle of mules, the eyeballs rolling too, the long morose faces turning into and out of the firelight; they passed them and reached a section of empty tents, the light pup tents of a military campaign, made to hold two men. The guards herded the convicts into them, three brace of shackled men to each tent.

They crawled in on all fours, like dogs into cramped kennels, and settled down. Presently the tent became warm from their bodies. Then they became quiet and then all of them could hear it, they lay listening to the bass whisper deep, strong and powerful. "The old man?" the train-robber convict said.

"Yah," another said. "He dont have to brag."

Then the tall convict sees the River by daylight:

At dawn the guards waked them by kicking the soles of the projecting feet. Opposite the muddy landing and the huddle of skiffs an army field kitchen was set up, already they could smell the coffee. But the taller convict at least, even though he had had but one meal yesterday and that at noon in the rain, did not move at once toward the food. Instead and for the first time he looked at the River within whose shadow he had spent

the last seven years of his life but had never seen before; he stood in quiet and amazed surmise and looked at the rigid steel-colored surface not broken into waves but merely slightly undulant. It stretched from the levee on which he stood, further than he could see—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. That's what I am standing on looks like from there.* He was prodded from the rear; a guard's voice carried forward: "Go on! Go on! You'll have plenty of time to look at that!"

This last is a very ironic sentence, because the tall convict is going to have plenty of experience with that River and what it's about before the story ends!

Now let's look back into these passages and consider the contrasts of the different kinds of tonality Faulkner employs. All these people are moving around almost mechanically, people turned out of their homes by the flood, hovering around fires, watching the convicts come in from the penitentiary. The convicts are also moving mechanically, like animals, into the tents. And in the midst of this picture of mechanical movement Faulkner paints for us, the tall convict suddenly becomes aware that there is *another level* of being. The River here is *being-itself* — and "being and becoming" — and all the jazz you can think of as "the metaphysical ground of life"! The tall convict "did not begin to hear it all at once, he suddenly became aware that he had been hearing it all the time, a sound so much beyond all his experience and his powers of assimilation that up to this point he had been as oblivious of it as an ant or a flea might be of the sound of the avalanche on which it rides . . ."! This is an awakening, a realization, and enlightenment! — which Faulkner excels in recording! It is a kind of existential description of what happens to people in real life: all of a sudden you are fifty-two (or however many) years old, you wake up to find this immense roar that has been going on under your feet *all the time!* Now, everything is moving! And way over *there* is a little thin line; and where *you're standing* . . . well! that's what it looks like from there! "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 recognized. *It's another levee*, he thought quietly. *That's what we look like from there. That's what I am standing on looks like from there.*" Everything seemed so solid and real and dependable and suddenly . . . Swoosh! . . . you find yourself suspended . . . "as fragile in appearance as a single hair . . ."

And remember also: this is a tremendous statement of something that happens not just to individuals but to the human race. When? Well, toward the end of the Middle

Ages, for example. As if all of a sudden, the whole picture changed and Western man found that things weren't nearly as solid and definite as they had been before. The earth was not the center of the cosmos, with all those concentric circles around it and God exactly seven miles up. Moreover, what Faulkner is talking about in these passages is not the archaic world of "The Bear." It is the world of Pascal, the world of infinite spaces, of a void, and neither you nor anyone else knows where it's going.

Then there is the account of the convicts moving along in their clanking chains, when suddenly the tall one stops and they all have to stop like cars in a freight train but nobody knows why they stop. But the Negro knows why and answers his question immediately: The tall convict asks, "What's that?" and the Negro says, "Dat's him. Dat's de Ole Man." Again, different levels of *being*. The primitives are the ones who are aware of the nature of things, while the more civilized people, the guards and white convicts move along mechanically on their line, not aware of it. But later on, settled down in their tents, they all become aware of it. One of them resents the River's bragging: "Then they became quiet and then all of them could hear it, they lay listening to the bass whisper deep, strong and powerful. 'The old man?' the train-robber convict said. 'Yah,' the other said. 'He dont have to brag.'"

The "tall convict" and another ("short, plump, hairless, quite white") are ordered into a rowboat to pick up two people stranded in the flood — a man on a cottonhouse and a woman in a cypress snag. Almost immediately, they are separated, the tall convict swept along in the rushing floodwaters but hidden in the rowboat from the other, who reports him drowned to the warden of the penitentiary. Let's pick up the story where the tall convict is clinging to the rowboat and oar as they are tossed around madly in the current:

Things had moved too fast for him. He had not been warned, he had felt the first snatching tug of the current, he had seen the skiff begin to spin and his companion vanish violently upward like in a translation out of Isaiah, then he himself was in the water, struggling against the drag of the paddle which he did not know he still held each time he fought back to the surface and grasped at the spinning skiff which at one instant was ten feet away and the next poised above his head as though about to brain him, until at last he grasped the stern, the drag of his body becoming a rudder to the skiff, the two of them, man and boat and with the paddle perpendicular above them like a jackstaff, vanishing from the view of the short convict (who had vanished from that of the tall

one with the same celerity though in a vertical direction) like a tableau snatched offstage intact with violent and incredible speed.

He was now in the channel of a slough, a bayou, in which until today no current had run probably since the old subterranean outrage which had created the country.

Typical! But bad geology. Faulkner geology has nothing to do with the geology of Mississippi, which is not the result of igneous rock being pushed up and down but of a flat sea bottom being eroded. Geologically, there was no "subterranean outrage"! But you can see how it fits into the picture Faulkner is painting for us. Just try to grasp the implications he would have us consider when he regards the origin of all this as a "subterranean outrage"!

There was plenty of current in it now though; from his trough behind the stern he seemed to see the trees and sky rushing past with vertiginous speed, looking down at him between the gouts of cold yellow in lugubrious and mournful amazement. But they were fixed and secure in something; he thought of that, he remembered in an instant of despairing rage the firm earth fixed and founded strong and cemented fast and stable forever by the generations of laborious sweat, somewhere beneath him, beyond the reach of his feet, when, and again without warning, the stern of the skiff struck him a stunning blow across the bridge of his nose. The instinct which had caused him to cling to it now caused him to fling the paddle into the boat in order to grasp the gunwale with both hands just as the skiff pivoted and spun away again. With both hands free he now dragged himself over the stern and lay prone on his face, streaming with blood and water and panting, not with exhaustion but with that furious rage which is terror's aftermath.

I dare say that this is an admirable description of a man being beaten up by his own boat in a flood! But more than that, we must consider the implications Faulkner is trying to get before us! The picture is not one simply of a man getting beat up and tossed around in a flood. Rather, *this is life!* This is the way life goes! And there are times (including the monastic life!) when we know life gets to be exactly like the deluge Faulkner gives us here.

My notion is that this particular deluge journey is close to what is called a mystical *navigatio*. It's like the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* — the navigation of St. Brendan — during which he goes to those fabulous mythical islands.

II

Now that we're into *The Wild Palms*, let's try to get some impression of the *two layers of being* Faulkner superimposes one on top of the other, by the way he moves these two stories. One thing that comes through in each of the stories is his use of an element of nature to create a special kind of atmosphere. Maybe we should call it a "double element." In "The Wild Palms," air; in "Old Man," water. Water, we all know, is a very ambiguous element: life and death, as the liturgy has it. Baptism is both death and life. And while Faulkner was not being explicitly Christian here, it is clear that the deluge in "Old Man" is symbolic of life and death. For in the midst of this deluge by water, the tall convict meets the woman perched in a tree trying to escape the flood. She is pregnant, the two are swept madly back and forth, wholly unable to help themselves. Just as she is about to have the baby — and he's ready to "ditch" her, but he knows he can't — the flood dumps them on an Indian mound sticking up above the water, which Faulkner pictures as one of superabundant life: everything that can swim is on it, deer, water moccasins, rabbits, chipmunks, living together in the deluge. It is Isaiah's description of the eschatological kingdom, the "end of the world," dangerous and menacing animals living together in peace, not in a man-made zoo but on an old Indian mound and, in the midst of this deluge comes new life, a human being. It is almost a kind of virgin birth, for no one knows about the father, he's totally irrelevant to the point that the woman gives birth to the child, miraculously, in a flood on a strange, eschatological mound. A shattering thing! Without giving this any explicit Christian message, Faulkner does present us with an eschatological event, *a renewal of life in the midst of the deluge*. And the convict realizes that he is involved in this great renewal.

This must be put in counterpoint, as Faulkner does, to the toally sterile, windy hospital where everything is spic and span — the symbol of death with the element of wind and air and their sounds in "The Wild Palms." The title itself suggests the palm tree outside Harry's jail cell where he is imprisoned following the death of Charlotte. The rattling of the dry palm in the wind creates — with the use of the sounds in the hospital where Charlotte is dying because of the abortion aimed at life — a fantastic *atmosphere of guilt!* By merely suggesting the sounds in the hospital, Faulkner is able to convey the picture of Harry, who exhibits no expression of sadness, dejection or despair. Faulkner gives us merely the *sounds* which are going on around Harry — sounds of wind, of air in movement — and

somehow or other the sounds are so real that *we* are put in the other's place, in Harry's place. Now, it's *our* guilt because we have identified so completely with the sound enveloping Harry in the hospital. We have in ourselves this awful feeling of desolation created by Faulkner's description of the wind blowing up the seashore and into the hospital, and later into the jail. This is one of the best things ever written by Faulkner!

There are many other counterpoints in *The Wild Palms* which symbolize life and death. On one level, the birth of the child in the utterly impossible environment of the flood on the Indian mound, surrounded by all kinds of animals and reptiles, with nothing of use to aid in the birth but a tin can and the fire and hot water and the convict's shoestring: here, the symbol of life. On the other level, the absence of life in the totally sterile, windy hospital, the woman dying because she insisted willfully on an operation which strikes directly at life: here, the symbol of death. You can work out here other fantastic correspondences between two levels of life and death.

And from another angle, *The Wild Palms* presents contrasting notions, or two levels, of man-and-woman destined to be part of each other as "one-body." For Harry and Charlotte, sexual fulfillment was obviously not enough to make them "one-body" that is, fully human. It gets them nowhere and in the end Charlotte continues only as a "neutral reality" or memory. There is no renewal for Harry, just a prolonged "enduring" ("*between grief and nothing I will take grief*"). On the other level, there is no sexual relationship between the tall convict and the woman, yet between them is the birth of the child presented as a renewal amidst all the scenes of destruction caused by the deluge. Perhaps because of his own acceptance of responsibility for the woman and the child, the tall convict is renewed also.

Now let's look a bit closer at a few more of the texts to bring out these contrasts. The tall convict is again beaten flat on his face in the rowboat by the floodwaters:

This time he did not get up at once. He lay flat on his face, slightly spread-eagled and in an attitude almost peaceful, a kind of abject meditation. He would have to get up sometime, he knew that, just as all life consists of having to get up sooner or later and then having to lie down again sooner or later after a while. And he was not exactly exhausted and he was not particularly without hope and he did not especially dread getting up. It merely seemed to him that he had accidentally been caught in a situation in which time and environment, not himself, was mesmerised; he was being toyed with by a current of water going nowhere, beneath a

day which would wane toward no evening; when it was done with him it would spew him back into the comparatively safe world he had been snatched violently out of and in the meantime it did not much matter just what he did or did not do. So he lay on his face, now not only feeling but hearing the strong quiet rustling of the current on the underside of the planks, for a while longer. Then he raised his head and this time touched his palm gingerly to his face and looked at the blood again, then he sat up onto his heels and leaning over the gunwale he pinched his nostrils between thumb and finger and expelled a gout of blood and was in the act of wiping his fingers on his thigh when a voice slightly above his line of sight said quietly, "It's taken you a while," and he who up to this moment had had neither reason nor time to raise his eyes higher than the bows looked up and saw, sitting in a tree and looking at him, a woman.

A beautiful section! No one wrote like this before the movies! You can see this thing being filmed, with orders from the director about camera angles, zooming in on the man spitting blood, the woman in the tree . . . (As a matter of fact, "Old Man" was on TV not long ago. I didn't see it, of course! But I've heard it was pretty good. But the book is better!) The convict gets the woman into the boat, still determined to pick up his partner, get the woman and boat back to the authorities so he can return to the penitentiary. But immediately they are swept madly away into the Yazoo River, which in the flood is running backward not, as he thinks, toward, but away from Vicksburg. Then, the tidal wave:

And he was not alarmed now either because there was not time, for although the visibility ahead, for all its clarity, did not extend very far, yet in the next instant to the hearing he was also seeing something such as he had never seen before. This was that the sharp line where the phosphorescent water met the darkness was now about ten feet higher than it had been an instant before and that it was curled forward upon itself like a sheet of dough being rolled out for a pudding. It reared, stooping; the crest of it swirled like the mane of a galloping horse and, phosphorescent too, fretted and flickered like fire. And while the woman huddled in the bows, aware or not aware the convict did not know which, he (the convict), his swollen and blood-streaked face gaped in an expression of aghast and incredulous amazement, continued to paddle directly into it. Again he simply had not had time to order his rhythm-hypnotised muscles to cease. He continued to paddle though the skiff had ceased to move forward at

all but seemed to be hanging in space while the paddle still reached thrust recovered and reached again; now instead of space the skiff became abruptly surrounded by a welter of fleeing debris—planks, small buildings, the bodies of drowned yet antic animals, entire trees leaping and diving like porpoises above which the skiff seemed to hover in weightless and airy indecision like a bird above a fleeing countryside, undecided where to light or whether to light at all, while the convict squatted in it still going through the motions of paddling, waiting for an opportunity to scream. He never found it. For an instant the skiff seemed to stand erect on its stern and then shoot scrabbling and scrambling up the curling wall of water like a cat, and soared on above the licking crest itself and hung cradled into the high actual air in the limbs of a tree, from which bower of new-leaved boughs and branches the convict, like a bird in its nest and still waiting his chance to scream and still going through the motions of paddling though he no longer even had the paddle now, looked down upon a world turned to furious motion and in incredible retrograde.

From this point on, he hasn't even a paddle. On the Indian mound, he picks up a board which he loses, and then tries to burn a tree limb into the shape of an oar. But this gives you some idea of what it's like to be on a Mississippi River flood.

Then they reach the mound; he's carrying the woman up and she's ready to have the baby:

"Let me down!" she cried. "Let me down!" But he held her, panting, sobbing, and rushed again at the muddy slope; he had almost reached the flat crest with his now violently unmanageable burden when a stick under his foot gathered itself with thick convulsive speed. *It was a snake*, he thought as his feet fled beneath him and with the indubitable last of his strength he half pushed and half flung the woman up the bank as he shot feet first and face down back into that medium upon which he had lived for more days and nights than he could remember and from which he himself had never completely emerged, as if his own failed and spent flesh were attempting to carry out his furious unflagging will for severance at any price, even that of drowning, from the burden with which, unwitting and without choice, he had been doomed. Later it seemed to him that he had carried back beneath the surface with him the sound of the infant's first mewling cry.

Now there's a child born into the world. The tall convict still wants to leave the woman and return to the peniten-

tiary, but he doesn't. He knows he cannot, regardless of how badly he wants to. (This is the end of a section of "Old Man," which is followed by a terrible section of "The Wild Palms" — a mine in Utah, scenes in San Antonio and New Orleans. It becomes clear that Harry has bungled the abortion demanded by Charlotte so "I will be all right and it will be us again forever and ever.")

Then, back to the tall convict, the woman and the child. He's trying to light a fire:

When he returned with the wood and the dead rabbit, the baby, wrapped in the tunic, lay wedged between two cypress-knees and the woman was not in sight, though while the convict knelt in the mud, blowing and nursing his meagre flame, she came slowly and weakly from the direction of the water. Then, the water heated at last and there produced from some where he was never to know, she herself perhaps never to know until the need comes, no woman perhaps ever to know, only no woman will even wonder, that square of something somewhere between sackcloth and silk—squatting, his own wet garments steaming in the fire's heat, he watched her bathe the child with a savage curiosity and interest that became amazed unbelief, so that at last he stood above them both, looking down at the tiny terra-cotta colored creature resembling nothing, and thought, *And this is all. This is what severed me violently from all I ever knew and did not wish to leave and cast me upon a medium I was born to fear, to fetch up at last in a place I never saw before and where I do not even know where I am.*

What is the tall convict saying? With Faulkner, you know, half of it is music. But the convict suddenly realizes, "I've gone through all this, I've been brought here because of this little thing that looks like a piece of clay!" A tremendous religious message, a fantastic statement about providence. Faulkner has brought us, with the convict and the woman, through all these wild experiences in floods and tidal waves, beaten continually by the rowboat, to the Indian mound and the cottonmouth mocassins, a baby born with only a tin can and shoestrings . . . *for what?* That somehow God — or providence — wanted this child to be born and safe! God will go to all this trouble for one little bit of human flesh, one bit of life! The convict sees this when, so to speak, an enlightenment comes to him about the whole experience, the meaning of reality, what *life* is in God's sight: it is worth all this trouble that a child might be born and be safe: "looking down at the tiny terra-cotta colored creature, and thought, *And this is all. This is what severed me violently from all I ever knew and did not wish to leave and cast me upon a medium I was born to fear, to fetch up at last in a place I never saw before and where I do not even know where I am.*"

This level of Faulkner's meditation on life we must hold in counterpoint to death in "The Wild Palms." Here, the young, modern, urbanized, sophisticated, educated and talented woman wants neither the trouble of childbirth nor, more importantly, the implications of children in her relationship with her lover. To perform an abortion is easy — Harry had been an intern, he had successfully performed the operation on another woman during their stay at the mining camp in Utah. Here with Charlotte and Harry the resistance to life is seen in counterpoint to the affirmation of life in the birth scene in "Old Man." Faulkner makes here (and in 1938, remember!) a precise statement about the world we live in. It is a judgment on modern society and modern man. Say only, the birth control issue — and we may as well face up to it, there is going to be a lot of fuss in the next few years about the issue of birth control. At the moment, let's not pass judgment, but simply record the tremendous swing in progress toward a wholly different point of view about life than the one Faulkner is making in *The Wild Palms*. What is being argued is the difference between the "person" and "nature" and the judgment is going down more and more on the side of "person" against "nature." There is certainly an element of this in Charlotte's argument. Moreover, I know Catholic women who argue solemnly about a time when the differences between the sexes may be eliminated by some kind of biological stroke. In other words, it's not simply that women become "equal" to men, it's that women refuse to be held down by what they call a "binary life-style." Faulkner takes the other view: here is life, given by God. Here is death. Man doesn't inflict death: *Thou shalt not kill!*

O.K. Let's get further into these contrasts seen in "The Wild Palms," the hospital where Charlotte is dying, for here we have those elements (and sounds) of air and wind in counterpoint to the water of "Old Man." Harry is waiting in one of the corridors of the hospital; in the operating room the doctors are trying to save Charlotte's life. Harry is with an officer, who talks to him, goes in and out for a smoke . . . that sort of thing. They wait and wait, nothing much really "happens," except that they keep on waiting. And listening. And we listen to Faulkner's description of the noises, the sounds. This first section is a description of what it is like to be in a hospital:

"Yes," Wilbourne said. There was no wind in here, no sound of it, though it seemed to him that he could

smell, if not the sea, at least the dry and stubborn lingering of it in the oyster shells in the drive:

Now this idea of the smell of low tide is very important here: the tragic miasma, the smell of evil, which is the source of the tragic disaster and the punishment of the gods, symbolized by the low-tide smell, this awful sense of a completely rotten existence that comes when the wind blows ashore. The passage continues:

and then suddenly the corridor became full of sound, the myriad minor voices of human fear and travail which he knew, remembered—the carbolised vacuums of linoleum and rubber soles like wombs into which human beings fled before something of suffering but mostly of terror, to surrender in little monastic cells all the burden of lust and desire and pride, even that of functional independence, to become as embryos for a time yet retaining still a little of the old incorrigible earthy corruption—the light sleeping at all hours, the boredom, the wakeful and fretful ringing of little bells between the hours of midnight and the dead slowing of dawn (finding perhaps at least this good use for the cheap money with which the world was now glutted and cluttered); this for a while, then to be born again, to emerge renewed, to bear the world's weight for another while as long as courage lasted.

Very ironic: the hospital room is a kind of womb where people go to be reborn. But what kind of rebirth? Certainly not a spiritual rebirth! Rather, a kind of mechanical thing—in and out, mechanically, of the hospital rooms. The passage which follows is where Faulkner is so good with the particular sounds of the hospital:

He could hear them up and down the corridor—the tinkle of the bells, the immediate sibilance of rubber heels and starched skirts, the querulous murmur of voices about nothing. He knew it well: and now still another nurse came down the hall, already looking full at him, slowing as she passed, looking at him, her head turning as she went on like an owl's head, her eyes quite wide and filled with something beyond just curiosity and not at all shrinking or horror, going on.

Quite a picture! With it, Faulkner puts *you* in the man's position. Harry sees the nurse looking at him and then, you suddenly realize: that's *me* she's looking at! The nurse is looking right at *me*! *I've* done this horrible thing! Harry watches the door of the operating room:

Again the door went

inward on its rubber tires and returned, clapped silently to with that iron finality and that illusion of iron impregnability which was so false since even from here he could see how it swung in its frame by one side only, so that a child, a breath, could move it. "Listen," the officer said. "Just take it easy. They'll fix her up. That was Doc Richardson himself.

Trying to console him, the officer tells Harry some long tale about the doctor they had just glimpsed in the operating room. Then:

Wilbourne discovered that he really could smell the sea, the black shallow slumbering Sound without surf which the black wind blew over. Up the corridor, beyond an elbow, he could hear the voices of two nurses, two nurses not two patients, two females but not necessarily two women even, then beyond the same elbow one of the little bells tinkled, fretful, peremptory, the two voices murmuring on, then they both laughed, two nurses laughing not two women, the little querulous bell becoming irascible and frenzied, the laughter continuing for half a minute longer above the bell, then the rubber soles on the linoleum, hissing faint and fast; the bell ceased. It was the sea he smelled; there was the taste of the black beach the wind blew over in it, in his lungs, up near the top of his lungs, going through that again but then he had expected to have to, each fast strong breath growing shallower and shallower as if his heart had at last found a receptacle, a dumping-place, for the black sand it dredged and pumped at: and now he got up too, not going anywhere; he just got up without intending to, the officer at the entrance turning at once, snapping the cigarette backward.

Faulkner identifies Harry with the harbor. It's *low tide* for Harry too. He can't breathe. Charlotte is dying and he is dying with her because they have been living in this sort of symbiotic relationship. The two of them tried to become a sort of "one-body" by losing each self in the other, and ended by destroying each of them.

The officer comes back:

But Wilbourne made no further move and the officer slowed; he even paused at the light-slashed door and flattened his hat-brim against it, against the crack for a moment. Then he came on. He came on, because Wilbourne saw him; he saw the officer as you see a lamp post which happens to be between you and the street because the rubber-tired door had opened again, outward this time (*The Kliegs are off*, he thought. *They are off. They are off now.*) and the two doctors emerged, the

door clashing soundlessly to behind them and oscillating sharply once but opening again before it could have resumed, re-entered immobility, to produce two nurses though he saw them only with that part of vision which still saw the officer because he was watching the faces of the two doctors coming up the corridor and talking to one another in clipped voices through their mouth-pads, their smocks flicking neatly like the skirts of two women, passing him without a glance and he was sitting down again because the officer at his elbow said, "That's right. Take it easy," and he found that he was sitting, the two doctors going on, pinch-waisted like two ladies, the skirts of the smocks snicking behind them, and then one of the nurses passed too, in a face-pad also, not looking at him either, her starched skirts rustling on, he (Wilbourne) sitting on the hard bench, listening: so that for a moment his heart evacuated him, beating strong and slow and steady but remote, leaving him globed in silence, in a round vacuum where only the remembered wind murmured, to listen in, for the rubber soles to sibilate in, the nurse stopping at last beside the bench and now he looked up after a space.

"You can go in now," she said.

This is a terrific scene! Think about the noises! These are noises you don't hear in the hospital rooms—the noises of feet and skirts flicking, starched coats of doctors, starched skirts of nurses . . . You hear these ominous sounds when you're on the operating table getting ready to be anesthetized! Another indication by Faulkner of the symbiotic relationship between Harry in the corridor and Charlotte in the operating room. On the floor of the operating room, there is only empty space—no beds and things like that to deaden the sound. Rather, wide corridors and people moving around; rubber-tired things going by, rubber-soled shoes, etc. I can tell you, that's where you hear that kind of sound—when you're out flat just before they begin to chop you up! That's what is associated with this particular series of sounds Faulkner is describing. You're on the operating table, you're helpless, full of dope, not yet out, but lying there unable to move even if you wanted to. You're drugged. All you can do is lie there and hear these sounds floating in. You don't sit up and look around. You lie there and hear these sounds and see these faces and wonder when they're going to knock you out completely! That's the kind of atmosphere by sounds Faulkner gets into the situation.

Then, there is a bit where Harry goes and looks at Charlotte's body as they take her out:

There was no especial shape beneath the sheet now at all and it came onto the stretcher

as if it had no weight either. The stretcher whispered into motion again, wheeling sibilantly, sucking through the door again when the officer now stood with his hat in his hand. Then it was gone. He could hear it for a moment longer. Then he could not. The nurse reached her hand to the wall, a button clicked and the hum of the blower stopped. It cut short off as if it had run full-tilt into a wall, blotted out by a tremendous silence which roared down upon him like a wave, a sea, and there was nothing for him to hold to, picking him up, tossing and spinning him and roaring on, leaving him blinking steadily and painfully at his dry granulated lids. "Come," the nurse said. "Doctor Richardson says you can have a drink."

What stands out in that passage? Yes, "the tremendous silence which roared down upon him like a wave, a sea . . ." Faulkner brings in the image of the tidal wave again, but completely a *mental* tidal wave hitting Harry like the *physical* tidal wave which carried away the tall convict and the woman in "Old Man." Harry is completely shattered by this wave, his world has collapsed. They have taken out the body of Charlotte and he's left with nothing.

Listen! The importance of marking well these Faulkner passages is that we are listening to a *writer who knows how to write*, who knows what to do with words! It's good to have that once in a while! We get this sort of thing with words in the Bible and a few other places, but most of the time we are not in the presence of such power and creativity with words.

Well. To close out. Harry is now in a jail. Again, the element of wind:

The jail was somewhat like the hospital save that it was of two storeys, square, and there were no oleaners. But the palm was there. It was just outside his window, bigger, more shabby; when he and the officer passed beneath it to enter, with no wind to cause it it had set up a sudden frenzied clashing as though they had startled it, and twice more during the night while he stood, shifting his hands from time to time as that portion of the bars which they clasped grew warm and began to sweat on his palms, it clashed again in that brief sudden inexplicable flurry. Then the tide began to fall in the river and he could smell that too—the sour smell of salt flats where oyster shells and the heads of shrimp rotted, and hemp and old piling. Then dawn began (he had been hearing the shrimp boats putting

out for some time) and he could see the draw bridge on which the railroad to New Orleans crossed standing suddenly against the paling sky and he heard the train from New Orleans and watched the approaching smoke then the train itself crawling across the bridge, high and toylike and pink like something bizarre to decorate a cake with, in the flat sun that was already hot. Then the train was gone, the pink smoke. The palm beyond the window began to murmur, dry and steady, and he felt the cool morning breeze from the sea, steady and filled with salt, clean and iodinic in the cell above the smell of creosote and tobacco-spit and old vomit; the sour smell of the flats went away and now there would be a glitter on the tide-chopped water, the gars roiling sluggishly up and then down again among the floating garbage. Then he heard feet on the stairs and the jailer entered with a tin mug of coffee and a piece of factory-made coffee cake. "You want anything else?" he said. "Any meat?"

What has Harry been doing? He stood all night at the window of his jail cell, hanging onto the bars. The tide has gone down, he has gone down. But then the tide comes back in again, the fresh morning breeze with it and you sense that life is coming back into Harry. You get the sense of this man standing all night at the window of his cell, *dead*. Then he comes back to life with the return of morning. Death and resurrection, in a way. There is an interlude where some bizarre things happen — his trial, a chance to commit suicide which he rejects and instead embraces the monastic

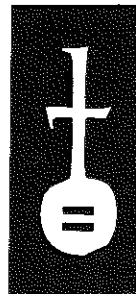
life of a penitentiary.

As I said at the beginning, one theme of *The Wild Palms* is, in a way, monastic vocations. Or rather, two of them. The one Harry decides for is certainly not the highest kind, but he does decide for it. And what does he determine? To grieve. His last words are "*between grief and nothing I will take grief*"! He will spend the rest of his life grieving: another death and resurrection motif. Harry seems to recover his own autonomy, his own freedom, which perhaps he had lost with Charlotte because they were so completely submerged in each other, so completely trying to be lost in the other, that they could end up only destroying each other.

This is something Faulkner obviously has in mind: the man-and-woman relationship — which is to say, what it is *to be human* — can never be a completely symbiotic thing. When two people become wholly submerged in each other, it is destruction, not love — which is the counterpoint to the story of the convict and the woman in "Old Man."

So much for *The Wild Palms* as Faulkner's meditation on two men and two women, tidal waves, deaths and resurrections, ending, in whatever one wants to make of it, a sort of monastic vocation in a Mississippi penitentiary.

□



CHRISTIANITY AGAINST HISTORY: FRANZ OVERBECK'S CONCEPT OF THE *FINIS CHRISTIANISMI*

Robert B. Luehrs

Quite palpably, Franz Overbeck, professor of church history and New Testament exegesis at the University of Basel, was the most radical theologian produced by the nineteenth century. His incisive, dispassionate skepticism denied the very basis of his own profession and the subject matter it was supposed to treat. He condemned theology for betraying all of the real principles of Christianity by injecting into this transcendent, world-renouncing faith the poison of reason and accommodation with a hostile environment. Christianity was not a loose collection of independent tenets which may be accepted or rejected as the needs of the moment demanded but a seamless unity in which logical contradictions were irrelevant. He considered history an alien medium into which Christianity had been catapulted against its will. Thus a belief which in its pure state had rejected history in favor of eschatology had been

metamorphosed into an aging institution subject to the same historical forces as any other human creation and had ended up, in modern times, an empty portmanteau into which all manner of irreligiosity could be inserted without qualm. Neither theologians nor church historians were justified in speaking in behalf of Christianity then, a conclusion Overbeck quite willingly applied to himself also.

Not the least element in his radicalism was his frank admission of how distant from Christianity he actually was. This comprehension of his own position allowed him to approach Christianity impartially, without either belief or rancor, an honest agnosticism without parallel among his colleagues. Whatever religious belief he might have had as a child was an early casualty of his university education, a fact that, unaccountably, had no effect on his choice of a career. He later supposed that his interest in theology must have stemmed from a brief-lived dream of youth to unite the spiritual life with some sort of humanitarian activity in the style of the worldly priest-philosophers of the Enlightenment.

Indeed, he sometimes thought that he belonged in the

ROBERT B. LUEHRS is Associate Professor of History at Fort Hays Kansas State College, Hays, Kansas. His introductory article, "Franz Overbeck and the Theologian as Antichrist" appeared in the Summer 1973 *Katallagete*.

eighteenth century rather than in its rather shoddy successor where he felt himself the outsider. He considered the endeavor by the Enlightenment *philosophes* to eradicate Christianity totally from culture only proof of their blindness about the extent to which this religion has shaped western civilization. He emphatically did not share the *philosophe's* view that Christianity was a purely retrograde force in history, an agent of barbarism, superstition and ignorance. On the contrary, Christianity had been of great value, setting high standards to be met by any ideology competing with it. Still, Overbeck believed, the *philosophes* deserved recognition for performing the undying service of reading the supernatural out of history and giving man back his own past rid of everything but human actions and human voices. By eliminating God as the motive force of history, man could begin to discover something about himself. Overbeck shared many of the attributes of the *philosophe* mentality: the circumspect rationalism which quite understood the limitations of reason but declined to proceed beyond it; the incorruptible drive for the truth; the relentless skepticism and willingness to criticize all assumptions; and the individualistic humanism, strong enough to stand without chains or crutches and to rest on nothing beyond itself.

Like the *philosophes*, Overbeck was a man of no party and no single sovereign. He had, it is true, been momentarily caught up by German nationalism in the 1860's but his aversion to an amoral *Realpolitik* which recognized no values outside of itself soon made him a "good European" rather than a patriot. This cosmopolitan attitude was much more appropriate to his reserved temperament and the international character of his background; the son of a German merchant, he had been born in 1837 in Russia, had grown up in a French-speaking household, and had come in contact with Germany only after his family had moved to Dresden when he was twelve.

For all of his intellectual boldness, Overbeck heartily disliked controversy and the fanaticism of the intellectual crusader. He had the quiet, bookish mien of the archetypical scholar. He carefully distinguished his literary activity from his classroom responsibilities and refused, as much as possible, to allow the conclusions he had reached in the former to intrude on the latter. As a teacher, he felt it was his task to present the New Testament and church history insofar as possible without bias so that his students might acquire mastery of these fields and be prepared for their examinations; his own religious viewpoint, or lack of it, was a purely internal matter, a burden for himself alone. He did not seek converts for he was too skeptical to assume he had somehow discovered the ultimate answers to the riddle of life. The answers he did have he fully realized were intensely personal, full of unresolved tensions, and transitory at best.

Not surprisingly, considering the intellectual limitations he placed on himself, he published little during his lifetime, and most of what he did publish was of a

scholarly rather than of a polemical or critical nature. When in 1897 a deteriorating physical condition released Overbeck from teaching and thus from the horrible paradox of working for theology as a professor and against it as a thinker, he no longer had the strength to carry out into the open his campaign against modern theology or to develop fully his concept of a profane church history, a purely objective study of Christianity as only a historical problem with all questions of sacredness and theology excluded. At best he could assemble material for these two impossible projects. Selections from these manuscripts were subsequently published after Overbeck's death by his younger colleague at Basel, Carl Albrecht Bernoulli. The most significant of these posthumous books compiled from Overbeck's literary remains was *Christianity and Culture* [*Christentum und Kultur: Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie* (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1919)], which strung together Overbeck's incisive and sometimes acrid observations on a variety of historical and cultural topics. It was unfortunate for the value of *Christianity and Culture* and the other Bernoulli products that the editor took on himself the obligation, with the aid of Overbeck's widow, of reworking Overbeck's labyrinthine, graceless literary style; toning down the myriad of gnarled phrases, subordinate clauses, and qualifying comments; of rearranging or eliminating sentences; and even of writing entirely new passages to clarify what Overbeck appeared to be saying. *Christianity and Culture* was especially flawed in these respects, for Bernoulli blended together ideas, both idle and serious, which Overbeck had conceived over more than three decades with no attention to chronology or the situations under which these concepts were evolved. Since no corrected versions of these Overbeck manuscripts have ever been issued in any language, the posthumous works must be measured against what Overbeck himself published, especially his grand assault on all the pretensions of theology, *Concerning the Christianity of Our Modern Theology* [*Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie* (Leipzig: E. W. Fritzsch, 1873)].

Even so, there is no mistaking Overbeck's view of history, which permeated everything he wrote. He mightily distrusted all philosophies of history, insisting that man has not been given to know beginnings and ends but may only quietly observe the continuum lying between. Since history was a descriptive science, the historian was to do no more than to contemplate and record; he was a mirror in which the reality of past events was to reflect itself, demonstrating its own direction and movement uninfluenced by the preconceptions of the scholar. Such was the ideal, although Overbeck was realistic enough to admit that in fact

historical research was a problematical activity and that in the last analysis the historian was subjective, particularly in his supposition that he could grasp and comprehend the substance of history. Only a healthy measure of skepticism could induce us to have the perspective and secure the insight we sought.

Thus Overbeck conducted a life-long quarrel with the spirit of nineteenth century church history which proclaimed objectivity but actually proposed to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. These were antithetical goals, impossible to harmonize. Overbeck denied that church history need serve any metaphysical goals and, moreover, found nothing in it to suggest special mission, miraculous inspiration or divine guidance. Besides, if only a Christian could properly handle church history then, by logical extension, no man could understand anything beyond his own culture or beyond himself. Beyond this, Overbeck saw history in organic terms.

Why does history create the impression that all things are to be conceived as in degeneration? Because history presents the development of objects; but all birth is vigorous in comparison to continuation and must be more vigorous. Only the births do not cease and what develops does not remain isolated, developing purely out of this original source, but puts forth new sprouts out of its environment . . . The movement of history is neither steady degeneration nor steady progress; it manifests itself in the interlacing of the two . . . (An historical object) begins with especial vigor and grows until it decays. That is true of every historical form if it will be contemplated historically in a real and earnest fashion. (*Christentum und Kultur*, p. 6)

An historical force, then, will rise from the humus of its decadent predecessors, maintaining a kind of continuity with these ancestors, and in its turn will die, giving birth in the process to something new. If Christianity was to be considered an historical force, it too partook of such a fate. There was no evidence that the advent of Christianity introduced some new age in which the existing world perished and a new order of existence was created. Christianity did not bring mankind anything that could be considered revelation or salvation: "What is eternal in us was in us always and did not become part of our life supplementally in an historical mood." *Christentum und Kultur*, p. 73. Or, again:

The world is a unity of heaven and hell. But we knew that without Christianity, and long before, because we knew it within ourselves. And therein exists the major offense of Christianity against us men: it particularly wants to have us impaled on a fact on which we have been impaled for a long time and thinks with that in a curious way to save us. (*Christentum und Kultur*, p. 65)

Christianity was no new departure but, as embodied in the church, maintained the continuity of history by absorbing into itself much of Graeco-Roman culture. On this

basis alone, Christianity could never be eternal, "modern" or contemporaneous. It belonged to the ancient world; it was the "embalmed for" in which we have inherited Antiquity, separated from our world by two thousand years. Christianity did not tame history. History swallowed Christianity and made its destruction inevitable.

Originally Christianity rejected history for itself and experienced a history against its own primeval expressed will . . . Placing Christianity under the concept of the historical thus admits that it has become historical — that is, that Christianity is *of the world* and, as all life, only lived in this world to experience life. Placing it under the category of development also places it under the general science of the historical consideration of things in which one speaks of a beginning, a blossoming, and an end, something genuine and real Christianity never acknowledged. Transplanted to the basis of historical consideration, Christianity is irrevocably enslaved to the concept of mortality or decadence . . . The extreme old age of Christianity is for serious historical contemplation the lethal argument against its immortality. In life there is no old age that is not the forerunner of death. (*Christentum und Kultur*, pp. 7-8)

This dismal prospect was the result of Christianity betraying its first principles based, as they were, on the assumption that in view of the impending apocalypse neither the world nor its history held any significance. Authentic Christianity belonged beyond the limits that a historian must respect, to a species of the past Overbeck called prehistory [*Urgeschichte*]. Prehistory in this sense had nothing to do with the chronological prehistory of man before the existence of written records, say in the neolithic era, but to that period of time in which a given historical manifestation first bursts into life. Thus Christianity experienced its prehistory surreptitiously within the mature and brilliant Roman Empire. Overbeck supposed that once the requisite energy had been amassed for a historical entity to be defined, it was thrust into history where as it gradually expended its strength and progressively atrophied, it became a legitimate subject for historical study. The historian did not have tools of sufficient delicacy to permit the probing of this mystery of birth; he could only chart the expiration of historical institutions. Prehistory was a mystery, hidden in a darkness so profound that at best the historian could only discern general shapes within it. The literature and monuments of prehistory were completely intelligible only to itself despite the efforts of subsequent commentators to argue otherwise.

Overbeck stuck by these cautionary dicta and provided only some general observations about the nature of original Christianity rather than a precise discussion of its attributes. He found this Christianity to be a self-contained, elemental life-view which totally absorbed the believer, leaving no room for the existence of competing outlooks.

Needless to say, Christianity had nothing to do with reason or knowledge; there was an "unambiguous antipathy" between all wordly wisdom and the true faith which could not be resolved in the slightest fashion. Its chief prerequisite was a "childlike belief" in Christ, an impossibility for our world but quite acceptable for the world of prehistory in which Christianity had its genesis.

Christianity means nothing else than Christ and the belief of his followers in him. It is something supratemporal, not existing in Jesus' lifetime. I think no modern theological investigation of early Christianity has succeeded in proving otherwise. After Jesus' death it withdrew from all historical perception in that Christ's followers became a completely incomprehensible thing shimmering ambiguously between being and nothingness. Paul first introduced Christianity into the sphere of history . . . (*Christentum und Kultur*, p. 28)

This primitive Christianity presented eschatology as the practical expression of its most profound truth and placed the expectation of the Second Coming at the very center of its beliefs. Naturally growing out of this rejection of the world and anticipation of its imminent destruction was asceticism, the means by which Christians could escape the sinful world and make manifest their rejection of all that existed in the name of what was about to exist. Asceticism was also a transformation of the expectation of Christ's return in such a manner that the failure of the *Parousia* did not shake the faith invested in it. Formalized as monasticism, asceticism preserved the soul of Christianity while the Church was being absorbed by the World. On this basis the advent of Protestantism represented not a noble attempt to recapture the spirit of original Christianity but a grim milestone in the destruction of the religion.

Christianity could not rule the world for its wisdom was that of the last things, of death, the intrusion of the unknown into the life of each individual. Here was the delicate riddle which all men must meet, although Overbeck did not believe that by doing so the meaning of the universe would suddenly be revealed. Overbeck never really approved of the desperate consolation Christianity attempted to offer about death and much preferred the serene observations of Montaigne about the degree to which death illuminated the possibilities of life. Death was the most unambiguous symbol of our community, the agent which could banish illusions and distortions in life. Still, he appreciated the overriding significance of the Christian emphasis on *Memento Mori* and considered this the most powerful message in the Sermon on the Mount.

Illustrative of the enigma of Christian prehistory were the written fragments that have survived from this time of

genesis, Christian preliterate [*Urliteratur*]. In a sense the relationship between Christian preliterate and later ecclesiastical literature such as the patristic writings was equivalent to the relationship between primal Christianity and the historical church. Totally separated from the universal intelligibility and conventional forms of genuine literature and manifested in such nonliterary languages as tribal Aramaic or Hellenized Hebrew, Christian preliterate was completely self-contained, addressing itself directly only to the faith of a small group of believers. Such primitive documents would be incomprehensible to outsiders, a situation the church itself had to acknowledge towards the end of the second century when the best specimens of Christian preliterate were embalmed as canon and attributed to the authorship of the Holy Ghost.

The institution of canon was the admission that the sort of mentality which had produced the Gospels and Acts was dead and because these works could never be duplicated, they had to be accorded special status fitting their unworldly character. It was at that point that the church completed its involuntary passage from prehistory to history, and in the *Stromateis* of Clement of Alexandria (c. 200 A.D.) Christianity produced its first example of true literature. For that matter, the New Testament was not considered as history by Overbeck; it lacked an authentic sense of time, something that became evident fully only in Eusebius' works (c. 325 A.D.), where apologetic intentions were united with themes adopted from secular history.

Overbeck was most intrigued by the Gospel of John, in many respects the most unhistorical gospel of all. John employed the information offered by the synoptic gospels not in order to supplement it but to go in a new, even contradictory, direction. The fourth evangelist devised his own chronology of scenes and used them simply as sets for Jesus' speeches rather than as harmonious parts in a general narrative. The brief, poetic parables uttered by Jesus in the synoptic gospels were transfigured by John into long, obscure confessions of a supernatural consciousness which perplexed instead of enlightened the multitudes. To Overbeck the author of the fourth gospel was comparable to a poet who covered what he adopted from his predecessors with the private world of a vision in which men and objects swirled in a world devoid of time and space and served only to mirror the existence of an alien force in their midst. John provided no biography of Jesus but a profession that Jesus was the Son of God. Whatever this essay might be, it was not history.

Understandably, considering the peculiar nature of the available source material, Overbeck had little to say about the figure of Jesus, one of the perplexing of the enigmas embodied in Christian prehistory. "Can a human figure as

passive as Jesus be considered as the founder of anything in the world (in history)? Is not Christianity a historical edifice to the dimensions of which the figure of Jesus has absolutely no relationship any more?" (*Christentum und Kultur*, p. 39) He considered the most fruitful approach to the personality of Jesus to be that offered by his close friend Friedrich Nietzsche. Overbeck was no Nietzschean, although he did follow Nietzsche's intellectual odyssey with considerable interest and a certain degree of sympathy, especially for his friend's acute inquiry into the barbaric decadence of the modern age. Overbeck's circumspection held him back from participating in Nietzsche's increasingly vitriolic war of extermination against Christianity and pointed out to him scholarly errors in the philosopher's analysis of the essence of Christianity, notably in Nietzsche's downplaying of asceticism and in what Overbeck discerned — erroneously, it could be added — as an antisemitic coloration creeping into his friend's normally philosemitic outlook. Yet, Overbeck was fascinated by Nietzsche's depiction of "the psychological type of the Redeemer" in *The AntiChrist*, a highly agitated product of Nietzsche's last days of lucidity.

Nietzsche's conception of Jesus, which freely owed as much to Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot* as to the gospel account, was a man who instinctively hated reality, who was incapable of resisting anyone or anything. Here was a serene being who did not have to control his passions because, rather as a western Buddha, he lacked them entirely; here was the childlike faith which needed no proof beyond its own existence and to which Overbeck often referred. In Nietzsche's view the "glad tidings" — the "good news" — did not involve redemption from sin, a promise of future blessedness, but an immediate reality in which man became one with God. This was not a belief but a way of living, action which came automatically, without the need for thought, rather than some artificial dogma to be believed. To Nietzsche, the kingdom of God was a condition of the heart. Overbeck clearly agreed with much of this characterization:

Christ is the prototype of the religious drive in men to feel positively one with God. Whoever is not able to find the point within himself where, as in every one of us, the drive and capacity slumbers for sublimating ourselves in God, absolutely abandons comprehension of Jesus. For this individual there are only the eternal alternatives of worshipping Jesus blindly (the theologians ought not and cannot do this) or considering him a fraudulent fanatic. (*Christentum und Kultur*, p. 42)

Overbeck did not affirm Nietzsche's aphorism that "in truth there was only one Christian and he died on the cross;" he denied that Jesus could be termed a Christian at all. The differences between Jesus and St. Francis, for example, were far more instructive than the similarities. Of course, Overbeck could not accept any testimony as to Jesus' divinity. Such a question simply lay beyond the

narrow limits of human knowledge.

There was a good deal less concurrence between Overbeck and Nietzsche on the subject of Paul. Overbeck did call Nietzsche's insistence on the Jewish roots of Christianity, as evidenced in a man like Paul, a most valuable contribution to the understanding of Christian prehistory. The two men were also agreed that Paul was the cofounder of the Christian religion if not its actual originator and that Paul was the man who, by opening the doors of the church to the pagans, started Christianity on the road to the betrayal of its first principles. Both asserted that Paul could not fathom Jesus despite Paul's claim to be the authentic interpreter of Jesus' teaching. As Overbeck put it:

For a personality like Paul's, a personality like Jesus' must have been completely unintelligible and only enjoyed his absolute abhorrence or his absolute veneration. Paul felt both for Jesus. — All the beautiful sides of Christianity stem from Jesus, all of the ugly from Paul. — Frankly, Jesus was incomprehensible to Paul, and for that reason Jesus seemed to him a positively transcendental being: Jesus with his harmony, Paul with the infirmity of his consciousness. (*Christentum und Kultur*, p. 55)

However, for Nietzsche Paul was a villain of the first order, "the genius of hatred," the "dysangelist" who led the emotional cripples in their campaign of revenge against the noble and great and who twisted Jesus' way of life into a dogma of malevolent retribution. Such rancor was foreign to Overbeck; he was not at war with Christianity, after all. Overbeck found Paul a splendid example of what the impact of Jesus on an idealistic, enlightened Jew could produce. Overbeck was also fascinated by the relentless, insatiable nature of Paul's frenetic missionary activities. The conviction that Christ's return was at hand had driven Paul to seek limitless territory for God. It was totally irrational: Paul would convert a community, forgive the converts their sins, and then hurry on to the next town, leaving the new Christians to their own devices. His was the passion of an ecstatic, who saw everything in religious terms. Such a mentality was utterly remote from that of modern Christianity. Even Luther misinterpreted it, thinking Paul taught justification by faith and the perpetual sinfulness of man. In fact, Overbeck argued, Paul felt himself raised above all sin to the point that he had no fear of the Last Judgment; thus Paul could compare his life, with all of his deficiencies, to that of Christ. Such a Christianity was intensely personal, unrelated and opposed to the world and its works. Luther, who considered himself Pauline, was too political to grasp this type of faith. Luther used Paul as a weapon to break free of the Catholic Church, the sort of liberation Paul would have found meaningless.

Actually, Overbeck asserted, much closer to Paul in spirit than Luther was Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth century mathematical genius who felt in his own soul the unbridgeable chasm that separated reason and faith. Before he was sixteen, Pascal had published an essay on conic sections which, it was said, had astonished even the formidable Rene Descartes. At eighteen, he invented an adding machine. He worked with formulas of probability, was a pioneer in hydro-dynamics, and came close to discovering calculus. Yet, he became aware at the age of thirty-one how useless the mathematical method was in dealing with the human condition. Scientific knowledge had value only within the limited sphere of our experience, but had no bearing on those crucial mysteries which lay beyond, such as the existence of the Christian God. The natural world of the scientists offered only ambiguous testimony about such a question; the metaphysical discussions of the theologians were unconvincing and, in any case, turned God into a sterile abstraction, a nebulous First Cause, more pagan than Christian. The God of the philosophers, to Pascal, was definitely not "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Pascal was convinced that the most important truths of all, those concerning man's nature and his relationship to God, could not be apprehended through the categories of analytical reason. The immediate, direct, instinctual experience of God sought by Pascal could not be achieved by deductive logic, skillful debate, elaborate dogma or any other intellectual gymnastics. It was an unreasoned perception of the heart, a product of faith alone. To Overbeck, Pascal was truly the last of his breed: a splendidly authentic Christian who realized that the only legitimate form of apologetics was the life of the believer. Moreover, Pascal had correctly identified the enemy. In his brilliant polemical war against the Jesuits, Pascal was really exposing the casuistry of theologians who diluted Christianity for the ease of men of the world and thereby struck their religion a mortal blow. "Jesuitism," wrote Overbeck, "is Christianity become worldwise. It appears in a certain epoch of the development of every Confession." [*Christentum und Kultur*, p. 124] He added that

Protestant theology had become an especially sublime form of Jesuitism.

Overbeck also appreciated Pascal's immense intellectual power, his independence from all parties, his wry humor, and his highly developed skepticism, which permitted him to marvel at the "chimera," the incredible tangle of contradictions man was. The two men shared a remarkable sense of the problematic, the paradoxical, and the ironic in the human condition, and documented the ambivalence of life in a prose richly filled with ambiguities and reservations. There was, however, a major difference. Pascal ultimately escaped skepticism by a leap of faith Overbeck could not manage. Still, Overbeck could not help but admire Pascal's insight and integrity:

The problem which occupied Pascal is absolutely not the religious one of reformer of his confession — on the contrary, he held himself apart from this with all the consistency of instinct — but the intellectual one of a representation of Christianity against the world or, more strongly expressed within the boundaries of Pascal's terminology, Christianity against human nature. The problem has never been conceived in the modern world with the same purity as by Pascal . . . Whoever would undertake to represent Christianity against knowledge could take no better model than Pascal. No undertaking, however, appears to me to lie further from the modern world than this one. (*Christentum und Kultur*, pp. 130-131)

A figure like Pascal could only serve to emphasize how far the modern age had ceased to be Christian. Contemporary society with its emphasis on progress and the future could not be further removed from the precipitate efforts by the first Christians to be ready for the end of the world. Forced against its will into the maelstrom of history, compelled to enter into communion with the culture it rejected, Christianity had grown decrepit and problematical, an impotent shadow of what it was at the beginning. Since no remedy was possible Overbeck asked only that Christianity be permitted to expire softly. It had been vanquished in its competition with the world, but then the world had not been the realm of Christianity in the first place. □

HOW THE KINGS OF THE EARTH LAND IN THE NEW JERUSALEM

"THE WORLD"

IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Vernard Eller

The big thing in biblical studies these days is "trajectories." I am willing to traject one but insist on doing it different, beginning at the landing site rather than the launch pad.

Predictably, I suppose, the most question and controversy regarding my commentary on Revelation [*The Most Revealing Book of the Bible*, Eerdmans, 1974] has come with the scripture printed below and its placing of "the kings of the earth," in all their glory, right on the streets of the new Jerusalem. How scandalous to find them there: — (1) for conservatives, because it implies that redemption may reach even into the lake of fire, when any true believer *knows* that damnation is for always; (2) for

radicals, because God is a fink if he breaks faith with them and ceases at some point to hate kings, presidents, and such types; (3) for liberals, to think that anyone might take the book of Revelation seriously in the first place. But for the Revelator to speak of "the kings of the earth" is to speak of "the world"; and where that trajectory ends is here:

And the city had no need of sun or moon to shine upon it; for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk, and the kings of the earth shall bring into it all their splendor. The gates of the city shall never be shut by day — and there will be no night. The wealth and splendor of the nations shall be brought into it; but nothing unclean shall enter, nor anyone whose ways are false or foul, but only those who are inscribed in the Lamb's roll of the living. Then he showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the city's street. On either side of the river stood a tree of life, which yields twelve crops of fruit, one for each month of the year; the leaves of the trees serve for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 21:23 — 22:2)

VERNARD ELLER is Professor of Religion, LaVerne College, LaVerne, California, and a minister of the Church of the Brethren. Among other books, he is the author of *King Jesus' Manual of Arms for the Armless*; *The Promise of the Kingdom*; *A Sex Manual for Puritans*; *The Simple Life*; *In Place of Sacraments*; *The Most Revealing Book of the Bible*.

John's thought regarding "the world" is nothing if not complex and dialectical — so much so that he handles it with a congeries of images rather than as anything like "a concept." Indeed, we would do better to speak of "worldliness" rather than "the world," for John is more concerned with a type of *faith* than he is with an entity of some sort.

For sure, nothing much can be learned by doing a word study on his use of the phrase, "the world." The term occurs infrequently and even then without apparent theological overtone but simply in the sense of "the mass of mankind." In one case the wording is "... that serpent of old that led the whole world astray" (12:9). In another, "The sovereignty of the world has passed to our Lord and his Christ" (11:15). Clearly, "the world" is a swing term that, in itself, implies neither good nor evil, neither approval nor disapproval.

However, the case is dramatically otherwise when we go to the images that represent the faith we have chosen to designate as "worldliness." John develops this in deliberate counterpoint to the true faith which is in Christ Jesus. He has a wordly trinity to stand over against the Christian trinity. Satan, the great red dragon, is the counterpart of God the Father. As God is the ultimate source of all that is good and true, so Satan is the ultimate source of everything that constitutes "worldliness." But just as the Christian faith (and thus Revelation) tends to focus more upon the presence and work of Christ, so does worldliness upon his opposite number.

Christ is *arnion*, the Lamb; Antichrist is *therion*, the beast. A commentator has said, "Whatever is opposed to Christ is Antichrist"; and John would seem to agree. The Lamb is intended as the focus of man's entire faith, fervor, and fealty; whenever and to whatever degree that focus moves elsewhere, its object is the beast. Antichrist, thus, includes anything outside of Jesus Christ that might become a center of ultimate concern; or perhaps more precisely put, Antichrist is the spirit that leads men to give priority to that which is not Christ. In any case, worldliness is a faith, a god-worship, just as truly as Christianity is — although, as is appropriate to its nature, it fixes upon the multifarious as its object rather than upon the integer of truth. (David L. Miller is right; if the task of the theologian is to invent a form of deity that will best serve the tendency of man, we ought to get polytheistic.) But whether or not it accords with modern preference, the Revelator divides all faith into just two categories: Christianity and worldliness, the worship of the Lamb or of the beast.

John also has an unholy spirit to stand over against Christianity's Holy Spirit; but he does not give major attention to either of these, except to portray their parallel of function (13:11-17). They are not crucial to his understanding of worldliness.

Moving from the deities to their faith-communities, John portrays two women who represent the communities themselves and two cities representing their milieus and homes. The woman clothed with the sun — who in time becomes the bridge of the Lamb (?) — is the community of the true Judeo-Christian faith; the great whore is the community of worldliness. Jerusalem (old and new) is the place of the true church; Babylon (over and out) is the place of the church of worldliness.

The way in which John relates and interrelates the beast, the whore, and Babylon is telling. The whore is Babylon; John says this and does not provide the wherewithal for making any but distinctions of imagery between them. But the whore *rides* the beast (and into the ditch, apparently). We shall make a closer analysis of the Babylon-whore a bit later; but I read the significance of their relationship/distinction somewhat as follows: The whore signifies more the outward, empirical manifestations of worldliness — the kind of things and activities that are reported, communicated, and advertised through our mass media. The beast signifies more the spiritual power that lies behind worldliness. Worldliness is not simply the sum total of the worldly things people do; it is a faith indwelt by a power, a motive, a tendency, a directive of its own. And if the Christian neglects the beast aspect out of a desire to deal with worldliness only as whore, he is inviting trouble.

Out of the two faith-communities, then, John draws classes of men to stand as paradigms of each. From the Lamb's people, it is the saints who have borne a martyr-witness; they are those most representative of what Christians are called to be. From the beast's people, it is "the kings of the earth," the ones who did the martyring of the saints. They are introduced in parallel scenes (6:9-17).

II.

Watching them in action, it is rather plain what these kings signify for John, namely power, glory, status, aggrandizement, exploitation, connivance, repression. Most particularly, they represent militarism and war; we tend, perhaps, to forget that, historically, kings, first and foremost, are the commanders-in-chief of their armies. Twice (6:15 and 19:18) John lists the beast's people in descending order from the evilmost ringleaders down through the not-quite-so-bad followers. In each case the kings of the earth lead the march and other military types come immediately behind.

We need to take note of this precession of evil; but we need also to beware of the occasion for misunderstanding that is here as well. John's imagery of worldliness is not

confined to kings. They, of course, point to what we call "the state"; and the temptation in our day has been to see all evil as centering there, to equate Antichrist directly with the state, to assume that the major obstacles to human realization are all political in nature, and thus to interpret the Christian calling as being the mounting of political opposition to those "kings of the earth."

But it won't do! In the first place, worldliness takes on a much broader aspect when Babylon, the whore, and Antichrist are allowed in the picture alongside the kings. When, in Chapter 18, Babylon falls, "the kings of the earth (who) have committed fornication with her" are joined by "merchants the world over (who) have grown rich on her bloated wealth." And as that account continues, the emphasis is much more on luxury, materialism, and ecological profligacy than on government activity. Of particular significance, in the scene where the beast's followers are sealed as members of his order of worldliness, we are told that "no one was allowed to *buy or sell* unless he bore this beast's mark" (13:17). Clearly, worldliness is as dominant in the sphere of commerce, economics, and consumerism as it is in the sphere of statehood.

But there is no excuse to stop with that. As *whore*, this woman, of course, is *sexually* licentious. There would seem no doubt but that John means the symbol to refer to more than just sexual promiscuity; yet there certainly are no grounds for exempting actual carnality from the representation. Similarly, the woman is pictured as *drunken*. Again, John obviously intends more than simple physical intoxication — particularly when he specifies that it is "the blood of God's people" she drinks. But again, also, there is no justification for exempting physiological toxics from John's thought. We should read in Revelation what we ought to be able to see around us as well, namely that unrighteousness in personal deportment and lifestyle are as of great threat to the human community as are our "social ills." Worldliness consists in what we find *within* us as much as it does in evil institutions outside.

Finally, as we already have suggested, Antichrist, in himself, represents anything and everything that would seduce men away from exclusive loyalty to Jesus Christ — be that seduction political or economic, related to public morality or private, of a behavioral nature or spiritual. If the only enemy you know is those kings of the earth, your Bad is too small!

In the second place, even though the kings do represent a significant focus of evil, there is no hint anywhere in Revelation that the indicated response is for the Lamb's people to go out and fight them on their own terms, that is, in terms of socio-political activism. Rather, John's counsel consistently and repeatedly is "Don't apostasize; don't let yourself be seduced into worldliness." And in this regard, it well could be argued that, even when one sets out to fight *against* the kings, if he lets *them* determine the site and the means of that fighting, he has been seduced. In turn, it could be argued, too, that the great

Christian crusades of recent memory (whether of conservative, liberal, or radical sponsorship) have smelled more of seduction than of victory.

At many different places, in many different ways, John makes clear what is the uniquely Christian way to defeat kings, whores, or Antichrists — a way that is as distinct from the way of worldliness as the head of each faith is from the other. His most effective statement is a single verse: "By the sacrifice of the Lamb they have conquered him (i.e. the beast), and by the testimony which they uttered; for they did not hold their lives too dear to lay them down" (12:11). This "way of the cross" obviously is something quite different from the worldly perversion of the idea, the *crusade* (literally, "cross-bearing") — a mass movement designed to either bandwagon or steamroller the bad guys out and the good guys in.

III.

Having defined and located "worldliness," its course through history now can be traced simply by following the path of John's "kings of the earth." Their first mention comes very early on. As John greets his congregations in the name of Jesus Christ, he gives Jesus a three-fold title, the final element of which is "ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:5).

The declaration is that the kings even now *have* a ruler, not that they someday will get one; and this points us to one of John's fundamental premises. When the story opens — at the time of his writing — the kings and, indeed, the entire aggregation of Evil already have been defeated and taken under control. They have not yet realized or admitted it, but that is what happened in Jesus' death-and-resurrection. John's is the account of the working-out of that already-accomplished victory; and he is careful not to suggest the possibility of or even the need for any decisive showdown between Good and Evil yet to come. The kings of the earth already have their ruler, and the fate of worldliness already is determined. (And this means, by the way, that the Lamb's people, here and now, can begin to share in that victory; they don't have to let themselves be seduced or overpowered; they possess the wherewithal for repelling worldliness.)

It is in 6:9-17 that the kings actually are brought on the scene and set up in direct contrast to their counterparts, the martyr saints. And here it is established that the kings are guilty as can be, know that they are guilty, and are in desperate fear of "the vengeance of the Lamb" (although no hint is given as to what that most paradoxical phrase might imply).

In 17:2, "the kings of the earth" are identified as the first in line among the whore's customers. In this fornication their moral stature stands revealed; they are themselves the *seduced* as well as being leaders in the party of *seduction*.

In 16:14, then, the kings are directed by the evil trinity to muster their armies for what they think will be a great day of battle against God. The role given the kings here is helpful in our reading of the character of their activity; but the battle they envision does not come off; their effort collapses before they even can get in sight of an opponent. And in this we see two ideas that John elsewhere reiterates in other ways: (1) As we already have noted, the decisive confrontation between Good and Evil took place in the cross of Jesus Christ and no subsequent set-to dare be allowed to detract from the sufficiency of that one. (2) The very nature of worldliness [*defeated* worldliness always recall) is that its center cannot hold; by composition multifarious, its inevitable tendency is dissolution. Neither in his several accounts of the fall of Babylon nor, as here, in his "battle scenes" (so-called) does John include any suggestion of an outside *attack* upon the forces and structures of Evil; no, they fall apart under the weight of their own inherent corruption. It follows, certainly, that God neither needs nor wants his people to sponsor plots of obstruction and subversion against the world; and John nowhere even hints at such a suggestion.

Chapter 19 contains a second rendition of the Armageddon scene; and this one is John's primary treatment of the parousia. The kings again appear as the human agents who head up the war effort of worldliness. In this case there is explicit imagery specifying the cross of Christ as the effective cause of this final collapse of Evil. Also, in this case, the fate of the kings is particularized: they are eaten by the vultures. This is an appropriate end for the kings, but we dare not take it as their *final* end; this is their entrance into merely first-order (i.e. physiological) death.

A subsequent vision, that of the final sentencing (20:11-15), does not mention "the kings of the earth" by name but surely must be understood as including them. All of the supernatural representatives of Evil and now all of "the dead," i.e. all those whose names are not to be found in the roll of the living (thus, all of the beast's people, including the kings), are flung into the lake of fire. They have gone from death to DEATH — from first-order, physiological death into second-order, spiritual death. And *this* is what we normally have understood as being the final end of worldliness and what we have felt properly should be so.

IV.

But then . . . but then comes Chapter 21 and the passage quoted at the outset of our study. And here, lo and behold, in the new Jerusalem, are: (1) the kings of the earth in all their splendor; (2) the wealth and splendor of the nations being carried in; (3) open gates, which certainly are meant to imply a continuing in-traffic; and (4) trees, the leaves of which are to serve for the *healing of the nations*. (Particularly if the Greek verbs are given their exact sense, the picture clearly is that of a continuing migration into the city — from out the lake of fire (?) — rather than a point event at the time of the city's establishment.)

And it is just this passage that has necessitated the very careful way in which we have been using the terms "worldliness" and "the world." "Worldliness," the *faith* that we have defined, *has* disappeared forever in the lake of fire, and nothing of it is to be found in the new Jerusalem. John (deliberately, I think) is quick to tell us so; immediately upon mentioning the kings and the wealth of the nations he qualifies that nothing "unclean" shall be entering. Likewise, none of the supernatural personifications of worldliness, those figures that represent worldliness in and of itself, ever are portrayed as getting anywhere close to the city. Nevertheless, much of what is covered in our term, "the world," does turn up there: the kings of the earth (and by implication, others of the beast's people as well) and the wealth and splendor of the nations, which surely had been thought of as going down in the fall of Babylon.

That, somehow, God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ can get to the beast's people (even the kings of the earth) and that out of the extremity of the second death and its lake of fire — this is itself a radical enough idea, to be sure. But catch the implication of the wealth and splendor of the nations being brought into the city. The trust of that announcement carries beyond the limits of our comprehension; but one thing it says for sure is that this God of ours is really some Ecologist. Nothing that he has created as good ultimately will be lost; whatever is redeemable, he is intent to redeem; and if that goes for the wealth and splendor of the nations, it certainly goes for human beings whom God, obviously, loves and values above all.

V.

Now because this conclusion is so different from what most of us expect (particularly from the book of Revelation), there is a real temptation to dismiss the

wording of this passage as a carelessness or accident on John's part, his getting so carried away in magnifying the new Jerusalem that he forgot who these kings were and where he had put them earlier. Or else there are attempts to explain away our interpretation: these are not the same kings who were flung into the lake of fire but a group of Christian kings who had been part of the Lamb's people all along (although, in that case, they would need to be part of the native population of the city from the time of its creation rather than outsiders who continue to enter the open gates). Alternately, the suggestion is made that the city is not meant to represent the total church, the total sphere of redemption, but only its headquarters. These are, then, newly appointed kings who rule the outlying domains of salvation and have in-and-out access to the city. Why anyone who *could* be in the city with God and the Lamb ever would choose to be outside — and what function *kings* might have in such a realm — is not said.

Yet all these tactics come to naught once we see that John's trajectory landing of the kings in the new Jerusalem is not his own invention but actually a reiteration of a trajectory that traces through the Bible as a whole. The key is the realization that, in John's passage, "the nations" is a term that is even more prominent than "the kings of the earth": "By its light shall the nations walk" (21:24); "The wealth and splendor of the nations shall be brought into it" (21:26); and "The leaves of the trees shall serve for the healing of the nations" (22:2).

In the original Greek, we need to know, "the nations" translates the very same word that at other places is translated "the Gentiles"; the translator's judgment as to which rendering reads best in a given context is the only basis of distinction — a distinction which would not even have existed for John and the early Christians. It must be noted, too, that the same situation holds regarding the corresponding *Hebrew* word used in the Old Testament. "The nations" and "the Gentiles" are one concept, not two. And it is a concept that is very well defined and understood within the total course of the Bible.

The most incisive expression of what the term implies is probably Ephesians 2:11-12 (part of a passage to which we will return in due course):

Remember then your former condition: you, Gentiles (nations) as you are outwardly, you, "the uncircumcised" so called by those who are called "the circumcised" (but only with reference to an outward rite) — you were at that time separate from Christ, strangers to the community of Israel, outside God's covenants and the promise that goes with them. Your world was a world without hope and without God.

The meaning of "the nations/Gentiles," if we can put it in a

word, is OUTSIDERS; the overtones are part of the very term itself.

As we trace the biblical trajectory, then, what becomes abundantly clear is that "the nations" never designates merely one particular group of nation-states that share a certain moral character, leaving open the possibility that there may be another group of nation-states of different character. "The nations" probably were not thought of as any sort of collection of nation-states at all — more likely, the totality of outsiders as a class. In short, the term is *theological* rather than political in nature.

And what we shall soon discover is that the phrase "kings of the earth" is so intimately linked to "the nations/Gentiles" that it must be understood the same way. The kings do not designate a specific group which might include some rulers and not others; the kings themselves constitute a theological category, the first rank of the outsiders, the enemies of God. Acts 9:15 clarifies the situation beautifully; the Lord says that Paul is "a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel." All mankind is comprehended under those categories; there is no one else.

Getting that terminology straight tells us something. It tells the conservatives that they cannot suddenly, at Revelation 21:23 — 22:2, make the words "the kings of the earth" and "the nations/Gentiles" mean something entirely different from what they do everywhere else in Scripture and now identify entirely different people. But at the same time, it tells liberals that it is not biblically honest to leave Revelation on the shelf during a Kennedy administration and then use it for a fare-thee-well in fulminating against the kings of the earth during a Nixon administration, to imply that Richard Nixon definitely is one but that George McGovern would not be. Yes, of course, there are significant moral differences between one ruler and another; but if we may say so, these are relative enough as to be invisible when looking at history from the ultimate perspective that John affects.

VI.

As we proceed now actually to trace the larger biblical trajectory, we have neither the space nor inclination to do an exhaustive study. We will confine ourselves to selected passages from Psalms, Isaiah, and Paul and will not fuss about matters of dating, authorship, strata, and all such; our interest lies only in the tradition that was available to John as he wrote Revelation.

Psalms 2 is a messianic hymn that obviously was important to John and to which he alludes several times. (Notice here and in the following how the nations/Gentiles

and the kings are sometimes put in direct tandem and sometimes in poetic paralelism but always in the closest possible association.) The psalm opens:

Why are the nations in turmoil?
Why do the peoples hatch their futile plots?
The kings of the earth stand ready,
and the rulers conspire together
against the Lord and his anointed king. (2:1-2)

John shows them doing just that in his Armageddon scene.
The psalm closes:

Be mindful then, you kings;
learn your lesson, rulers of the earth:
worship the Lord with reverence;
tremble, and kiss the king,
lest the Lord be angry and you are
struck down in mid course;
for his anger flares up in a moment. (2:10-12)

John shows the kings beginning to get this message when they pray that the mountains might fall upon them and save them from "the vengeance of the Lamb."

Psalm 48 describes Zion's hill, "fair and lofty, the joy of the whole earth, the hill of the great King's city." But then:

See how the kings all gather round her,
marching on in company.
They are struck with amazement when they see her,
they are filled with alarm and panic. (48:4-5)

The Armageddon scene could have been patterned almost directly over this one.

In Psalm 68, God again scatters his enemies, naming "the kings" by name (vs. 12). But then, consequent to that victory, we are told in verse 29, "O God, . . . command kings to bring gifts to thee for the honor of thy temple in Jerusalem." John, of course, has the kings carrying the wealth and splendor of the nations into the new Jerusalem. But notice a difference upon which we will want to keep an eye: the psalm describes a subjection of the kings and an extortion of their tributes that is entirely absent in John.

Psalm 72 is a prayer for the victory Psalm 68 recounted:

All kings shall pay him homage,
all nations shall serve him.

Long may the king's name endure,
may it live for ever like the sun;
so shall all peoples pray to be blessed as he was,
all nations tell of his happiness. (72:17)

Psalm 102:15-16, then, caps the entire psalmic sequence:

Then shall the nations revere thy name, O Lord;

and all the kings of the earth thy glory,
when the Lord builds up Zion again
and shows himself in his glory.

That one gets very close to what John described as taking place in the new Jerusalem.

Going to Isaiah, matters become, if possible, even more explicit:

On that day the Lord will punish
the host of heaven in heaven,
and on earth the kings of the earth,
herded together, close packed like prisoners in a dungeon;
shut up in jail, after a long time they shall be punished.
The moon shall grow pale and the sun hide its face in
shame;
for the Lord of Hosts has become king
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and shows his glory before their elders.

(Isaiah 24:21-23)

The sequence is at one with John's: the host of heaven (the supernaturals of Evil) and the kings of the earth are thrown into the lake of fire and then is the glory of the Lord manifested in the new Jerusalem.

Isaiah 49:22-23 has both the nations and the kings entering redeemed Jerusalem — although it must be admitted that the note of subservience is very strong.

Now is the time: I will beckon to the nations
and hoist a signal to the peoples,
and they shall bring your sons in their arms
and carry your daughters on their shoulders;
kings shall be your foster-fathers
and their princesses shall be your nurses.
They shall bow to the earth before you
and lick the dust from your feet;
and you shall know that I am the Lord.

Yet, in counterbalance to that, regarding the great 53rd chapter of Isaiah (which begins back at 52:13), recall that it is "many nations" and "kings" who see what they had never been told, namely that it was the suffering servant of Yahweh whose chastisement made them whole and by whose stripes they were healed. It is the nations/Gentiles and the kings of the earth who are the direct object of that vicarious atonement.

However, it is Isaiah 60, a great hymn to Jerusalem, that is most obviously the source of John's culminating vision:

Arise, Jerusalem,
rise clothed in light; your light has come
and the glory of the Lord shines over you. (vs. 1)

And the nations shall march towards your light
and their kings to your sunrise. (vs. 3)

The riches of the sea shall be lavished upon you

and you shall possess the wealth of the nations. (vs. 5b)

Your gates shall be open continually,
they shall never be shut day or night,
that through them may be brought the wealth of the nations
and their kings under escort. (vs. 11)

The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
nor the moon shine on you when evening falls;
the Lord shall be your everlasting light,
your God shall be your glory. (vs. 19)

Two specifics out of this total Old Testament vision will need to be taken care of by John. For one thing, the Old Testament seers apparently understood all this as a development to take place within history, a destiny working out through political means involving the Jewish state and the literal city of Jerusalem. For the other, as we have noted, there is the almost inevitable overtone of the Gentile's enforced subservience to Israel and her God. One of these concerns will be cared for even before John gets to the matter.

VII.

The trajectory of the nations/kings sails right across into the New Testament. The best description of its flight at that point is the passage from Ephesians at which we took just a brief peek earlier. In full, it is a rather exciting bit of news.

Remember then your former condition: you, Gentiles as you are outwardly, you, "the uncircumcised" so called by those who are called "the circumcised" (but only with reference to an outward rite) — you were at that time separate from Christ, strangers to the community of Israel, outside God's covenants and the promise that goes with them. Your world was a world without hope and without God. But now in union with Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near through the shedding of Christ's blood. For he is himself our peace. Gentiles and Jews, he has made the two one, and in his own body of flesh and blood has broken down the enmity which stood like a dividing wall between them; for he annulled the law with its rules and regulations, so as to create out of the two a single new humanity in himself, thereby making peace. This was his purpose, to reconcile the two in a single body to God through the cross, on which he killed the enmity.

So he came and proclaimed the good news: peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near by; for through him we both alike have access to the Father in the one Spirit. Thus you are no longer aliens in a foreign land, but fellow-citizens with God's people, members of God's household. You are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the foundation-stone. In him the whole building is bonded together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you too are being built with all the rest into a spiritual dwelling for God: (Ephesians 2:11-22)

It is interesting that few if any Christians have difficulty with the thought expressed here; most, in fact, make

it a central aspect of the faith, that "in him you (outsiders) too are being built with all the rest into a spiritual dwelling for God." Yet they get uptight when John says the same thing: "By its light shall the nations (outsiders) walk, and the kings of the earth shall bring into it all their splendor."

There is, of course, a difference. The assumption generally is made (although Paul never says it and, indeed, drops some hints the other way) that Christ's creating "out of the two a single new humanity in himself" is effective only if it happens before a person dies. John simply raises the possibility that the one who, on the cross, killed the enmity, might not recognize death as all that insurmountable an obstacle to his work of reconciliation.

As a Christian, John (with Paul) knows that the single new humanity cannot maintain the Old Testament note of Gentile subservience and second-class citizenship. Also, as a Christian, he knows that the goal of history comes, not in the Old Testament mode of an immanent socio-political development, but after Jesus' own pattern: history itself must die, then to be resurrected by God. How, then, do the kings — and the nations — come to land in the new Jerusalem? They come there propelled by the trajectory of John's Old Testament biblical tradition and his own New Testament faith.

VIII.

And what has all this to say about the Christian stance and attitude toward "the world"? Mostly it says that that stance must be dialectical indeed. Worldliness we must hate — as God himself does. But the world we must love — as God himself does. The dragon, the beast, and the whore — these we are to hate, resist, and avoid; they are worldliness, the gods of worldliness. But their protégés (the kings and the nations) and their goods (the wealth and splendor of the nations)? That's a different story; God still holds title to those people and that property and someday plans to claim them and it for his new Jerusalem. Hatred in that direction would be bad wrong.

Admittedly, the distinction is neat and a very tricky one to observe; yet we Christians always manage to draw the line just where it does not belong. Conservatives, liberals, or radicals, we choose to hate some aspects of worldliness but love others, love some people of the world but hate others. We have blind spots regarding some seductions of worldliness and hot spots in our feelings toward some men of the world. We hate kings (particularly those named Nixon) and love liberated sex. Or we love churchly showmanship and affluence and hate unbelieving liberals. The line that should go up and down, we draw crossways. We would do well to give a little more attention to John's picture in getting it straight as to who belongs forever in the lake of fire and who is destined for the new Jerusalem. □

REFLECTIONS ON MONASTIC EXPERIENCES

Matthew Kelty

We may think of a monastery as an environment constructed specifically to facilitate the experience of God. It is, thus, something of an ideal, an effort to translate into practical terms the dream of man living here on earth with relation to his life in the kingdom to come. Since every man is called to live with an awareness of that destiny, the monastery has general significance. At the same time, it is beyond the norm because it seeks to implement the purpose of life by means which are more than usual. Yet, the monastery does say something for every man, though it may not say it in words he would use, for all his agreement with the message.

The monastery is of this world because it involves men of this world. It is very much of earth. It also relates to the world to come and makes this thrust very evident in the way it functions. In some sense it is an earthly city which at the same time is a vision of the heavenly city, the one to come. It may be said to be not quite of this world, for its eyes are

focussed on the next, and not quite of the next world either, since it obviously remains on earth. Its place is in between the two worlds and is therefore a place apart, not wholly satisfactory to the men of this world; since it is somewhat short of what we expect in the world to come.

The impracticality of the monastic life lies precisely in the fact that it seeks to attain the impossible, yet it is precisely practical for that very reason: it outlines the point of all living, indicates the goal, the aim of life on earth. Building an earthly city with total dedication, the monks are building all the while a heavenly one. The two intermingle, the one merges with the other.

The monk loves this world. He must. It is the only world he has. He loves this life. Again, he must. It is the only life he has. But the monk also loves the world to come because he is a Christian, loves eternal life because he was called to it by Christ. His love for this world and this life is therefore intense by reason of their unutterable value, their importance and their unfathomable significance.

For very love of this world and this life, the monk sets out to make as best use of them as he knows how: the monastery exists to expedite this desire and make its realization possible. It does not follow that the monk's way of life is the best, or that his love of this life and of this world is exceptional. Rather, in terms of his love and in relation to his desire to express it, the monastery is best. He is *called* to it. His response to that call is both personal and social, since in it he finds his happiness, and by it serves the community of man by being what he is called to be, a calling that serves Church and world as testimony, witness, symbol.

This testimony and witness may be visible, as any symbol, yet not be limited to that. There is witness to truth that is not seen, is hidden and unknown, and is with point, for all that. Human vision is limited and we are affected by a great deal that we neither see nor are aware of. If a monk hides, or a monastery seeks seclusion, it is not for shame. Neither monk nor monastery puts that much emphasis on merely human points of view. All goodness, like all evil, is not visible, yet both may thrive. And have manifest fruit.

Beyond the tension the monastery experiences because of its concern with two worlds at the same time, there is the contradiction in the very term "monastery." While it is clear that the word monastery deals with solitude, all know that monasteries involve community. A monastery is usually a group of men or women living together, and that is the way we think of it. If monasteries are typically communities, the *monastic* way nonetheless has deep roots in the solitary experience. If we reckon with that, we can understand many of the practices monks make use of. While to most men, monasteries make at least some sense, the solitary life more often does not. Aside from a certain tolerance toward the strange man who would prefer to live alone for one reason or another, there is not too much sympathy with the idea. Seen as a religious experience, solitude strikes most as odd and peculiar. Some find it intriguing and puzzling, stirring something within them, perhaps, which rouses questions. Solitude may be seen, if one might venture an explanation, as a logical pursuit of a way of life that leads to God. While most people, and even most monks, find their adequate way to God in contact with others and within the fabric of a society, the solitary, in varying degrees, seeks God alone. His logic lies in knowing that the human heart is no small world, but a vast one containing in some real sense the whole. The solitary in leaving the world knows quite well that he takes the world *with him*, within. He would think of his solitude as a sharpening of focus, almost forcing a confrontation not merely with the world but with the God who is present in it. In that sense, the one in solitude could be called a miniature monastery, since he is engaged in a similar pursuit; the search for God, the experience of God. And even if alone, he would think of himself actively involved in building the city of God and man, here and in the life to come, since in his heart he meets both God and man and relates to both in mercy received and mercy shared.

Since solitude is not without its hazards, it is not difficult to understand why men searching for God in this earnest way should seek counsel. From the relation of master and, first, the single disciple, and later a group of them, the accumulated wisdom, a monastic style of life evolved and has come down to us. It has not come static, but living; it comes not in one rigid formula, but in many

modes. Times and places, the grace of God and the response of men, felt needs and unanswered longings gave rise to these many ways; all of them, however, in some sense recognizably monastic. Meanwhile, solitude itself never totally disappeared, though in recent centuries it nearly did so. Our own day sees a revival of interest in this form of religious life. Whether it be a "sign of the times" is hard to say, but it does indicate an intense interest in an aspect of the monastic life that has been overshadowed, an interest that is likely to have repercussions on monastic communities also.

Among other areas, perhaps that of obedience will undergo further study, though already much discussed. Monastic obedience, and obedience in religious life as derived from it, has deep connections with the solitary life. Saint Benedict placed prime emphasis on obedience, a lesson he learned from monastic experience before him. The desert solitaries discovered by necessity the need of the spiritual father and guide, recognized the value of total submission to him in the ascesis of the wilderness. Put in contemporary psychological terms, and unprofessionally, the ego is a weak instrument before the onslaught of the unconscious and is tempted either to identify with it or to be lost in it. Unless a man be free of the domination of his ego and has at least to some extent entered into the deeper self, the true person, he is in no position to encounter the forces of his own depths. Obedience was early recognized as an elemental tool in this work. Through obedience the monk learned to walk the road of freedom, in an obedience total and complete. Only truly free men can be trusted and monastic life was seen as a school of freedom.

When religious life of more recent times, and monastic life to some extent, became more engaged with active ministry and social works of many kinds, it is clear that monastic obedience of the desert type would be rather out of place. One cannot supervise a hospital or a school with the same techniques one would make use of in governing a group of solitaries. Sometimes one wonders if the effort were ever made. In any case, we see a wide disenchantment with obedience today. It may be based on an awareness that an ascetic practice is one thing and good administration another. They are, after all, two rather different fields. But with religious life perhaps going further out, on the one part, and further in, on the other, it would not be surprising to see obedience rediscovered in its relation to the inner life. A combination of a passionate desire for a deeper spiritual life and an undeveloped approach to obedience can be quite lethal. Experience shows this. A rather shallow obedience together with a style of life not particularly deep may be a disappointment, but it is not dangerous. The former is. And the climate today is apt to produce just the sort of people who in monastic life would need a very good grasp of obedience. And even so, monks, as well as others, find they are apt to be suspicious in this department. It is an era of fancied freedom and much resentment against authority in any form, a resentment in many ways justified. Yet, in a

FATHER KELTY, Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, called Trappist, Abbey of Gethsemani, is a monk at Bogia, Madang, Papua New Guinea. His reflections, "Life in the Desert," will appear in the next issue of *Katallagete*.

monastery with any pretensions to seriousness, rightly understood and rightly employed, obedience is basic. It would be a pity to realize this only after some have been seriously hurt. Nor will it do to counter that misapplied obedience in past times has itself bruised, and more than bruised, very many. But one cannot use one thing for another. You are on your own if you do not read the label and follow instructions.

Something similar might be said of silence, fasting, seclusion, manual labor and its role, leisure, reading, night office, psalmody, communal love expressed in service, tolerance, patience, peace . . . all facets of monastic experience, and all in a way related to the solitary life. I suspect all of these will undergo even more serious attention than they have been wont to receive both in theory and in practice. If they open one to a profound experience of the human, they open one also to the mercy of God, and so can lead one to that gentleness that was so characteristic of the solitaries of the desert and so charmed those who visited them. Communities of monks follow the same path and use the same methods, hopefully to reach the same goal.

After all, it is possible that we shall witness a far greater interest in what is called the contemplative life. While religious in active or semi-active orders have found many of the practices of the religious life of small help in their professional work — so small that some have thought that they could serve God better in their work without them — there are also others who sought deeper religious experience and did not find it. The former feel they could have found satisfaction in professional pursuits outside religious life; the latter have not found religious satisfaction within it. The trend "further out" takes its course. We may perhaps expect a movement "further in." If the latter develops, the movement will need to call on monastic experience and will, I think, find that field enriched by recent concern for the solitary aspects of the monastic experience.

It is obvious that the solitary life is related to virginity, though often enough one does miss the discussion of celibacy in that framework. Perhaps a better grasp of solitude as a religious experience will freshen the approach to celibacy. While the actual solitary does not give to many pause in reference to family life, for it is clearly not there, a group of solitaries living in community, a monastery, oddly enough does. Monks speak of the "monastic family." The term gives rise to the question: is communal life then seen in some sense as a substitute for family? And if substitute, why would it not be more appropriate to marry and have a genuine family instead of a surrogate? Or, carrying it even further, why cannot the family of man, conceived individually or in the context of the earthly city, serve not only as well but even better as a "way to God, the experience of God?" Is not just this, after all, what Christian

life is all about? A good question, though not a new one! Some have rejected monastic life on that score. A similar retort might also reject celibacy, and has.

Solitude/virginity may give monastic life its eschatological note more effectively than any other specific quality it possesses. One need not be a monk to be earnest about a desire for God, to seek and practice deeper prayer, to love quiet, to seek out silence and seclusion, to cultivate a life of love and service, peace and good order. If monks have done well in liturgical prayer and worship, others also have. If in past times or in present, monks have created much that was beautiful in many art forms, they were not and surely are not unique in this. Monks have done very well as farmers, as educators, as missionaries, as scholars, but so have a multitude of others. And if monks endeavor to build the city of God here below as they create the city of man, there are those who see their own efforts in that regard as more realistic of their doing so within the setting in which God's providence has placed them. It would seem, then, that it is the virginal life that sets monks apart. The solitary dimension.

And since others in the Church are officially within the ranks of celibates, monks share with them an experience of particular quality, one long cherished by the Church. What is so significant about virginity that men and women should enter on it, a way so clearly at odds with typical human life, so difficult and so fraught with problems and risks?

I would find the answer in one particular vision: the androgynous human. Many will throw up their hands in horror at this, find such an answer not to their taste. They are entitled to their opinion. If they have a more sound approach to virginal life, it will certainly be welcome: virginal life could use a few friends.

Monastic life in past times was often referred to as the "angelic life," a reference to Christ's dictum that in the Kingdom of Heaven there will be neither male nor female, nor marriage, but men and women shall be as the angels of God. Since we will have bodies, albeit glorified, our being like the angels must refer in some way to our being whole, complete, integrated; fully persons. "The two shall be one flesh" of Genesis might then be taken to mean that the individual would be whole, "one," each partner discovering in himself/herself those qualities of the person once hidden, but brought to light through union with the other, and absorbed into the personality, now complete and integral. This view may be more Jungian than Scriptural, but as good an understanding as I have found, one with ancient roots. With such an approach, virginity/celibacy makes a great deal of sense: I have met none better.

The peculiarly warped cultural scene of recent centuries has lent no help whatever to our grasp of these

mysteries: the breakdown of that particular combination of values has made public a number of developments that we might well pay heed to. Why, do you think, have some men of our time gone to such extravagant lengths to indicate a feminine aspect to the male? Before you dismiss all this as gross and decadent, I suggest there might be a message for us in it. I am not so sure the male is all male. I leave it at that.

One thing I see as certain: that the virgin is no freak of nature. I do not construe celibacy as some arduous effort to control natural urges and desires as a form of penitential exercise. If that is all it is, there are better things to do. No one seriously contends that celibacy is a form of life superior to marriage, if the inference is that marriage is somehow low-level. Or are we celibates only because Christ was? I daresay we were better off following Him as carpenters if there were no more to it than that. What is celibacy, virginity, solitude, if not an anticipated taste of the life to come, a plunge into the future, a preparation for the kingdom so dramatic that only martyrdom has its equal for intensity. I certainly did not give up married life because it was a good sacrifice to make to Jesus. Nor do I count on having my married life later in Heaven. I certainly did not enter the celibate way because the law demanded it of me if I were to become a priest. Further, I refuse to accept the weak-kneed statement that "he simply did not want to get married, that's all." So what is left? Only this: that through the virginal way I mean to approach that wholeness and fullness of life that will one day, please God, be totally and truly mine in the Kingdom. Why begin now what had better be left until its own time comes? Because it is the role of the prophet, the priest, the poet, the dreamer, the artist, the nun, the monk, to speak out in one life what is in the heart of *every* one, that by doing so we be encouraged, enlightened, inspired and supported in our journey. Further, man is not deprived of a bride at all, since he takes as spouse, as Christ did, the woman who is the Church, and in her is fruitful. With Christ, he lives for her, offers himself for her, is faithful to her. As does the counterpart nun or virgin, united to Christ in love as His bride, the people of God.

Sacrifice, of course, is involved: any husband knows as much. Any spouse. If entrance onto some such mystical way is not for every man or woman, but for those called to it, *the call* brings it the grace needed, though such grace may be neglected. The call to poetry, to priesthood, to prophecy is made *by God*, and made generously. The response is not always such. If poets go hungry and prophets go unheard, priests might expect heavy weather; they often get it. Christ is a rather good model.

Seen in this light, celibacy lives out actually what marriage does symbolically. Marriage is both symbol of our mystical union with God in the next life, and a symbolical search for integration, holiness. What the celibate does is actually to enter into that way of integration and, dispensing with symbol, live in a mystical union. It is the

particularly vivid quality of this way of life that best serves to brighten every man's vision of the significance of human life, even and especially of marriage. All being is nuptial, as has been said, and the nuptials are both inner and outer. The outer in some way symbolizes the inner, is at once a union of opposites within and a union with God, and in God with all that is. The monastery is thus a vision of the heavenly city to come, not merely as a community of love and peace, but also in that each monk would be that integrated whole we will each be in that kingdom, a person at one with himself, with God, with all creation. The solitary is also just such a vision: the lack of evident community in his case but serving to give greater emphasis to the fact that inner union is at one and the same time union with God and with all.

The call to priestly celibacy is a call to this sort of witness. And be it noted that the priest is typically a solitary rather than a member of a community, as most monks are. His role is that of Christ; his spouse the local Church. That his Church is visible in no sense diminishes his experience of solitude, nor does it for all that, increase its scope. It merely locates it. True, his call to priesthood is a call to service of altar and word in all that pertains to the community of man, yet that service has long been linked by the Church to solitude. Solitude is in no sense essential to Bishop or to priest, for any fit man could minister Bread and Book, head the Church or churches. The tradition in the West uniting priest and celibate plants that *calling* in a mystical context which makes a staggering impact on the world of men. The people of God not only need this heavenly fire, they want it, they delight in it. If poetry dies, the people's vision dies. So, the priest as celibate enters the world of poetry. True enough, a priest may not picture himself involved with a mystic dimension, nor may he see himself some sort of solitary. He may dismiss such notions emphatically. That would not necessarily deny the reality of the situation, however, nor need such declarations be taken without qualification. It is a rare man who does not at one time or other have some hint rising from his depths, some sudden insight that reveals a vista he was not aware of, and then quickly passes.

We are, after all, immortal, every one. That we should now and then have some intimation of such can cause no surprise. Few are able to articulate such lights, and if they could, are not always willing to do so in an age heartily given to the pragmatic. Yet it is for this reason — this mystical quality of man — that the priest serves as inspiration and confirmation, for his very life attests to the existence of more in man than is obvious. This priestly testimony is no mere by-product, but it is an elemental quality in the man of God much heightened by celibacy. In

an age of chaos and disintegration such as ours, stirrings of a spirit long hidden and long inhibited are much in evidence. They are not all of a kind, nor are all of equal merit; some are rather alarming, and all need interpretation. It is the priest, the man of the spirit, who is the spiritual father and guide in all this. An awareness of the divine that lies hidden beneath all that is human is thus no quixotic past-time for those who have the leisure for such, but becomes more and more necessary for the servant of God in our day.

There is a bit of the poet in everyone and it is to this side of man that the poet addresses himself, expressing what all in some way experience: he is a poet not merely for vision, but for being able to cast that vision. Poets are essential to society: we die with the last poet. It is not too much to say that every priest is rather much a poet in that his very life is in some sense a song. So too is the solitary by his celibacy. And had he not in some way detected this mystical dimension to the priesthood, would he have been attracted to it? Other factors may truly have entered into his response and may have seemed to him paramount, yet it is more difficult to assume total insensitivity to this quality than it is to take for granted that it was much part of the matter, however subtly.

If celibacy be not considered in this wider context, one misses the heart of it. More than tradition, church law, ascetic practice and the spirit of sacrifice are involved, not to say practicalities and economics. It might be further said that passing over the more significant areas makes the case for it very weak. A good family man might serve his people as parish priest very well: evidence is not lacking. And there have been married mystics, not to forget married poets and married men of the spirit. Long-standing traditions, however, bear respect. They do not endure when meaningless, and even when weakened, it may be for want of their real merit being recognized.

It is perhaps the extreme division of male and female that has more than any other factor brought the role of virginity and celibacy to the fore. Or, to put it in another frame, the inability or unwillingness of men to meet the woman within. People of the West are seriously unbalanced and it is no doubt especially marked in man's poor relation to woman, nowhere more evident than in the lack of integration of both aspects of the human person. The all-male male still evokes a powerful response. He calls forth youth to prowess in an initiation rite that has no ending, for he is still proving he is a man as he falls into his grave: Many decades later. It is this relation to the inner spirit that

releases the poetic, the mystic. Because this process, in virtue of the impact of our culture, is so very much curbed, restrained, or even throttled, one whole tendency of man remains undeveloped, frustrated. It is almost inevitable that he will feel a certain lack, a vague unhappiness, an emptiness. The feeling is rooted in fact. He does lack. He is bound to be unhappy. He is very empty. In a priest this is a disaster. His life of prayer will be far from what it could be and should be. In middle life, if not sooner, he will at times know a great anguish and anxiety. His dreams may frighten him, though it is almost certain he will not take his dreams seriously: such men never do. If half of him is literally never allowed to grow and mature, how could he possibly sense contentment and peace? It should surprise no one that if in such a state he meets a woman who sounds him to his depths in heart, he may experience such a release of all that was hidden and denied within him, that his ensuing happiness will convince him that his priesthood was a mistake (or celibacy at any rate) and he will seek marriage with a vehemence and conviction that startles those who do not really know him. The pity is that the man has let another do for him what he should have done for himself. It took a woman to open the door he left locked and barred. He had the book and never opened it, had the light and never turned it on. Walled in, locked in, ignorant, in the dark because he chose to be. His fault? Yes, really. But not wholly. For he was taught this by a culture that is quite sick. He picked it up, absorbed it, made it his own without realizing it. Entering into the celibate state with such an outlook (or a marriage, too, for that matter) is bound to prove inadequate. The inadequacy is not celibacy, Church law, tradition. In some sense it is not the man himself. It is the impact of a culture and a lack of understanding of the impact that is at the bottom of it.

"Worldliness" in the Church today may not be wealth or business or politics or power play or lack of concern. It may be the absorption of a culture that is hideous. The Church of the West may have bought the all-male complex, not by design, not knowingly, for we are all part of that culture. But now, in the course of God's providence, what has happened becomes clear. Some sort of revelation takes place and we take part in it, a revolution which is not so much an outer attack on society as a disruption from within. We witness its expression. It is a time full of wonders, a time that could also be described as judgmental. We have a new view of what we are and what we have become. If what we see rather frightens us, it is a wholesome fright and can lead to healing. The odd thing is that it all revolves around woman. It is our relationship to her that is the key to everything else. And it is sin against woman that is the great offense. We have perhaps thought

that the Marian Era was behind us. It might be better to think of it as having just begun.

Hard on its heels follows, already in some way manifest, a great interest in what is technically called the contemplative life, the mystical life. Man in genuine relationship with woman becomes mystic. The rediscovery of sound understanding of woman will lead to mysticism. One predicts a blossoming of poets and artists, priests and prophets, monks and hermits. Religious life will, as established form, grow much deeper, more serious, more intense — no longer content with a program of religious exercises and an abundance of work. In all this endeavor, heavy recourse will be had to monastic tradition, so rich in pertinent wisdom.

Two brief contacts with New Guinea make me suspect when it comes to my comment on this land and its people. A three-year stint twenty-five years ago as a young missionary priest, and now this year here as a monk, scarcely qualify me. Yet, perhaps I may comment, my words being taken for what they are worth. For one thing, my first years here made an impression on me that influenced the rest of my life. If I do not owe my monastic vocation to New Guinea — for I long had an interest in that direction — I certainly do owe this country the relative facility with which I understood monasticism. These people literally live in two worlds: everything earthly has a spiritual relationship. Sophisticated Westerners tend to belittle this spiritual aspect because it is relatively primitive, naive. That may be, but it is a genuine culture of great depth and wisdom. Further, as individuals they are far better integrated than their alien visitors. This, too, few Europeans would easily admit; the primitive life-style perhaps throws them off. I state quite plainly: I find them better people than we are. They are more successful in the business of living. When I returned last Christmas (1974) after an absence of more than two decades, I was swept off my feet by the change: the whole scene has much improved on a material level. Yet what struck me most was what struck me before: the men. They are gentle, soft-spoken, warm, real. This is now even more evident than before, since some of the wildness has gone, the lines in the face are softened. Nor do I imply that they are not now capable of anger and violence and other shabby behavior. Nor do I suggest that primitive Stone Age life was somehow rather charming and paradisiacal: it was not. Much of it was ugly and vicious, ridden with darkness, fear, disease and worse. Notwithstanding, it had depth, it had wholeness, and above all, within the narrow limits of their setting, it worked. It was not all savagery and dirt. There was beauty, dignity, song and dance. There was liturgy and festival. There was a relation to the spirit world, the world beyond human vision. In spite of the arduous labor that was hers, the woman's place was of stature and

the evidence was there: the men reflected the spirit of woman. They put flowers in their hair. They proudly carry their babies around in their arms. They note the stars, remark on a soft breeze, call attention to the loveliness of a day, the passing clouds. Westerners seem pallid by contrast, the loud and arrogant. I do not see how they ever put up with us, for I see myself Western.

When I speak this way to my fellows, they dismiss me as romantic, under a delusion. They point up incidents to prove me talking nonsense. I nod. Yes, I know. But then I meet the people again. I talk to them. I watch them. Let my friends say what they wish: I can see with the two eyes God gave me. And what I see is another kind of man. He may not be a better man than you: I pass. But he is a better man than I am.

I think they would make wonderful monks. They would want a real obedience, of course. They would not find obedience demeaning, beneath their dignity: their grasp of themselves is not so fragile. They love being together and doing things together. Their own life is an amalgam of spirit and matter; would a monastery strike them odd? Their relation to a liturgy adapted to the locale would be, I daresay, hearty. Virginity would be the new element: it is not customary. Most of the world thinks of tropical, southern-clime peoples as sensual. There may be something to it. But I think children would be the major hurdle. They love children. They go so far as to think the purpose of marriage is children. Every man wants sons and daughters, and sons and daughters coming after them. Through faith they would need to understand the fruitfulness of life in God, even in the celibate state. But their own natural urges they would want guarded and controlled so they might be able to do what they wanted to do. Unlike their foreign friends, they would not see various forms and usages as curbs on their freedom and their dignity, but obvious necessities to help them do what they wished to do. We of the West have for some reason abandoned the fruit of the centuries of experience and glibly assume that one can do what one wants to do without taking steps to make sure it will be possible, protecting ourselves from ourselves, as it were. These people have much sense. They are also more natural. Their women are modest for a very simple reason: they want to be chaste. To be sure, they are learning much from the West.

A monastery would be appropriate in that it would open a dimension of the life of the Church largely closed to them. There are no monks here save myself — not much of a sample. There are Poor Clares, and cloistered Carmelite nuns have been here many years. Other than that, most religious life is rooted in action; Church involvement in every area is generous and expert. But the life of prayer, the

life of the spirit, within the context of a community set apart to build a city of God, is not present for men. I would think, too, it would need to be heavily steeped in local character. This is something no Westerner could bring about. Having been introduced to the monastic life, the monks here would move from that understanding toward expressing it in their own way. Something simply imported and imposed would seem to me somewhat regrettable.

This past century of primal contact with the European had its predictable results. Much progress in many fields: health, education, transport, commerce, industry, politics, religion, peace and good order. Along with a sense of shame for their own ways and their own styles: much that was good was left to perish along with much that was evil. All effort was in the direction of acquiring new ways, new customs. In this way many art forms have been lost, or nearly so. It is traditional to blame missionaries for this: they certainly did live and do live more closely to the people than others, but it seems to me an unfair charge. It appears more likely to be a typical reaction to an invasion by a culture so apparently superior in so many ways. Now, as was also predictable, the reaction has set in and there is a rediscovery of the good in their own ways. There is a renewed interest in the past, an effort made to recapture it, re-express it, reshape it.

A monastery would be an ideal setting in which to further this good trend. If the recovery of much that was good in the past is not underwritten by a genuine life of the spirit, it will be largely mere show: a gathering of objects and skills and putting them on exhibit. If the movement is in any way to be real, it must be the fruit of spiritual experience. Since the monastery is a climate in which the life of the spirit is expressed, one would think of it as a likely place for the development of a good liturgy, good music, good art — all of them genuinely creative since they would flow from experience. Good art in the past was abundant, evident to me of a good life with living contact between the inner and the outer man. A similar development would be possible in poetry and other literature, once part of the unwritten tradition. They are a poetic people, in touch with their dreams.

Offhand, I do not think they would need a great deal of solitude to hasten and deepen the experience of God. A more mild solitude in a milieu of a monastic community would probably more than satisfy, be challenge enough, enriching. The solitary note would be there, but gently, though not less effective for that. Beyond a high degree of

integration they already possess, these people have also endured the trauma of exposure to an advanced form of civilization, stepping from the Stone Age into the present century — surely as great a feat as the human spirit is called upon to endure. That they have not broken down completely under the strain says more for them than perhaps anything else. They are, then, in a superb position for a deep spiritual life, a contemplative life in the proper sense of the word. Westerners do well if they move into some form of development as persons — an achievement, no doubt, but in another sense no more than the first stage for a real love-life. It is the person who loves on the deepest level: if one must spend a lifetime becoming a person, there is little time left for further movement. If monasteries in the West have a therapeutic quality, that says as much for them as for the times, but their prime purpose is not therapy. They exist to promote the experience of God on the deepest level. Perhaps the people here might be more fit for that than those of us who have come here to tell them all about it.

I see my own being here as some sort of plea and prayer that something of this kind may develop. One monk on a hill looking out over the sea is not much to begin with, even if that lasts long. But he can sow the seed, make the suggestion, raise the question, pray to God. Then somewhere, somehow, in those mysterious ways in which God operates, something will sprout, take root, begin to break through the ground. No doubt there are young men scattered through New Guinea now who will one day be monks. I sense they will make good ones, better than us. But God can use even us to carry seed. In any case, I have my own dream: that my own land will one day have more monasteries than one can count. God is at work opening up the depths of the human heart by sending a little chaos into our lives. Quite a little.

It is this climate of chaos, this desert scene, this time of disintegration, that can be a grace. The ancient monks who went out into the desert found just this experience. Everything they had known, believed in, had confidence in, fell apart in that wilderness. Faced with the onslaught of chaos they were tempted to despair, for they found the faith they had was too weak to sustain so great a demonic upsurge. Yet, in their distress, they prayed for faith and faith was given to them. Through that faith gladly given, they entered into a relationship with God that was rich in mercy. This misery, succored by the sweet compassion of God, led them on to a like compassion toward their fellowman, a brother in the same plight. It was this touching kindness of

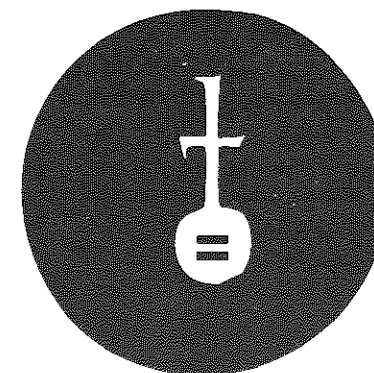
the monks that so moved those who knew them. The man who has been into the depths of his own heart's misery and has found there, waiting for him, the God of mercy, can talk on equal terms with any man, for it is in the depths of the heart that we are brothers. There is no love like the love of a good monk. And his love is like that of any man who knows what it is to be human. Misery needs mercy, but it is impossible to give it to another unless you have first given it to yourself. And that again is only possible if you know how much in need of mercy you are. The mercy we give is the measure of mercy we have received: the better we know our own heart, the better we know our brother's. There is no community like that of misery and mercy. It embraces the whole human family. In Christ.

It would follow that the monk has a peculiar relevance today. We need monks and we need poets, priests and prophets. We need someone to explain the desert we have all entered upon. And, ironically, we need the monk to teach us the love of woman. And New Guinea needs monks, for I fear they will imitate all the good and bad of the West,

giving away so much of their own way of life that is precious and beautiful, without realizing what they are doing. It would be no great solace to learn that we had done no more than create them anew after our own image and likeness. We did not come for that.

Which about sums it up: we did not come for that. Our purpose here on earth is not to be thought of save as some sort of life which has its feet on the ground and its heart in Heaven. If the world is full of the glory of God, to what point that fullness if we are not aware of it? Life is so short. What if we bungle it? There are no re-runs. It must be a love affair, a mingling of head and heart, of man and woman, of time and eternity, of visible and invisible. The whole world is really no less than a monastery, a house of work and of prayer, of song and of dance, of life and of love, an earthly city that is symbolic of the real city of God to come. With Christ as the Abbot, who is at once our Father and our Mother, our Sister and our Brother, Spouse and Beloved, who lives and dies for us, our God and fellowman; priest and poet and prophet and solitary. Blessed be He!

□



**

**

**

**

**

CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

We have tried to follow our readers when they move from one part of the world to another. But now we need your help! We want to keep up with you, but our resources are limited. We shall no longer be able to make the 'change of address' without your help.

So: if you want *Katallagete* to follow you, send us as soon as possible your new and old address (including new and old ZIP codes).

RENEWALS:

Again: our resources are at their limit. When you receive a renewal notice return it as soon as possible and let us know if you want to continue receiving *Katallagete*. Otherwise, we cannot keep you on our mailing list.

YOUR HELP IS GREATLY APPRECIATED!

NEW AND GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS:

NEW: To new subscribers, we will send with our thanks your choice of one of two books, described below, which collect earlier issues of *Katallagete*.

GIFT: To those receiving a gift subscription *and* to those making the gift, we will send one of the books described below.

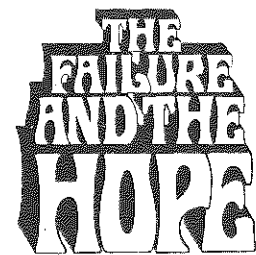
BULK MAILING:

There is a special rate for ten or more copies of each issue of *Katallagete* mailed to the same address. Write to *Katallagete*, P.O. Box 2215, Nashville, Tennessee, 37214, for arrangements.

AS BEFORE: send us the names of friends who might be interested in *Katallagete*, and we will send them a free copy of the current issue.

PLEASE USE THE SUBSCRIPTION AND GIFT SHEET INCLUDED WITHIN THIS ISSUE. WE HAVE ALSO SUPPLIED AN ENVELOPE FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE.

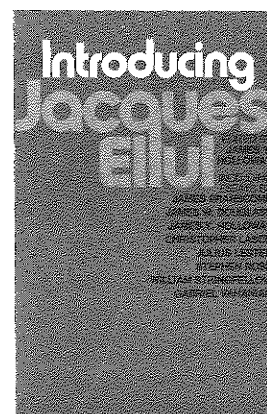
ONE OF THESE BOOKS WILL BE SENT WITH ALL NEW AND GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS.



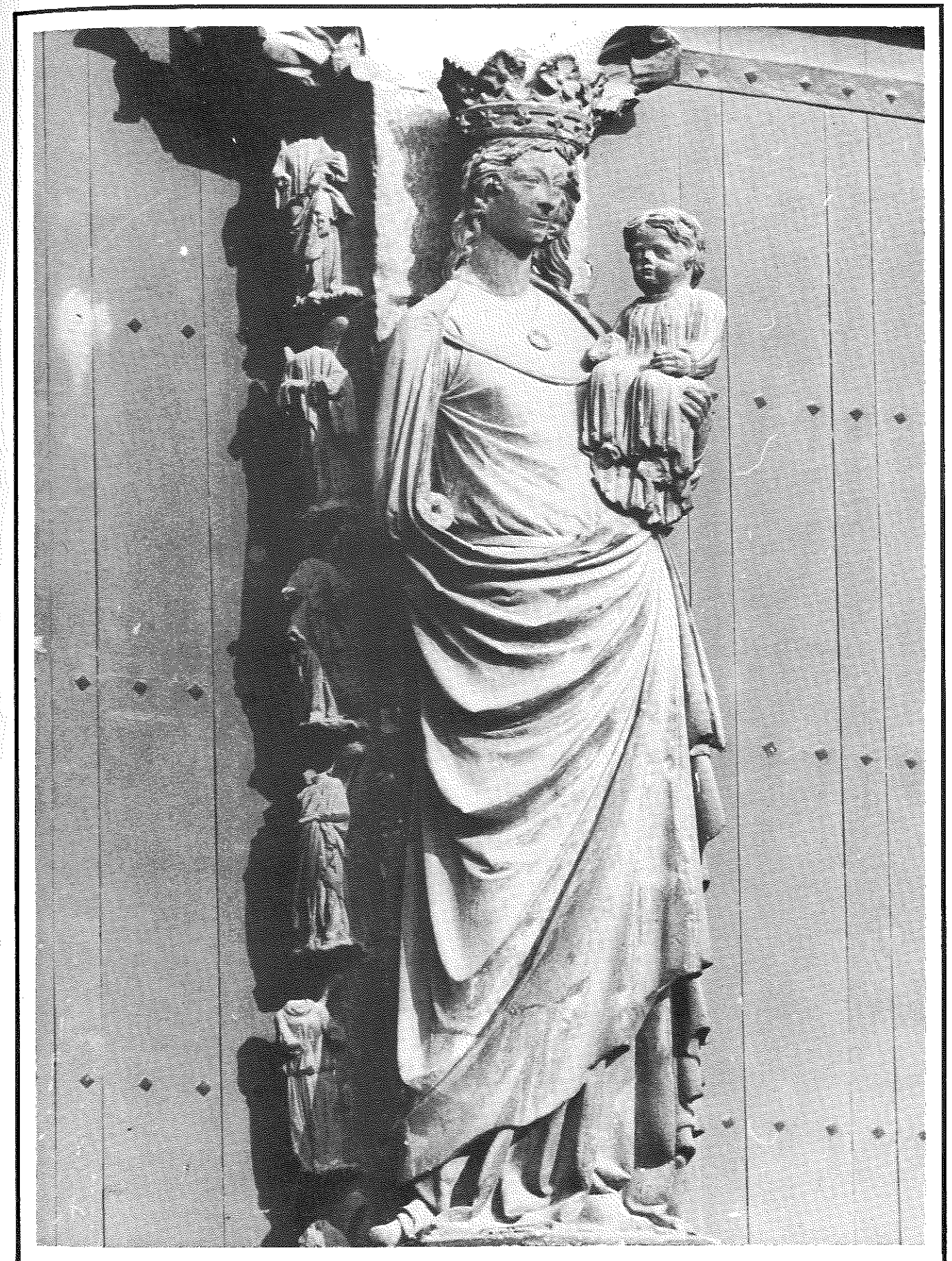
ESSAYS OF
SOUTHERN
CHURCHMEN

Edited by
W.D. Campbell
James Y. Holloway

Campbell and Holloway, editors. Essays of Southern Churchmen. Contributors include Walker Percy, John Howard Griffin, Vincent Harding, Ann Beard, Thomas Merton, James G. Branscome, Fannie Lou Hamer, Pete Young, Campbell and Holloway.



James Y. Holloway, editor. Contributors include Holloway, James G. Branscome, James Douglass, Christopher Lasch, Julius Lester, Stephen Rose, William Stringfellow, Gabriel Vahanian, John Wilkinson, and an introductory word from Ellul.



the COMMITTEE OF southern churchmen

Post Office Box 2215
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37214

Return Postage Guaranteed
Address Correction Requested



Non-Profit Organization
U. S. Postage
PAID
Nashville, Tennessee
Permit No. 1634

48 22901ALDNVFW
030
ALDERMAN LIBRARY
SERIALS I PERIODICALS
UNIV OF VA
CHARLOTTESVILLE VA 22901

MIXED CITY

RECEIVED
JUN 11 1971