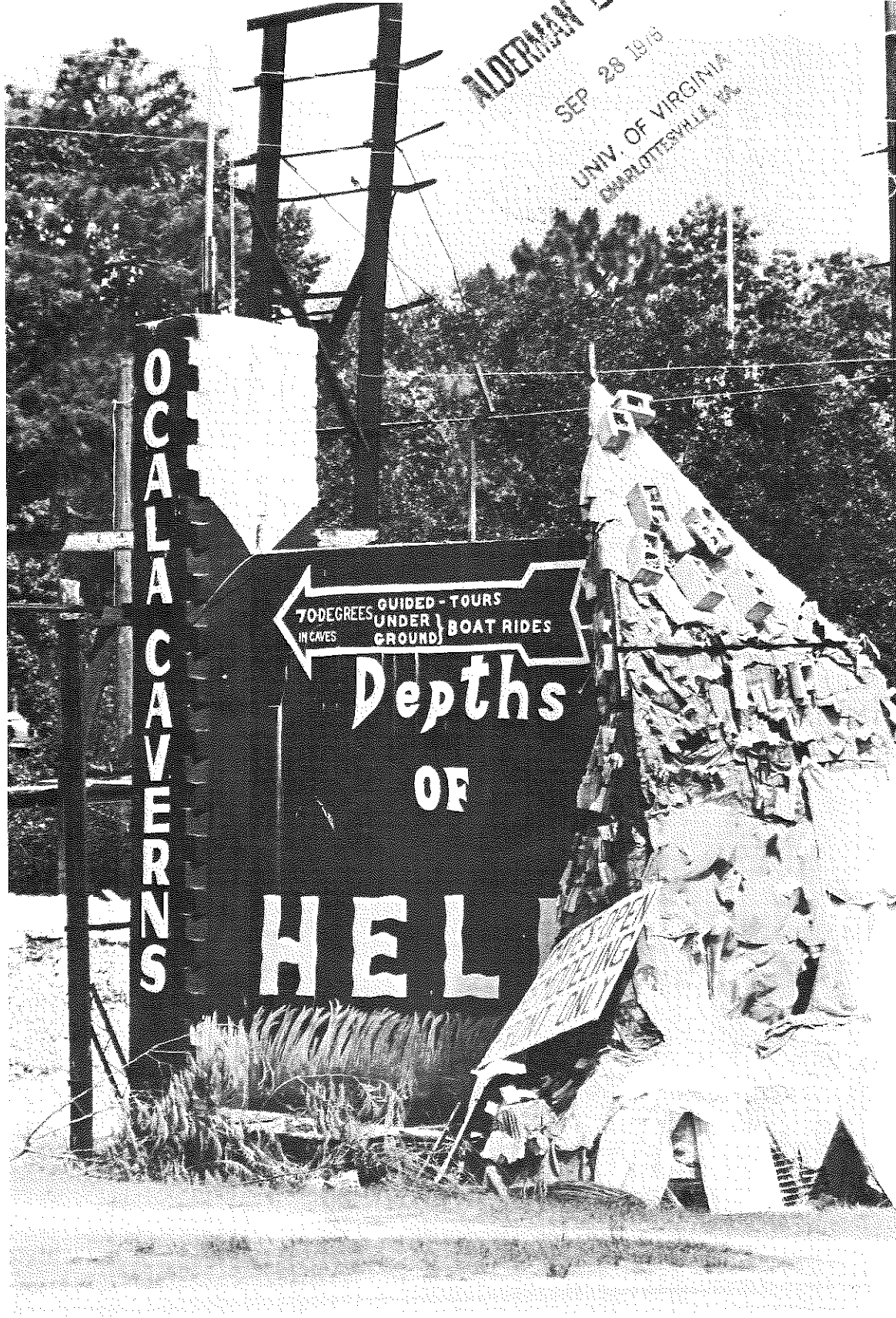


KATALLAGETE

BE RECONCILED



SUMMER 1976

Journal of the Committee of Southern Churchmen



FROM JULIUS LESTER:



Dear Reader:

This issue of Katallagete is reaching you many months late for a very simple reason: there was no money to pay the printer. In the eleven years of its existence, Katallagete has been supported by various foundations. Such support freed it from all concerns except the most important one — the content of the magazine. Of course, such freedom was ideal, and although it now appears that the magazine ought no longer to rely exclusively on foundation grants, I am unwilling to concede that it will have to relinquish the freedom such support created.

The present financial situation is an opportunity for us, the readers and contributors, to support the magazine ourselves. I would not presume to say what the magazine means to you. For me, however, it has been the only place where I could write what I wanted to say in whatever way I chose to say it. My most importing writing has appeared in Katallagete. It seems to me that Katallagete is unique in this respect among journals of large or small circulation and I believe other contributors and most of our readers would agree with me. That is why Katallagete has raised questions and issues which might otherwise not have seen the light of day.

The matter before us is not Katallagete's survival. It will survive. The question is in what form, and how often it will appear. We can supply the answer. We need from contributors and readers the basis of financial support to insure the appearance of at least three issues a year.

About a year or so ago, we went through our subscription lists very carefully. Almost 5,000 individuals and institutions indicated that they wanted to subscribe to Katallagete. My own travels around the country, however, convince me that at least twice that number read each issue. The correspondence received in Nashville and Berea supports my judgement. So: ten dollars a year from each of you would give the magazine a solid financial base, allowing it to retain its previous publishing schedule.

We are not asking you for a lot of money. Ten dollars is not much, but it will mean a great deal to our effort to make Katallagete financially independent. Katallagete is not the responsibility of any foundation. Foundation support will continue to be sought, but this is an uneven business, as the delay with this issue demonstrates. So the ultimate responsibility for the magazine is ours: readers and contributors. The magazine has consistently fulfilled its responsibility to present me with the most provocative and meaningful theological writing being done today. Now it is my turn to be responsible.

Those who can afford ten dollars should send more. Those who cannot, should do what they can. As I sit here and try to imagine what the next few years will be like, I find that all I can look forward to is watching my son play hockey and reading Katallagete. I admit that while I could use some help in buying my son a new pair of skates, I can't justify asking you for that. Katallagete is different, though. Whatever other virtues it might have, I can testify to the fact that it definitely makes good hockey players. And if you know how to use it, Katallagete helps your beans grow too.

An envelope can be found somewhere in this issue for your contribution to help us keep Katallagete coming regularly.

love,

A stylized, handwritten signature or scribble, possibly reading "J. L. 5".

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Journal of the Committee of Southern Churchmen

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE. . . .

TRUTH, LANGUAGE AND. . . .

Some months ago a friend of ours, a black man we had known well when he was a college student and active in the Civil Rights movement, invited us to meet with a group of black Baptist pastors in a large southern city. They were gathering to discuss ways to become active again in combatting the racism and repression still present in their city. The plight of prisoners was also among their concerns. In the late afternoon some of the men began to testify and preach, in earnest. A man in his early sixties took the aisle and began to exhort:

"Brethren, now listen to me. Listen!" He slapped his hands together and jumped straight up in the air. "Yea! I said, 'Listen!' Because I'm fixing to preach to you. It's all here. It's all right here!" He threw a medium-sized and well-worn Bible into the air, catching it with another hands-together slap as it came down. "You want to talk about prisons? I've been there!" Then he began to read from Acts, Chapter Five, about Peter and John in prison and about their release. "Now I ain't no educated man". "You got enough, brother! You got the basics. Now preach!" The group was beginning to say "Amen!" and become excited about what he was saying. "But I been in prison. And I was guilty! Yea! Yea! And Peter was guilty! And John was guilty! And I was guilty, too! But the Lord turned me loose. It's all here! In the book!" He began to weep and laugh at once. And prance and dance up and down the aisle. By now the group was with him. "Preach!" "Tell us, Reverend!" "Some of you been talking about what you believe! Well, I don't have no beliefs. I know! Do you believe God raised Jesus from the dead?" Everybody became quiet. "I don't believe that. I know it! Do you believe God can heal your soul? I don't believe that. I know it! Do you believe God can deliver you from prison? I don't believe that. I know it! You folks might have beliefs. I ain't got no beliefs. I know some things!"

To anyone not familiar with the story of Pentecost, the

scene would be described as pandemonium. Clapping, shouting, laughing, crying, and yes, listening. We probably looked a bit uneasy. Our friend leaned over and whispered, "Give the Fund for Theological Education thirty more years and you won't be able to find that kind of preaching." We muttered something about that being a shame, and left the meeting. Driving away, we thought about another sermon we had heard, years ago at divinity school, by our dean, a man we loved and admired, preaching on the text, "To whom much is given, much is expected." The "much" we were being "given" was theological education. As we drove along, we thought a lot about that.

This issue concerns a subject that has hovered above, and sometimes found its way into, the pages of *Katallagete* over the past decade. Simply stated, it is about the bankruptcy of theological language and traditional Christian rhetoric to communicate what is good in the news about Jesus. Stating it that simply, however, risks misunderstanding (and another failure of language). It is not simply that the traditional Christian words, images, pictures and metaphors are bankrupt to communicate the Gospel. It is also that those traditional words, images and metaphors too often today communicate something which violates the Gospel in the New Testament. So the issue is not merely the failure of the language of "salvation," "regeneration," "reconciliation," "born again," "sin," "hell," "eternity" to confess the truth of Jesus as Lord. It is the *perversion* of these and other Gospel words and images in our culture, by all of us: theologians and theological journals, folk and country and rock opera "Gospel's," media evangelism and television commercials and behavior modification. We know: the issue we seek to isolate here is one of a larger

set of issues: the bankruptcy of theological language and religious rhetoric, yes. But also the powerlessness of language today to communicate the realities and truths we need to communicate to live, as Martin Buber expressed it, "I and Thou".

Consider only one irony: The "CB" industry is a fair bid today to threaten the color television industry at the very time when conversation between those most intimately related is powerless to convey the joys, hopes, fears and loves that lie at the heart of the relationship between "I and Thou." A *form* of communication is present, of course, in the CB transmission and in the intimate conversations between those who are most nigh. But how often does it take place today only through the introduction of a new and technical vocabulary? The esoteric gibberish on the CB's has its parallel in the new verbiage introduced into I-and-Thou relationships by language technicians of group analysis, advertising, politics, social science, psychiatry and "evangelism" using the mass media. What keeps one operator from *knowing* another operator is the same technical introduction that restricts an "I" from *being with* a "Thou": a mechanism, a technique, a thing in the formula of words. In one, gibberish and ciphers transmitted by electronics (celebrated with such commercial success by the current hit record, "Convoy!"); in the other, language modified and controlled by the technicians of behavior modification, group analysis, politics, advertising and the social sciences. In both, a mechanism operates to prostitute communication between an "I" and a "Thou" into an exchange between programmed "its."

It is as if we no longer dare to risk the simple activity of language without the formulas of the technicians because we fear what we shall discover, about ourselves, and those nigh to us. We dare no longer *be with* the other without the mechanical and impersonal formulas of wordings and phrasings which guarantee we will not be with the other, as *Thou*. Only as *it*.

Expressions of love and hate, hope and doubt, truth and lies, — the medium of the great poets and novelists in our tradition — have been reduced to specialized, sterilized and commercial formulas in TV, religion, radio, movies and music, as essential to our being and life today as the air we breath. "The Beat Goes On", Everywhere in Everything. In George Steiner's words, "a sound culture": "The beat is literally unending. It matters little whether it is that of pop, folk, or rock. What counts is the all-pervasive pulsation, morning to night and into night, made indiscriminate by the cool burn of

electronic timbre. A large segment of mankind, between the ages of thirteen and, say, twenty-five, now lives immersed in this constant throb. The hammering of rock or of pop cultures creates an enveloping space. Activities such as reading, writing, private communication, learning, previously framed with silence, now take place in a field of strident vibrato. This means that the essentially linguistic nature of these pursuits is adulterated; they are vestigial modes of the old 'logic'. The new sound-sphere is global. It ripples at great speed across languages, ideologies, frontiers, and races. . . . Popular music has brought with its sociologies of private and public manner, of group solidarity. The politics of Eden come loud. Many contexts of the decibel culture have been studied. What is more important, but difficult to investigate, let alone quantify, is the question of the development of mental facilities, of self-awareness, when these take place in a perpetual sound-matrix. What are the sweet, vociferous hammers doing to the brain at key stages of development?" (*In Bluebeards Castle*, pp. 115-116).

Yet we squat, satisfied, exhilarated even, talking into an electrical squash, uttering ciphers and yak without meaning, or mouthing to those nearest us mechanical formulas received from the specialists. We are driven by such a culture to relate to everyone and everything through mechanics and by what our world defines as "facts." As one example: Computer results about sex, marriage, abortion, dope, wars, murder, liberations, as they appear regularly from TIME, CBS Evening News, Supreme Court decisions, ideological "think tanks", and reports by the World Council of Churches. As another, what the critic/technician says about genius and apostle is more important than genius or apostle. Again, George Steiner: "Already a dominant proportion of poetry, of religious thought, of art, has receded from personal immediacy into the keeping of the specialist. There it leads a kind of bizarre pseudo-life, proliferating its own inert environment of criticism (we read Eliot on Dante, *not* Dante), of editorial and textual exegesis, of narcissistic polemic. Never has there been a more hectic prodigality of specialized erudition — in literary studies, in musicology, in art history, in criticism, and in that most Byzantine of genres, the criticism and theory of criticism. Never have the metalanguages of the custodians flourished more, or with more arrogant jargon, around the silence of live meaning. An archival pseudo-vitality surrounding what was once felt life; a semiliteracy or subliteracy outside, making it impossible for the poem to survive naked, to achieve unattended personal impact. Academy and populism. The two conditions are reciprocal, and each polarizes the other in a necessary dialectic. Between them they determine our current

state." (In *Bluebeard's Castle*, pp. 105-106). And so, in Ellul's memorable phrase, we are reduced to "a society of objects, governed by objects."

No doubt: the issue here is not novel. (What issue that means anything is?) On several occasions in this journal we have observed that Jesus spoke as he spoke (and did as he did) because the religious language and rhetoric of his time was bankrupt. Burned out. Meaning everything and nothing to everyone and to no one. Paul, on the other hand, neither lived nor spoke in parables because he didn't have to: the language, the metaphors, the images about Jesus and the Kingdom were a new thing. Crucifixion and Resurrection could be expressed in words, images, metaphors, signs, as fresh and unencumbered confessions of Jesus as Lord.

But we live today on the ash-heaps of 1500 years of the jargon of institutional Christianity which served in too large part as the official explanation of 1500 years of Western politics. Indeed, the politics of the past two centuries alone could have perverted the language of Paul and the early church into political propaganda. Beyond politics today, there is commerce, media, therapists and con artists and evangelists in every cranny of our civilization hawking the jargon of Christianity to ply their wares.

It is the scope, the range, the totality of the perversion that is novel and overwhelming. How does one speak today of truth born in Resurrection, of love wrought in Crucifixion, of why the Samaritan is "good," of why "God Alone!" — in the face of the bankruptcy of our language to communicate the truth about God and man and love and God-in-man?

We posed questions such as these to our contributors to this issue of *Katallagete*. Should some of their responses appear on first reading irrelevant to our questions, we say only that this is their response to the issue we have tried to pose in the preceding paragraphs. Their response is their response. Their responses, taken severally and singly, give no counsel to despair. The news about Jesus to all of us is still good.

And to return to the incident which began this introductory word. We have thought a lot over the years about theological education and theological language. There are many, but we close with only one "for example": will "myths" be the last thing that theology takes from us? The myths by which we have the capacity to experi-

ence the truth about Jesus in our setting, not theology's? Our freedom to discern the words of truth, for ourselves? Is truth ever revealed in ways other than "myths" which go beyond the limits of systematic, coherent, logical explanations of "facts"? Myths examined, handled, analyzed and controlled by institutional interpretations are dissected myths — that is, no longer myths, but specimens. Nothing finite — even myths which point to the Infinite — can be dissected and live. Yes: we knew that a long time ago. Yes: we go on acting as if it were not so. Yes: theology today is dead. The myths are dissected into specimens of fact by and for the professionals, the technicians, the scholars. Membership in the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion has never been higher. May the work continue! It may be that the death of theology has nothing to do with the life of God.

Theological language? How is it possible? It took Karl Barth 1200 pages to deal with the question and he came up with no certain answer — only hints, intimations, suggestions and cautions that theology not take itself, its words and systems and disciplines too seriously. Theology today has rejected his offer. Theology today is the theology that takes itself, its words and disciplines with utter seriousness. That self-seriousness is the most characteristic feature of it. So theology today is ideology and is neither interesting nor vital. So no one listens to it, not even the theologians to each other, because the enterprise confesses itself, not Jesus, as Lord.

When the visiting preacher, Rev'un Shegog, in the Easter Service in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, began to move back and forth along the pulpit, arms behind him, staring with monkey eyes into the hearts of the congregation, shouting, "I got de ricklickshun en de blood of de Lamb!" Dilsey and the others knew straightaway what he meant, because they too lived in expectation and hope. It was that expectation and hope that loosed the bonds of language to tell of and experience the good news in Jesus.

So what do we do? Trust only the primitives? By no means. What we do is keep asking at the academy, and of the primitives and the moderns: "Are you the one we seek or look we for another?"

And then give a report about what we have seen and heard.

WDC
JYH

KATALLAGETE

ESCAPING FROM BANKRUPTCY: THE FUTURE OF THE THEOLOGICAL TASK

Vine Deloria, Jr.

Jean-Francois Revel's book *Without Marx or Jesus* had remarkably little impact in American theological circles when one considers the scope of his vision. In describing the necessary next step for achieving both stability and sanity in the world, Revel suggested that five basic areas of concern be simultaneously reformed. Among the areas which he saw needing reform was a critique of culture encompassing morality, religion, accepted beliefs, customs, philosophy, literature and art. Revel was describing a process of systematic and prolonged examination of human values, but it is curious that he did not suggest a leverage point from which such a critique should begin.

Considering the ultimate meaning of culture as an expression of meaning by varieties of the human species — which definition avoids tautology because of depth of understanding only — one would think that either religious understanding or metaphysics would be the proper arena in which to examine planetary culture that may be emerging. Gary Snyder, in *Earth House Hold*, remarked that "we are now experiencing a surfacing (in a specifi-

Vine Deloria, Jr., a Standing Rock Sioux, is the former Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians. He was a member of the Board of Inquiry on Hunger and Malnutrition in the U.S.A., and of the National Office for the Rights of the Indigent. An attorney, he holds degrees from the School of Law of the University of Colorado and the Lutheran School of Theology at Rock Island, Illinois. His most recent book is *God is Red* (Grossett & Dunlap); he is also the author of *Custer Died for Your Sins; We Talk, You Listen*, and editor of *Utmost Good Faith*.

cally "American" incarnation) of the Great Subculture which goes back as far perhaps as the late Paleolithic." If Snyder's intuition is correct then a lot of what have seemed to be disruptive and unnecessary incidents in recent years are manifestations of this emergence; in both intellectual and emotional terms the problems of the human species are approaching an intersection in which religion and metaphysics are not simply possible but are an absolute necessity.

Religious people in the twentieth century have shied away from any discussion of metaphysics because it has seemed to them to be unnecessarily abstract and rigid, the pushing together of inhuman conceptions of the world or the endless bickering over basic premises by people unacquainted with the real problems of daily existence. Yet there is a lot to be said for considering metaphysics as a practical field of endeavor, distinct from theology, one would suppose, primarily because it does not rely upon the sacred scriptures of any tradition for its data. But it would seem to be possible today to use metaphysics and religion, or theology, in complimentary senses in that they are efforts by groups of human beings to coordinate their knowledge and experience of the world. In America we have been eminently practical in this task and one could say that the tremendous development of law in the American tradition has served us better than either religion or metaphysics because it has provided the practical boundary for behavior that Americans have sought.

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If law incorporates a sense of what the world is about, then a brief survey of social changes and important decisions of the Supreme Court on abortion, the draft, integration, the death penalty, and busing, indicates the scope of change that we are experiencing.

It would seem possible, therefore, to raise the question of meaning for our society either by taking traditional theology and metaphysics and examine the laws and decisions of previous generations as an expression of the old theological and metaphysical understandings of the world and by understanding the nature of recent changes in the law we can determine the extent to which the world has changed. Or, we can examine theories that are edging forward to confront us and attempt to determine what shifts in theological and metaphysical understanding are required of us.

Beginning an analysis of this kind can use almost any decision as a starting line and move swiftly to encompass related ideas forming a coherent understanding of the present state of society. But it is on the frontier that we must look for fundamental change, and two developments of recent years seem to be of different quality than others. In 1964 Charles Reich, later of "The Greening of America" fame, published an article in the *Yale Law Journal* entitled "The New Property." In this article Reich argued, and rather persuasively, that social services provided by governmental units to citizens is largely replacing other forms of wealth which had been dominating our conception of law, particularly the concept of property which had marked the boundaries between individuals and the state. Reviewing the many forms in which governmental actions had arisen to affect the lives of people, Reich pointed out that social security, aid to dependent children, occupational licenses, franchises, contracts, subsidies and the use of public resources had become such major sources of economic security and personal identity as to make other forms of wealth and income production rather miniscule.

Reich saw the important development, once this shift had been recognized, as the emergence of a new conception of society as the "public interest state" in which all segments of society are tied together by their relationship to the state and the variety of services that it offers. Certainly one has a difficult time hearing about the condition of New York City without acknowledging the basic validity of Reich's understanding of this shift in em-

phasis in our world. Services and incomes are so intimately intertwined in the New York City situation that movement in any direction toward a solution seems to provoke an indispensable segment of the city's population, thus rendering any final solution inoperative.

It would seem to be impossible for American society to back away from the present state of government involvement in the lives of individual citizens because the whole economic structure might collapse, revealing that we dwell in a benign feudalism in which a few giant corporations and banks have literal control over our lives. So the façade is continued and in forcing the situation to conform to false conditions and premises, we only hasten through uncontrolled inflation the final unveiling. But there seems to be little doubt that even in a financial catastrophe the pattern has been set so that people will expect the governmental structure to provide them certain fundamentals of human existence regardless of how benign or malevolent that provision may have to be to certain groups or individuals.

The other major development in recent years is Christopher Stone's famous essay on ecology, published in 1972 in the *Southern California Law Review* entitled "Should Trees Have Standing?" This article, according to Stone's confession to Garret Hardin, was put together as a means of testing the scope of the interaction of law and the development of social awareness, and was designed to raise the question of whether it was not time to extend the protection of law to natural objects in the same manner, by analogy to human characteristics, that minority groups, women and corporations had received the right to equal legal status as components of social reality. Stone's essay is brilliant because it understands law as the extension of metaphysical, and by relation religious, views of the world as they are manifested in legal concepts. As such, it is a qualitative degree above the usual claptrap published in law reviews which engages in simply pushing barren conceptions back and forth across the page.

Stone's essay caught the attention of the Supreme Court and both Douglas and Blackman took immediate notice of Stone's contention that the world had changed mightily in both a practical and a philosophical sense since the rules of standing had been outlined. Even better, the majority of the court in the *Sierra Club vs. Morton* case hinted rather broadly that if the question had been reframed and approached directly they would have been happy to expand upon the whole idea that natural objects might have some aspect of irreducible rights in the United States Courts. This hint was more than a casual acknowledgment of the growing importance of the ecological movement as a political force for it indi-

cated that the people on the Supreme Court were more fully aware than even most Americans that isolating the human species from the remainder of the planet was a foolish and shortsighted tack.

It seems tragic that the leadership in two important areas, the relationship of human beings to social institutions, and the relationship of human beings to the natural world should have to be taken in the field of law, which does not ordinarily understand the intangible aspects of the human spirit. Yet the fact remains that from the practical side of human affairs the decisions of the courts give us a pretty good indication of how we view society or how we will come to view society in the near future if only because we will be forced to behave in a manner as if we believed it.

As we begin a journey from the legal arena to theology and metaphysics we traverse again the statement of Gary Snyder that the ancient understanding of the world is once again emerging in our time. So we are able to understand emotionally and structurally that American society is undergoing a profound critique because the nature of things, personal and institutional, is under tremendous practical and short-term pressure to produce results which would have naturally come if the old view of the world had not been subjected to incredible changes in both quality and quantity of life. Whether we like it or not, human beings are revising their understanding of themselves. This change is affecting the manner in which they view both the natural world and the institutions which allow them to live in that world.

Theology and metaphysics enter the picture at this point because they deal with reality as experienced by human beings. The social and conceptional changes described above are changes that have happened not because people had ideas that seemed more reasonable than ideas previously held, but because it became necessary in order to survive and bring order out of impending chaos to take that next step. That Stone and Reich have identified the probable structure of certain parts of present reality does not detract from the immediacy of it nor does it mean that these developments are simply another temporary adjustment in the way men think about the world in which they live. If any comparison is possible it is the comparison of humans today with the first group of humans, whoever they were, who came to awareness of themselves as a species with unique capabilities and the means of transcending the world in which they found themselves. We stand today at the same dawn of creation as original humans did, except that we stand in a clut-

tered landscape which is littered with intellectual, emotional, and physical debris largely of our own making.

We do not, for the most part, have the feeling of original sin today. It is worthy of note that the rapid breakdown of some of our institutions, primarily the family and small community, are less breakdowns, according to Gary Snyder, than transitions from one form of existence to another. That the younger generation can take sexual freedom so casually and political responsibilities so seriously, and sometimes so fearfully, may be an indication of which forms of human expression are really important. For it is the relationship to multi-human institutions, beliefs, and practices that are causing the difficulties, not the relationships of individual people — although the existence of institutions as an isolating dimension of our present existence, if unnoticed, may make it seem the opposite.

The difficulty with social and individual change originating in fields other than religion and metaphysics, or first manifesting themselves in ecology, law, and social welfare programs, is that the ethics of the situation remains on a crude level. People must initially follow the late Speaker, Sam Rayburn's ethical dictates to his fellow House members: "Go along to get along." The dominating theme which we have heard in the Watergate, the C.I.A. investigations and in revelations of corporate misbehavior is that "I was just doing my job." This theme, this excuse, permeates American society today and is the next logical step in the development of a contemporary ethics which makes human beings parts of a larger machine rather than an adjustable organism. So society arrives at a crossroads in which, unless it has the careful and total critique of which Revel speaks, we are liable to conclude the existence of the human species in the manner in which Karel Capek and Aldous Huxley have predicted, mindless cogs in a universe machine.

For that reason Revel entitled his book *Without Marx or Jesus* to indicate that the task of humans today was to transcend political, cultural and religious backgrounds and arrive at a planetary conception and understanding of the human species in its direct and intimate relationship with the rest of the universe. This vision is very difficult for Christians to accept for it places the Christian tradition in the peculiar position of having to defend and understand its faith for the first time in two thousand years. And when one considers the very intimate relationship between Christian thought forms, concepts, and understandings of the world it is not at all certain that the Christian religion, or any other religion for that matter,

can survive in the world of the future.

It may be time for the human species to achieve a type of maturity which would allow it to relate to other life forms outside our immediate cosmic neighborhood. We must recognize that as these possibilities now emerge it is simply not enough to extend our old beliefs and understandings of the world in an infinite line of logic hoping that the initial grasp of reality was sufficiently universal to survive the buffeting of new experiences coming at us in a Toffler-described increasing curve of future shock. The old theological claim that Christ is Lord of the whole universe, making the encounter of humans with human-like creatures of another solar system entail missionary activities to them on the basis of our understanding of the Christian religion, will simply not work. The rejection of western values and the Christian religion in Asia and more recently by North American Indians should be sufficient warning that the Christian understanding of religious reality may not be sufficiently universal to be described as the ultimate religion.

There is no way, of course, to determine ahead of time what shape the future will take or if any religion will be capable of confronting the emerging society which will come to dominate our planet. So while we face a sense of discouragement, the central task of having the "courage to be" in the face of adversity must sustain whatever action or reaction we make in the future to new experiences. But we must be absolutely certain that we understand the nature of the world in which we live. We experience change; and there can be no denial that we have such experiences. What is not so clear — and this is the area in which theology and metaphysics are the only disciplines capable of undertaking the task of bringing order out of chaos — is whether we in fact understand the meaning which we ascribe to our experiences. As Ian Barbour has pointed out in his writings, it is not possible to mis-experience, but it is possible to mis-interpret experiences.

It goes without saying, therefore, that the world is making rapid yet sporadic changes as it gropes its way through time. History, in spite of Tillich's great series of analyses of it, does not favor anyone, it simply happens, and we place a label on it after the fact. It is virtually useless to continue to shift favorite Biblical sayings back and forth in an effort to discern from the most obscure texts a new way of understanding the experiences of minority groups, the place of women in societies, the freedom from political or economic oppression, or the value and sacredness of the secular city. Such exercises are but the fruitless rearrangements of one set of concepts to fit increasingly serious and novel situations.

Again, however, we must return to the field of ethics

within religion and metaphysics and consider exactly what we are describing when we refer to this field. Ethics seems to encompass aspects of existence which do not easily fit into other categories of explanation. And if we oppose the current theological expressions with current practical expressions the subject of the theological task of our generation becomes clear. We must find a new paradigm within which ethics can be articulated. The brotherhood of human beings which characterized the Christian understanding may have been adequate in a world in which we had to deal with ordinary experiences. We simply projected from our best values and understandings outwards towards our neighbors and treated them as we would like to have been treated. It worked as long as we did not have to face simultaneous change of large masses of people and institutions. When these masses grew so large as to allow differences to be recognized — minority groups, sexual distinctions, age differences — then it became an oppressive ethic because we never attached any personality to that neighbor. We never knew if the neighbor was a he or a she, a black, an Indian, an Asian or a Chicano, or if that neighbor was young, old, our age, or the generation just ahead or behind us.

Today we are faced with those distinctions and part of Charles Reich's hidden agenda in outlining the "public interest society" is that that society is composed of distinct groups which have certain indefinable and irreducible claims on society and its members. And then when we add Christopher Stone's admonition that the neighbor includes rocks, trees, animals, and landscapes which require a certain posture from the human species, the old ethical framework which told us how to respond to experiences burst completely.

Those people who are worried about the future of the theological task have reason to worry if all they intend to do is to reshuffle old verses and doctrines to the exclusion of any relationship of those verses and doctrines to the world in which people live and have experiences. But when one considers the many startling and unexpected changes that the human species is encountering and when the vacuum of ethical analysis is understood, then the task of both theology and metaphysics seems to be the most exciting task which any generation has faced. We seem to stand once again at the dawn of creation, comprehending the variety of the world and wondering what our role and relationship is. If we are content simply to name it in order to gain ascendancy over it, we will have unwittingly created the most original sin of placing our

fate and our future in our heads instead of incorporating it in our hearts and becoming a living expression of what creation must certainly mean to itself.

The articulation of the issues of natural objects achieving a legal status and the recognition of the "public interest state" came from the legal profession primarily because, in a certain sense, there had been sufficient movement and change within that profession to open wide gaps in the data between old concepts and new experiences. Thus it is those people in the coal fields, on the reservations, in the ghettos, and in the communes who have experienced both isolation and community with sufficient intensity to recognize a gap between experience and interpretation of experience who will pro-

duce the new theologies and metaphysics that will allow society and the human species to regain its vision and understanding and take up once again the task of affirming the value of human existence. It will not come from the professional theologians and philosophers who strut about rearranging old concepts in a frantic effort to deny that the universe and its life forms are undergoing constant, profound, and accelerating change.

There should be no bankruptcy in theology and metaphysics today. We are just looking for change in the wrong places. We have come to expect new words to indicate progress and health, whereas it is in the lives of people that the newness exists and it abounds to our delight if we only recognize it. □



TAKE COURAGE, BOY!

THE EARTH IS ALL THAT LASTS.

Julius Lester

I am thirty-seven and, with a shock, realize that I have rowed halfway across the river. I have entered middle age and knowing that I can reasonably expect only thirty-five more years of life, the time has come to prepare to die. Death does not frighten me as it did when I was young, for I am beginning to sense that it is not the end of life but the apex of it. To live is to learn how to die well.

Increasingly, however, American society tries to teach me differently. Doctors regard a life as if it were a machine to be kept functioning by removing worn parts and replacing them with spares. Human life is maintained by inserting electrical plugs into wall outlets and the decision as to whether or not a life so sustained is truly a life is decided by legal minds. (And what is more perishable, transitory and chimerical than the law?) More than any other people, Americans hate the idea that they will die. What we really hate is Life, because if one

is not willing to face death with an exuberant laugh, how then can Life, with all its terrors, risks and uncertainties, be lived? The earth is all that lasts and what is my brief passage upon it when compared to its never-to-be comprehended mystery and grandeur?

So I row toward death, for it is the final test; and part of the preparation for it is to stop in mid-river and look back at the first half of my life. I see that all I fantasized of accomplishing when I was an eighteen-year-old dreamer has been realized. I have written the books, poems and essays and have achieved enough of the fame I so ardently desired to know that I want no more. Having done so, I smile wryly, because I see clearly that my accomplishments are the markers of my existence in the outer world of men and things. The world has crowned me among its successful ones. However, such a coronation has not prepared me to die well.

*Behold, a sacred voice is calling you;
All over the sky a sacred voice is calling.*

At seven A.M. the sound of the alarm clock ejects

me into consciousness. If that is what one can call it. I'm not sure anymore. For some months now I have given myself more and more to the pictures which rise from the grave of night. Dreams are messages to us from the unknown parts of our souls, and in other times, they were considered divine revelation. Joseph and Daniel were noted interpreters of dreams; Jacob wrestled with the angel of God in a dream, and the entire book of Revelations seems to be a dream journal. But we of modern times know that reality is what can be measured, weighed and proved, and regard the night pictures as amusing diversions, or disturbances caused by indigestion.

I keep a note pad and pen on the floor beside my bed to write down the images from that unseen world. Within my dreams I can hear a sacred voice calling. I do not always understand what it is saying, but something in me does, because for the first time in my life I am beginning to accept, without protest, that Reality is beyond my comprehension.

Each morning while trying to gather the night-pictures before they are scattered by the broom of day's light, I hear the sound of the toilet flushing from my son's room in the basement. That is a sacred voice, too, a Bach prelude before the Invocation, telling me that all is well. My son is alive.

A few minutes later, as I flush the toilet, I wonder if he hears and records the fact that I, too, am alive. I doubt it. An eight-year-old boy is not aware of much except himself. He must experience himself as a separate, conscious entity before he can open and truly receive others. That is why he lives with me instead of his mother. He is male and I am male and we understand what a woman cannot — the ecstasy of leaping to glove a high line drive, the beauty of a spinning, spiralling football arcing through an autumn afternoon into one's arms, the pride of ripped pants and grass-stained shirts. Some afternoons I sit in my rocking chair by the living room window and watch my son and his friends play football. The parent in me cringes as I hear the little-boy-bodies strike the ground, and watch my tiny son disappear beneath a pile of bodies. Then I remember other autumn days and another boy and I can almost feel how the heat of my body burned like a torch against the chill dusk-autumn-darkness.

My son is returning my childhood to me. I look at him and remember how I, too, had an impeccable memory for baseball player's batting averages, how I never hung up my clothes no matter how many times I was reminded, how I had a fierce urge for independence which demanded an explanation for everything before I'd do what I was asked. (My father's reasons were always the same: "Because I said so," and remembering how I

vowed as a child to treat my children differently, I explain patiently to my son. Of course, my explanations only produce counter-arguments from him until I begin to see my father's wisdom and avail myself of it. However, I think my son understands that I respected his need to assert himself against that authority before I invoked it.)

Of course, there is much about my son that I don't like — his self-centeredness which is too often blind and uncaring about the feelings of others, his need to feel that he is always right in what he says and does, his attempts to practice emotional extortion on me by pouting when he doesn't get his way. These aspects of his personality enrage me more than they should, and painfully I am beginning to realize that one hates in another what one does not want to see in himself. Not only is my son returning my forgotten childhood to me, he is forcing me to see how much of me is still childish. If I am to tend his growing, I must complete the task of my own.

Often we smile at each other when passing through a room, or eating a meal. What he feels within himself at such time, I can't say, but the fact that he is my son is more than my emotions can encompass. I look at him and wonder, from whence came this life I see before me asking blithely for a four hundred dollar pool table for Christmas? I don't know, but I am certain that I had nothing to do with the creation of such a marvel. How could that innocuous-looking liquid which spurts from my penis during intercourse have any relationship to him?

I have tried to recall the night he was conceived. Such a moment should certainly glow perpetually in my soul. I should have been able to feel the instant the seed united with the egg. I remember nothing, except that I came to New York to visit my then wife from my work in the South as a photographer for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. As always on such visits, we argued for hours about when was I going to come back for good and my "Never!" rattled against her "Now!" until we tired, and went to bed where, more from habit and sexual frustration, we coupled briefly and uninspiringly before lapsing into grateful sleep. Weeks later when she told me that she was pregnant, my first thought was to name the child, Diaphragm.

I am ashamed at how casually and thoughtlessly my son's life was conceived. I give more thought to what brand of canned peas to buy than I did to his conception. But Nature does not notice or even care about my inadequacies and inner struggles. Its only concern is the

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continuation of the species and I was used for that end. He should be called Grace.

After he leaves for school in the mornings, I sit in the rocking chair sipping my second or third cup of coffee and watch him and the neighborhood boys throw piles of leaves onto each other while waiting for the bus, or in winter, snowball fights that assume the proportions of medieval battles. Though I cannot hear their laughter, I can see it fluttering like autumn.

After the bus goes, I read for an hour or so. Since spring all of my reading has been concentrated on deciphering the night-pictures, and uncovering the symbols I live. What does it mean that more than two years ago I began to say, "I want to be a tree." That is not a rational statement: It is symbolic, but I still do not know what I mean. So I read myths, looking for my own, and wonder who the people were that believed in Isis, Osiris, and devouring dragons. I have also taken to coloring books, which I disdained as a child. I have a cigar box full of Magic Markers and spend weeks coloring a representation of the Egyptian god, Horus, and the Aztec god, Quetzatcoatl, and the Greek Pegasus. I do not understand what I am doing or even why I am doing it, except that my need to color is symbolic. Maybe I am training myself to live by means other than my mind, to live without nailing a concept onto everything I experience. When I colored the falcon-headed Horus, I could not think about him, because people don't have the heads of hawks. What can I say about the goddess Isis, with her wings broader than any bird's, or a horse that flies? But these figures were as important to ancient civilizations as Jesus was (I dare not say is) to ours. Horus, Isis, and Pegasus were not concepts. They were experiences which shook the soul and directed it toward meaning. Today the McDonald's golden arches have more of that power than the Cross.

*I knew the real was yonder
and the darkened dream of it was here.*

My father and I used to do jigsaw puzzles together. Now I am the father and it is my son who sits at the card table with me, staring at hundreds and hundreds of puzzle pieces, searching for the exact one to fill an exact hole.

I love opening the box of a new puzzle and laying out the thousand tiny pieces, one by one. I stare at the picture on the box and then at the pieces on the table. There is no resemblance between them. Reality has been frag-

mented, broken up into unrecognizable pieces and I, with patience and perseverance, must put it back together.

My son taught me a new way to do that, for I see color and try to match pieces by color. He sees shapes and will look at the shape of a hole and search for the corresponding shape among the pieces. Now I see shapes, too, and am trying to teach him to see colors.

I can sit for a ridiculous number of hours, silent, before a jigsaw puzzle. On one level, it is a release from thinking, like my coloring books. The best way to do a jigsaw puzzle is not to think, but see, to let the eyes move back and forth from the space to be filled and the pieces scattered on the table and allow no words to pass through the mind. It is a form of Zen meditation, an excursion into no-mind.

Jigsaw puzzles are teaching me how to live, because I fit pieces into place and cannot see how they are creating the picture on the box. It is only when I stand back from the table that I see what I have been doing. It is that way with our lives, too. The whole is more evident when we stand at the edge of ourselves and see the picture that we are.

I find myself living that way in relation to my son, too. I hold a part of me away from him, the better to be consciously aware of the man now forming himself in the boy's soul. It is to that man that I am responsible. The child is only the thousand scattered pieces that must each find their places to create the adult. But there is no picture on the box to show me what he will look like when all is done. That is the fearful part of being a parent. I must not approach my son with preconceptions of who he is and who he should be. I must listen to him constantly and try to interpret the symbols he expresses unconsciously, like the New York *Mets* baseball cap which he always has on. And what does it mean when he announces, "I set a new record today. I have had my shoes on for thirteen hours and thirty-five minutes." He is making a statement about himself and I must interpret it so that I will not violate the particular image of God he is. Of course I will fail. I am only human and am still trying to fit together the pieces of my Self. The most I can do is put together the straight-edged border and be certain that all the pieces are laid out.

On his second day in school, he got into a fight. Part of me was glad, because it showed that he was wholly adjusted to his new school and new life with me. I could not condone fighting, but could not criticize it if I could not offer him an alternative and adequate response to the aggression of others. I knew only that I wanted him to learn to settle differences non-violently, i.e., with the force of his Being. But how does one communicate that

to an eight-year old? Certainly not with words, or a children's book on Gandhi. Slowly, after many weeks, I realized that he would learn non-violence in the way I related to him. Being a parent was less in what I said than in sharing the quality of my life. (The thought was enough to make me want to ship him back to his mother.)

My son does know it, but he demands that I find the way to live as a whole person, because all I can give him is who I am. (One day he announced that when he grew up he was going to write a book. Since my son has never been impressed by the fact that I am a writer, I was amazed and yes, more than a little flattered by his announcement. I began fantasizing about the beginning of a dynasty of literary Lesters which would make the Huxleys look like journeyman scribes. I could not pass up the opportunity, however, to tell him, "Well, if you're going to be a writer, you'll certainly have to work on your spelling." As the words came from my mouth, I knew, too, that I would have to work on not being so damned didactic and sententious. My son looked at me quizzically. "Who said anything about being a writer?" "You did," I responded. "Uh-uh," he said firmly. "I said I wanted to write a *book*. I don't want to spend my life being a *writer*." I did not feel rejected, because I was curious to know what it was that I had communicated to him about being a writer. Did he awake in the night and hear the typewriter? Had the night-pictures presented him with frightening images of a life chained to words and ideas, or did he perceive that some important part of myself was inaccessible to him or anyone? I did not ask him, for I am sure that he did not know. But he had learned something important about me and I had never said a word.)

The spiritual life as an alternative to the life society would have my son lead will only be convincing to him if he feels the vibrancy of the yonder real in me. But I do not yet possess it. The problem of living in the waning days of the twentieth century is that society and religious institutions have lost the capacity to sustain us if we try to manifest the yonder-real in our mundane dailiness. (The radical movements of the sixties were a demand that society provide a spiritual environment for alienated lives.) Isis and Quetzatcoatl determined the acts, emotions and thoughts of all in ancient Egypt and the Aztec nation. In the early Church, one was a Christian because he/she experienced the Cross within themselves as a numinous actuality. Now we pledge allegiance to the Cross, sign a loyalty oath to the particular denomination and are welcomed into the Body of Christ. It is not so

simple. (There is a small town in Pennsylvania whose population is comprised of Russian emigres, members of the Russian Orthodox Church. On Easter Sunday morning, the usual greetings of "Good morning," "How are you?", "A fine day today," etc., are replaced with a joyous and felt, "He is risen!") The doubt created by the Age of Reason has crystallized into dogma. Religious ritual has been transferred to the shopping malls where each Saturday we go to genuflect to the Powers of Goods which have become the Good, the True and the Beautiful ("Reduced for ONE WEEK ONLY to \$11.95.") Theology has become cultural, a mirror of temporal realities which are too often mistaken for Divine Revelation.

*It is hard to follow one great vision
in this world of darkness and of
many changing shadows.
Among those shadows men get lost.*

In the past year I have returned increasingly to the dangerous cavern of myself, where the shadows loom like demons and gargoyles against the walls of my souls. One cannot see the great vision if the shadows block it, and last spring a night-picture was given to me in which I followed a man onto a long out-of-use bridge and watched him cut telephone wires. Then I proceeded across the bridge. After many months of examining that picture I realized that that is what I have done — stopped communication to the outside world, even to friends, in order to cross over to the second half of my life.

During that passage I began to see how often I had lived among the shadows, been lost among them, confident that I stood in the full sun of midday. When we are young, however, we need that brash confidence which convinces us that night is day and all stars are beacons shining exclusively for us. I am no longer young, and that is a relief. I do not need to prove anything to myself or the world anymore. I am content to take my son to ice-hockey practice three times a week and sit in the bleachers with the other parents and complain happily about how expensive the equipment is and how tired we get of driving to and from the rink.

I wonder now why it took me so long to know that being a good father is as much "The Way" as being a monk, which I wanted to be for so long. In fully assuming the responsibility of being a parent, one comes to the heart of human existence. I have put on the father's hood and become a part of the immemorial human story as

fully as if I had put on the monk's cowl.

I want to have ten children and sometimes, I think I can feel children crying out from the trunk of my penis to be born. Now I regret all the years I regarded birth control as a blessing, for I sinned against my Self when I sent my seed to death for the sake of my pleasure.

How could I have been so flippant with the gift to create life? My seed is a covenant which I am bound to keep, and because it is, I can no longer agree with women who say that it is their right to do as they wish with their bodies. How came it *theirs*? That body was put into their keeping, but it is not their property.

The female body has become, however, a political issue and Life is just another legal case on the docket. Who are the real primitives — The Sioux who believe the prairie grass has a soul (*wakan*), or we who believe that something growing in the womb is not life? I can no longer agree that abortion is a woman's right, for the ability to create life was not given to women exclusively. I eschew my function as the seed-carrier and planter if I smile and say it is all right to uproot that seed. It is not my seed, and once that seed has taken root, a man and a woman no longer have rights. They are required to learn humility in the presence of the mystery of creation.

The legalization of abortion may one day appear to be a more horrifying event than the bombing of Hiroshima. (But not too many are yet horrified by that.) The last barrier to a definition of life as pleasure — the risk of pregnancy — has been removed. Got a cold? Take Dristan. Got pregnant? Get an abortion. Don't let Life stand in the way of HAVING FUN!

Technology has made sexual pleasure so ordinary that it has no value, and my son may grow up to think that his ability to create Life is accidental. Society can no longer give him a rationale for learning that his sexuality is an instrument of holiness to be offered up like a chalice raised by a priest during Mass. He will not experience his body as a prayer of thanksgiving, but merely as flesh.

I fear that we have been bound and imprisoned by the shadows and are rapidly losing the ability to distinguish the light from the dark. But if we expend our lives running from aging, which is a growing toward dying, and fleeing from Death, we have no energy with which to learn to dance with Life. If one only listens to the hoofs of Death's horse, how can he hear the call of the sacred voice?

*It is in the darkness of their eyes
that men get lost.*

On Monday mornings I do the wash. I put the money in the washer, close the top and listen as the hot water begins to fill the machine. When it is a quarter full, I add soap powder and bleach, and wait while enough water pours in to sufficiently mix them. Then I put in the clothes, slowly, a piece at a time. My son's clothes amaze me, particularly his underwear, for they are simply smaller versions of my own. They are not children's clothes, but child-sized men's clothes. As I drop them, piece by piece, into the washers, I remember that it was not long ago that my mother did the same with mine and that it will not be long before my son (I hope he does it) will do the same with his child's.

Doing the laundry each Monday, I realize that I am performing an act that is outside what we call history, for on Mondays, I am sure, the worshippers of Isis and Quetzatcoatl, also, did the wash. Not in the same way as I, but the act is the same. So are all our acts and in sweeping the kitchen floor, washing the dishes, making the bed, chopping wood, or sitting in my rocking chair and looking at the birds at the feeder beneath the pine tree, I know myself as inseparable from every person who has lived and is alive. So often we see only what makes us different from others. Yet, each day we all perform the same acts. It is not what we do that defines us, but the inner attitude of being with which we do. Doing the laundry becomes an expression of Being when we aren't concerned with doing the laundry just to get it done.

It is easy to record the fact and most of us know it. But our knowing is with the mind, which can so easily deceive us into believing that our knowledge belongs to our total being. The great vision cannot be realized, however, by an act of thought or will. It is not even something we can acquire, for we already have it. We cannot know that we have it, however, as long as we see only the darkness of our eyes, as long as we live among the shadows and do not know that they are shadows.

But I have been lost among the shadows more times than I know, and cannot know, even now, if I am living the vision or being deceived by the changing shadows. There is no certainty or prescribed rule which, if adhered to, will automatically lead to life within the great vision. Many have charted The Way, and that is the most that words can do. They cannot confer experience.

That is my greatest sorrow when I look at my son. I cannot give him the vision. I can only try to make my passage a true one, and hope that he, watching it, will be infected with the hunger to make his own. Ironically, I will never know, for the proof of how true my passage has been will only come at the moment of my dying, which I hope he will witness. However, what he sees and how it resounds within him will forever be unknown to me, for I will be crossing the final threshold, completing the jigsaw puzzle, entering the world of the night-pictures.

*Crazy Horse dreamed and went
into the world where there is nothing
but the spirits of all things.*

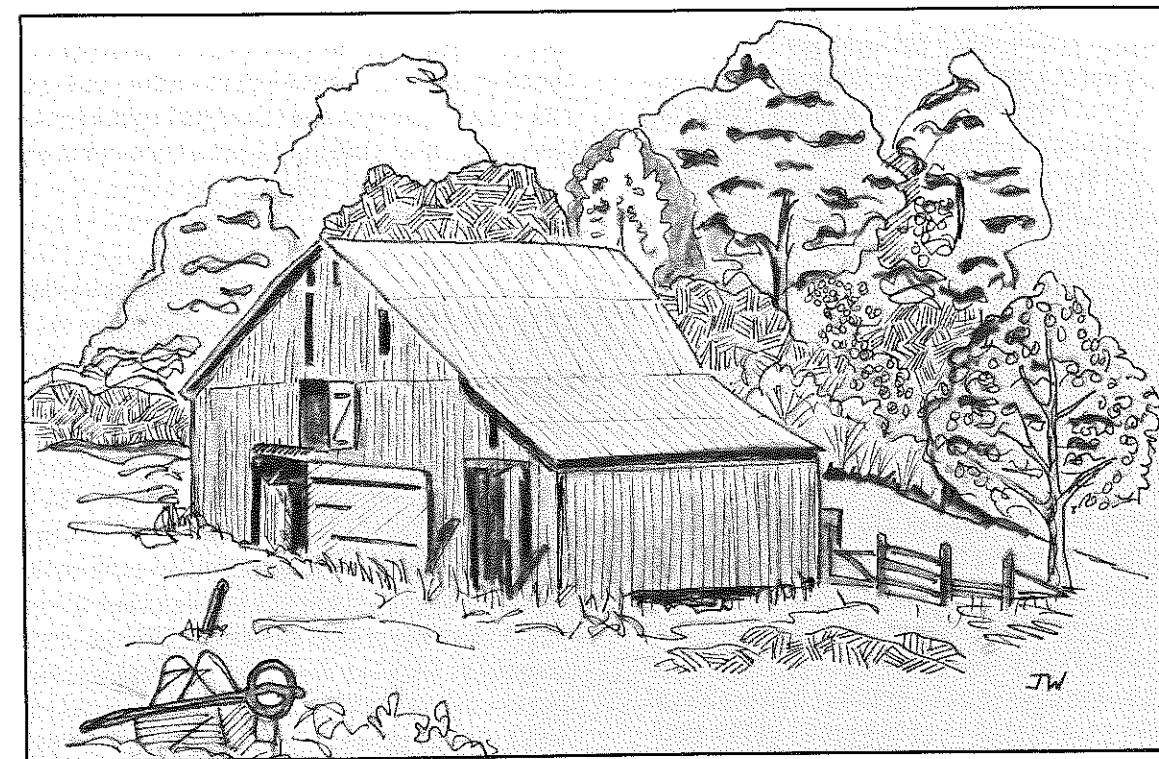
*That is the real world
that is behind this one.*

That is so.

*It is finished in beauty.
It is finished in beauty.*

That, too, is so. □

(The title and all italicized sentences except the final one are from *Black Elk Speaks*. The final one is the Navaho equivalent of the Christian Amen.)



SEMANTIC BANKRUPTCY

Laurence Mancuso

Languages and linguistics have captivated me since childhood. Words and their etymology, their use and mis-use, the developments and changes in their meaning — all this fascinated me intensely and always opened whole new worlds to me. From within these “new worlds” came new insights into the real world in which we live, as well as the world that constitutes the human condition as such and its self-consciousness. But I have always been equally consumed by a desire for authenticity. It bothered me that life afforded us the possibility of choosing something something imaginary. We *could*, in a word, opt for the phony. Anything less than the *real thing* was always disappointing, so that even a crust of moldy bread, if real, was always preferable to any kind of “dream loaf” that was no more than wishful thinking.

This is the background, then, into which any discussion of the bankruptcy of language enters my consciousness. This is the background that I will bring to bear on any consideration of the bankruptcy of *theological* language. Inasmuch as language in using this vehicle is crucial. If our *words* do not convey what they are supposed to convey, then how indeed shall we convey what they are supposed to convey? If we do not employ words to foster realism and authenticity, how can we ever achieve any positive, total growth? Yet, experience shows all too clearly that there is a bankruptcy in human language. This needs no proof. And the first victim of this bankruptcy of language in general, and of theologi-

cal language in particular, is man's interior life. That most vital “area” of human existence has been the first to suffer from this bankruptcy.

True religion should nourish and nurture this inner life of man. But the words used to express the transcendent truths of religion, whether technically in the realm of theological thought, or practically in the realm of religious instruction, have only contributed to frustrating this interior growth. A by-product of this, in turn, has been the development of subtle and less subtle forms of phoniness, the most flagrant of which we call *hypocrisy*.

Obviously, the spiritual life evades any kind of perfect precise expression, at least such as we might find in other areas of human knowledge. The nature of the spiritual world is itself our first handicap in dealing with it. However, the communication and expression of truths vital to human existence is further limited by the very *anthropomorphic* quality of human words. It is eminently difficult, if not actually impossible, to speak of the spiritual — that intangible reality *par excellence*! — when the prime vehicle for that discussion is necessarily unable to grasp that dimension. Who, for example, conceives of God in *anthropomorphic* terms except human beings? Who calls God *God* except human beings? And in fact, not even *all* human beings call God *God*; some call this reality *le Dieu*, or *Bog*, or *Iddio*!

Thus, try as we may, we have only made religion and its acceptance more difficult with every generation. We have used the limited tools of human language — *as indeed we must* — to deal with non-physical, non-material, non-human realities. This has contributed to

the general breakdown of what we can call (for lack of a better phrase) the practice of religion. We have been experiencing a period of (pseudo?) liberalism in church life and thought these last few years, and instead of finding a solution to our problem, it seems as though the trend now is to return to an ever more reactionary frame of mind, supposedly in defense of “conservative” religion. But liberalism is a beautiful concept, for it means *freedom*. Similarly, conservatism is equally beautiful for it means that we *preserve* the best. Few people, however, think of these terms in this way. Hence, the present trends can only promise to be as fruitless and confusing for mankind as any trend to date.

It seems, however, that we are here describing the results of something, not the causes of it. The actual condition of religion today, the way people reflect and understand it and do or do not practice it, is the result of something deeper than the mere bankruptcy of language. After all, *theological language* is not the only language that suffers from any kind of bankruptcy. Other activities have gone the same route — the generation gap, political disenchantment, etc.

The underlying cause of this seems to be our failure to understand what *understanding* means! When we add this to the fact that the spiritual life and all it entails are the greatest mysteries of our consciousness, how can we be anything but bankrupt? We seem to forget that the realities of spiritual life and religion are, first and foremost, *mysteries*. But, besides this, we do not really understand the nature of mystery. Therefore, it seems that a possible “road back to health” in this subject might be via some real reflection on these two concepts: *understanding* and *mystery*.

Education is a marvelous thing. Today, more than ever before, more people are involved in some form of education. People everywhere seem to be going to school trying to increase their learning. Many seek degree after degree. This might all seem great, something for which we should all be happy, grateful. Yes, it might appear as such, except. . . .

Experience gives us ample evidence that most often, the process of learning degenerates into mere memory work. We do not actually *think*, except ever so superficially; we *memorize someone else's thinking*. We parrot what another says or writes, never stopping to reflect in depth on what that other has said or written. Sometimes, we really do not comprehend what his words mean. In fact, we are not certain even the speaker or writer understands fully what he thought he said. For often, not only are there subtle nuances of difference in how people use words, but these subtleties seem to go over all our heads, over the head of the speaker as well as the listener.

The result is that the wisdom that can come only from true understanding is scarce indeed on the human scene. It may well be that this is an exaggerated description of the reality, but every exaggeration carries within it a kernel of the objective reality. It ought not be presumed that because the world today is better educated, it is *wiser* than it was when it was less well-schooled. It ought indeed be so, but that does not make it so. The utter nonsense that gets spilled onto millions of human beings under the guise of learning is one of the sins that cries to heaven for vengeance. And let us not mistake it: the world has increased in every way; technology is not foolishness, but technology is not wisdom either! Wisdom cannot come from computers or the ability to build or run computers. Wisdom comes only from understanding, and that is our deficiency.

Well, then what *is* understanding?

First, of all, consideration will show that understanding is not a thing. It is not *something* one finds out. It cannot be *learned*, nor can it be *taught*. But, it can be *achieved*. We can become *understanding*, and it has nothing to do with sympathy! But to achieve understanding, to any degree, in any area, requires *reflection*, *consideration*. To really understand, one must *reflect*, one must *consider*.

Our problem, all too often, is one of failing to go far enough in the process of learning. We try to *remember* what we have learned. This is fine, but it must not stop there. Memorization is *not* understanding. Memorization *is*, however, the retention, the recollection of the *what* we have learned. We try to remember the *facts* of knowledge. *Persistent consideration* of and *reflection* on these facts we have learned, remembered, and utilized is the way to attain authentic understanding. We cannot come to understand anything if we do not *look* at it, physically, intellectually, and however else it can be *looked* at. Too often, all we do is attend to the *words* used about something. What we must do, however, is *use the words* said about something *to draw our attention to what the words refer to*. This attention is reflection, consideration. It cannot bring about true understanding. But, we have *begun* if the only understanding we achieve is the actual understanding that we do not understand the matter at all!

To exemplify this, we might see life and all it contains as a magnificent, tremendous picture puzzle. In this puzzle, there are millions and millions of lesser puzzles, lesser plots, very much like those typically involved Russian novels. Daily life provides us with many of the

pieces of this puzzle, both of the lesser scenes as well as of the complete whole, the ultimate picture, so to speak. We do not have all the pieces by any means. We really do not even have many pieces, for our life is only a small iota in this great panorama. Yet, we have *enough* pieces to be able to put *some* of the picture together, and every day we face life, we get a few more pieces, or perhaps, we get a better view from the pieces we found yesterday. Though our supply of pieces is indeed limited, thoughtful and patient consideration of what we *do* have will indicate to us how they do or do not fit together, how they relate to the whole even though we do not even know what the whole is.

We have all worked on such picture puzzles. Never have we simply zipped them together without many hours of juggling them, of jockeying them around the table, seeing if this piece might go with that. We all can remember how "groups of pieces" suddenly "fit" or how some section "did not fit." We have all solved such puzzles. We can also recall that there were those puzzles that we never did quite finish. We can also note that when all the pieces were there before us, the puzzle could be completed; if pieces were missing — even one — then the puzzle could not be completed.

It is like this with the process of attaining understanding. We do not always have all the *facts of knowledge*, i.e., the pieces of the whole puzzle. We may not even have all the pieces of one of the sub-sections. At times, the facts we do have, it turns out, are not even true! But, the facts we have learned are the *raw material* for understanding. Thoughtful reflection, patient and persistent consideration, will lead to at least *some* true understanding. When we apply this approach to any aspect of life, even the aspects of which we are actually ignorant, we cannot but come to understand. This is the way our forebears attained even the earthiest of wisdom, and many of them had no schooling whatever, or at most, a minimum of it! Books are great, but they do not contain understanding. All they can provide for us is raw material for understanding, and understanding is the threshold of wisdom. Only wisdom can save mankind. "*Wisdom is the consort of the Lord.*"

It is just this same process that we must bring to bear on the whole subject of religion and its practice, on thinking about it and on teaching it. Religion is the field, *par excellence*, where we must not simply memorize, where we must reflect and consider, where we must achieve some real understanding. However, experience again shows us something else! We confront religion as a

monster; we freeze in our tracks! We are, after all, dealing with *divine truths* (thunder offstage). Better to memorize. No sense taking chances trying to understand even the little we might in fact be able to understand as human beings. Look at the past. So many disputes and tangents, heresy and schism, one failure after another! Yes, simply memorize. Anyhow, religion is mystery, and we cannot grasp that!

The world and the realities of the spirit are for the most part mysteries indeed! It should be noted, however, that when we describe religion as *mystery*, we do not mean what theologians of all faiths usually mean when they call some religious truth as *inscrutable mystery*. It usually means simply that they are baffled. Hence, they declare it inscrutable! It is also interesting to note that theologians have described certain phenomena as inscrutable mysteries, but, very often, in centuries to come, these "mysteries" became scrutable indeed! It does not seem that every iota of religious reality is an inscrutable mystery. Religion does indeed deal with many inscrutable mysteries, but we ought not suppose that everything religion has to say is inscrutable. Good Lord! where would we be?

Many things in life are indeed inscrutable, but it is unreasonable to presume such things are inscrutable mysteries simply because they are non-physical, non-material, non-human.

So there are those tenets of religion and spirituality that are indeed true *mysteries*. A great deal of the "other world" is mystery. But we tend to make the *nature* of a mystery also a *mystery*. Mysteries there are, but *what a mystery is* does not seem to be one of them. A clear notion of what the concept of mystery is all about will shed light on other realities as well.

Mystery is that *beyond* our comprehension. We cannot understand it because we do not have what it takes to understand it. We cannot come to grips with it *intellectually*. This does not mean that a mystery is *in itself incomprehensible*, for this would make *mystery* synonymous with *non-sense*. The realities we call mysteries are hardly nonsense! It is simply that in our present human condition, we do not have the means of coping with this reality. In fact, in the case of many mysteries, *we even have to be told* that such a mystery is a reality. This is what we mean by *revelation*.

Still, we should also note that not every mystery is really *totally* a mystery. There may be many facets of it that *can* be understood by human beings; if not sooner, then later. Furthermore, there are also things we do not classify as mysteries that actually are mysteries; now we may think we understand them, when in fact, we may not. And there are those mysteries which are not actually

mysteries at all; we simply do not *yet* understand them, but future generations may indeed come to comprehend them.

It is paramount to get a proper understanding of this notion, which is basic to all true religion. The mind was made to understand. Man seeks knowledge. No matter what the mystery, man wants to know, at least what he can, and then some! Lack of knowledge leaves man in the dark. But we were created for the light! Thus, we try to understand even in the face of "the mysteries of life."

We might more clearly portray the nature of mystery with an example. For a man *born blind*, a two-dimensional representation is a mystery. He does not have what it takes — *sight* — to comprehend this reality. He lacks what it takes to "see" (intellectually as well as physically!) the reality of the two-dimensional image. (Such is not the case with one who lost his sight through illness or disease or accident). Sight is *required* for man to understand how a two-dimensional representation actually *does* represent something that is *three-dimensional*. Since he does not have the means to see, it is a mystery *how* this flat something is a likeness, let us say, of his brother. In fact, that it is a likeness of his brother is something he must be told, and then he must take it *on faith*. He may have some idea of what his brother "looks like" since he has felt the features of his brother's face with his hands. Yet, the photo remains a mystery for him. It is beyond the power of a man born blind to understand this.

However, we note that not every aspect of the photo is a mystery. Even the man born blind can feel its flatness. Even the man born blind can feel the smoothness of a glossy print or the lesser smoothness of another kind of photo paper. He can even perceive it is paper, not wood. Even the man born blind can smell the photo, thus comparing it with other papers, with other flatnesses he has experienced this way. Thus, it is possible for some aspects of even the greatest mysteries to be understood, at least in a limited way.

May we not say, then, that better *understanding* and a more realistic approach to the *mystery* aspect of spirituality might help to retrieve us from our bankrupt state? Might we not apply this not only to facts that we learn in the field of religion and spiritual living, but to the words we and others have used to communicate these realities? Let us see.

What, actually, is true religion all about, anyway?

Throughout these pages, we have repeatedly used some form of the word *real*. In these same pages we have also used derivatives of the word-root *myst-*. We might therefore note what most people seem to overlook. Religion is actually a *way of life*, that is why it is inextricably linked with *mysticism*. Whether or not this word itself is the best to use, history has in fact used it in conjunction with religion and spirituality in general. At any rate, it has nothing to do with the occult. True mysticism is *realism*. Facing reality, seeking to meet reality is the essence of true religion. One of our perennial troubles is that people think they are practicing religion to the degree that they attend church or church-affiliated programs, to the degree that they perform their religious duties perfunctorily. This is ersatz religion. When a man actually confronts and embraces reality, when, in a word, he becomes a mystic, *then* he is actually doing what religion wants of him; he is living, he is alive, he is growing, *because* and *to the extent* that he has confronted reality! Unfortunately, though this is so, it is not at all the general experience of mankind. Therefore, let us look at some experiences that most all men are familiar with.

All of us are aware of *atheists*. We know that there are many atheists in the world. In fact, there have always been atheists. One may presume that there will *always* be people who will refuse to believe in God or anything else connected with religion. One may also presume that these atheists are simply acting in total conformity with *self-will* and *personal, unjustifiable pride*. One may even presume that this is *why* they are atheists. However, one would do better not to presume any such thing!

Consideration will show that, generally, the primary reason atheists exist at all is that there are believers in the world also! We believers make atheists out of other human beings! In other words, no one denies anything until it has first been affirmed. Denial is always the *response* to a positive affirmation. When one hears how so many believers speak about God, religion, their spiritual lives, it is no wonder that there are atheists in the world. The actual wonder is that there are not *more* of them! All too often, what believers say in matters of religion and faith is either childish or unreasonable, or so naive, so patently ridiculous — although, God knows! well intended — that those who cannot take it, reject it. Perhaps, this is an emotional response in atheists, but, in any case, we should note, it is at least that much, a *response*. It seems that perhaps *atheism* is one of the natural responses to any ultra-simplistic, ultra-anthropomorphic articulation of what are supposed to be transcendent truths. So many times, we believers are so highly emotionally charged as we speak, that some

people reject all our affirmations, all our religious utterances if only because of personality, cultural, temperamental, and linguistic differences. It is inevitable that less emotional and more critically rational individuals find it unreasonable, and therefore impossible, to say *amen* to what must appear to them, in all sincerity, as utter nonsense.

The same general observations can be made about those people who style themselves *agnostics*. They are, for the most part, probably mildly frustrated victims of the battle between *theists* and *atheists*, who are all just sick and tired of all the bickering, who throw up their hands in exasperation, convinced that humans cannot know anything about all this, anyhow!

Atheists and *agnostics* are by no means right; these people are not the innocent victims of religious fanatics or pushers of the *opium of the people*! Nothing human is ever that simple. Still, the historical phenomena we call *atheism* and *agnosticism* arise precisely from *lack of understanding*. They do not understand, and neither do believers. We all fail to understand that religion is not the property of anyone, let alone any organization. The truth cannot be owned. Furthermore, we forget our words do not do justice to reality, and that even where we can somehow verbally handle aspects of reality, the element of mystery is so pervading that we ought not speak in such simplistic, such utterly childish terms at all! After all, religion, faith, spiritual life — all these are somewhat more than fairy tales, than neighborhood gossip, somewhat deeper than nuclear physics! So, clearly, the *bankruptcy of language* is not so much a cause of atheism or agnosticism as is the *human failure to understand that language can go bankrupt*! — that this is sufficient reason for us to refrain from employing it with all the gusto and determined stubbornness *as if it were not liable to bankruptcy*!

Putting aside the problem of atheism and agnosticism, however, we plod along our merry self-righteous way, smug in our certitude about our faith. Thus, more bankruptcy is about to be born! Again, we *fail to understand*, we *fail to acknowledge the mystery* involved! Without batting an eyelash, we link together two words that are mutually incompatible, *certitude* and *faith*. Faith is characterized by the *absence* of any kind of evidence whatever — how then can it involve certitude? Religious faith, which is faith, strictly speaking, means the assent to something in the absence of evidence that might evoke assent. The psalmist has said: "I believed,

even when I said: 'All men are liars. . . .'" This does not seem to indicate that he kept faith because he reasoned to it; on the contrary, it seems he maintained his faith in spite of evidence to the very contrary.

One can be certain that such and such is a tenet of religion, but one cannot have any certitude about the *why* and the *how* of it, and then say "I believe." The domain of authentic religious faith is one wherein any and all evidence, strictly speaking, is impossible.

With such a staggering picture before us, one might not be blamed for being pessimistic! One might be forgiven for questioning the very possibility of doing anything to salvage the situation. For, inasmuch as bankruptcy is always ultimately personal, the would-be solutions necessarily have to take place in the *individual*, although no single individual is responsible for the bankruptcy even in the most indirect way. Such "disasters" have a way of seeming to begin nowhere; one day, we simply find ourselves engulfed by trouble. No one really knows where, or when, or how it all began, nor who, if indeed, anyone, started it.

But if the solution centers in an individual, one cannot presume that such and such a procedure will factually produce a solution simply because it seems as though it should. Religion, furthermore, is a subject on which people, especially clergy, all too often advise or propound when they have not the faintest idea of what they are talking about, when they themselves have not gone the route! However, I would like to suggest a possible approach from experience, because it proved efficacious for me.

Now, almost, twenty years later, it is obvious that the crisis that nearly overwhelmed me as a theology student was symptomatic of this bankruptcy. Even now, it seems strange that though I was really dedicated to studies for the priesthood, though I devoured them, it was those studies that precipitated the troubles. As they progressed, my life seemed to rush headlong into disaster, for I began to choke on the very meat of theology. I simply could no longer swallow the whole matter. As it turned out, two factors cooperated to save my life.

The first was my consuming interest in language. This joined forces with a growing awareness of the mechanics of understanding, as well as the comprehension of the nature of mystery. I cannot actually recall the details. I do remember that, more and more, I found myself

dissecting, taking apart the words of religious teachings and peeling away the surface connotations, real and unreal, in an effort to get at the heart of their meaning as religion employed them. It was somewhat like peeling an orange, or like the parsing we were taught in grade school. It was this approach that made the teachings take on honest meaning. In time, one by one, they began to make some real sense. This description, doubtlessly, sounds overly simple, perhaps, even somewhat melodramatic. Yet, in all honesty, there are still many generally accepted concepts of religion that I cannot personally say I accept. These, after years of consideration, still seem to be more the results of man's insecurity than spiritual realities. In spite of whatever this may mean, the developments I am describing here gave new credibility to basic doctrines, and as I gleaned deeper insights into them, I found myself coming back to life. Without actually realizing it, I was being rescued from spiritual bankruptcy.

Some may find an example enlightening.

In coming out of the darkness and terror of that crisis, I slowly became aware of the fact that I no longer feared God! I should add here that I was never one to be servile or easily intimidated, so it was not that, previously, I had lived according to religion because of some fear of what might otherwise befall me. At any rate, this new fearlessness left me with a wonderful feeling of exhilaration, even in the face of the biblical axiom that *fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*!

How often I had heard this! How little it really meant! And is it not the experience of many that such injunctions or axioms are so often sterile? The words ring familiar, but the meaning is a total nothingness for us, the message eludes us. Not only do we miss the heart of the matter, but all too often, we lose touch even with the elementary dictionary meaning that might help us to grasp the message. Therefore, it is not surprising that we miss the transcendent truth of it, and in so doing, we are left with *spiritual bankruptcy*. Somehow, we must make the truth ours even though it be something outside us.

Reflection eventually made it clear that the word *fear*, however perfect a translation of the original, is not a word conducive to attaining the purpose of that biblical axiom. It actually defeats the purpose of it. The *real* point, obscured for most of us especially today, might better be conveyed by a word or words free of the distasteful overtones of *fear*. This is by no means a *novel* route. Words often vary from one generation to the next, from one locale to another. What can happen then to their meaning and use over the *centuries*, as they pass from one culture to another? One does not have to be a linguist to see that *gay* does not mean today what our grandpar-

ents meant when they called the "nineties" gay! There are thousands of such examples, and these are in the field of religion as well. Thus, for most people, *fear* conjures up images ranging from the slightest timidity or faint-heartedness to that intense fright or even terror such as reduces one to fetal jelly, to paralysis of mind and soul, if not of body! This does not seem conducive to developing wisdom. And, by the way, what kind of a Being is God that would, if we are to be literal, want human beings to live in fear of him? Why, the normal, ordinary, garden variety of human being does not want to be feared!

So what really, is the beginning of wisdom?

For me, two words seem to convey what the Bible means: *awe* and/or *reverence*. One who *reveres* the Lord, one who *stands in awe* of God, and thus of all reality, is indeed on the road to true wisdom. One cannot prove this, but reflection will show that this is indeed the way of attaining wisdom. And reverence and awe would also seem to preclude our normal concepts of fear. Interestingly enough, *reverence* closely parallels the Latin *res vera* which means, simply, the *real thing*. To be *realistic*, to *respect*, *revere*, to *stand in awe* of the real thing, of *all* reality, is just what religion is about. And, that is another way of describing wisdom.

Another example from my own experiences. The doctrine of God-made-man, the *Incarnation*, boggles the mind! How can the Supreme Being (whatever, whoever, however the essence of that!) take on our nature, walk among us, get himself killed, then rise . . . ? We all know the story. Theological reasoning has certainly overloaded the wires on that one! Would not the less said be better? One day, I awoke to the simple but often overlooked fact that all the reasoning and intellectual gymnastics in the world could never tell the story on this one! The *Incarnation* is mystery, pure and simple! Not only is it mystery, but we could not even know *it is* without revelation. Now, then what kind of rationalizing can handle this kettle of theological fish? It was clear: there is only one of two things to do in the face of such mysteries; either *believe* or *reject*. If one opts for the first, he must recall that faith does not come with evidence, much less can it be born of theological and philosophical meanderings! If one opts for the second, one must recall that this is only the *natural response* of the human mind in the absence of evidence.

I opted for faith. Or perhaps, what I had better say was that such reflections, such confrontations with the mysteries of faith made a *man of faith* out of me in spite of

me! And let it be clear that when I say *man of faith*, I am not hinting at anything grandiose, dramatic, or heroic. It was a nightmare, but had it never taken place, I do not know what I might now be.

Besides language, *worship, liturgy*, was on my side in those troubled days. That, too, took painful reflection and consideration before any real understanding appeared. Ever since then, I wonder more and more if perhaps, *the* source of all our religious difficulties does not center, somehow, on our growing estrangement from authentic appreciation of liturgy.

Though we can arrive at a great deal of understanding even with the realities of spiritual life, there is ultimately that point beyond which the human mind cannot penetrate. That point is in the domain of mystery. It is faith, and only faith, that can come to terms with it. Although we cannot fathom it intellectually, we can *experience* it. In fact, we can intuit it and so pierce through to the realization that religion is essentially a mystical experience. Religion is neither science nor art. Although it is not sheer *subjectivism* either, it is not some kind of clinical reality that can be reduced to quantities and definitions. It is the deepest experience afforded man. That is precisely why all the words in the world fall short before it, and if relegated to the world of words, the result is again *spiritual* bankruptcy. We are dealing with *paradox*, and paradox means that reality which defies human handling and which is beyond human conception and expectation.

There is one way to deal with this experience, however, and that is what worship is all about. Liturgy, literally, the *people's work*, is the dimension wherein we encounter the other world. It is our meeting with ineffable reality, with mystery, without the risk of mauling and disfiguring it in a futile effort to articulate it. And liturgy is itself a mystery. It cannot be rationally defended or proved. It can only be experienced.

If this is not our experience with liturgy, perhaps, it is because we insist on viewing it as some thing historic, logical, artistic, or rational, or even anthropological. We have not faced it squarely for what it is, over and above and beyond these other certainly valid considerations. Nor is it simple ceremony — pomp and circumstance — like a parade. Nor is it some kind of "permissible" magic! True liturgy is *sacramental* because it is our meeting with the Ultimate. Therefore, it does not address itself to the mind, nor simply to the heart. It envelopes

the *whole* man in an experience of heaven on earth. At liturgy, the *Kingdom* is realized — however limited.

One might destroy all the catechisms on religion, one might suppress all religious expression, one might even burn all theology books (as well as theologians) in an effort to obliterate all traces of religion from the face of the earth. But, liturgy will remain. It is not for nothing that the most secular of states have had to devise some kind of "non-religious" liturgy for their people. Man needs liturgy, though at times, he forgets this indeed!

Only worship bridges the gap between the human and the divine, between reason and faith, between our world and the other. Only liturgy compensates for the frustration and pain of life, of trying to articulate everything. Only liturgy revives us from the drudgery of scholastic attempts to philosophize on everything. And liturgy does this by putting us in touch with the *Kingdom of God* through the use of *symbol*. These symbols are presented to us poetically and dramatically. Too often, however, we forget that symbols are *real*. It is through their *own* reality that they put us in touch, so to speak, with the unutterable realities of the spirit, with the realities they allude to.

Today, however, religious people are especially in trouble with worship. Presently, much that passes for liturgy does not raise man from the commonplace of this world. It fails to give him that experience of heaven on earth. Instead, it caters to sheerly emotional needs, to insecurities that are, after all, part and parcel of the human condition in the face of which we must go on. It leaves man in his misery in spite of a momentary good feeling of togetherness with others. How much real hope, how much real edification in the strictest meaning of that term, how much real inspiration it gives man is questionable. And when one finds as a consequence of ersatz worship that the Almighty is no more transcendent than we are, it will certainly not have been an experience of growth. We cannot, we must not, lose sight of the transcendency, of the inaccessible mystery beyond our reach. Only authentic liturgy, however, can assure this.

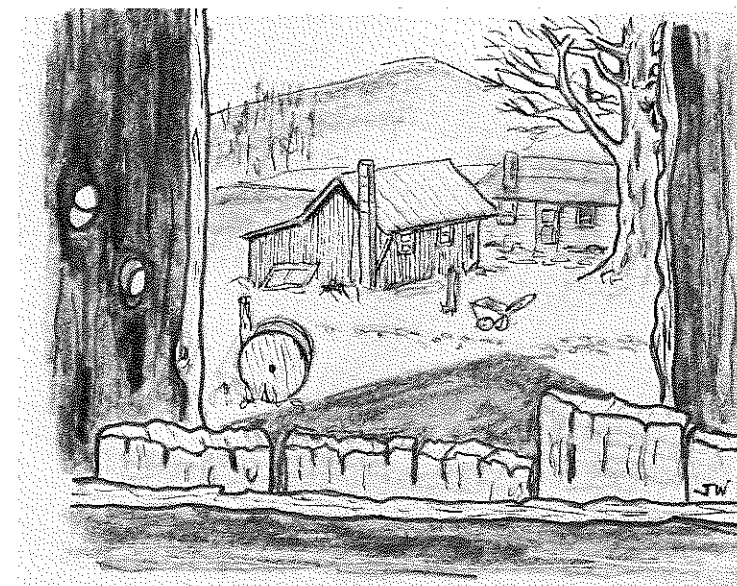
There are, even in the realm of the spirit, things of which we can speak; and speak of them we must. Even if we bungle it, we must continue, for this is the nature of man's mind. But, the things beyond us, we must allow to remain as such. We must stop stamping like spoiled children insisting on the impossible. Liturgy is the only way we can approach this reality.

It may appear curious that, at this point, we should refer to monasticism. But, our entire subject is intimately connected with monastic life. The gradual disappearance in various religious cultures of a healthy monasticism seems linked with the loss of a true appreciation of liturgy. History clearly shows that monasticism has waned through the past few centuries. Yet, monasticism is common to all true religion. Too often, we confuse monasticism with *asceticism*, simply because any self-discipline, any authentic growth in realism is intimately connected with a certain amount of asceticism. But, herein lies a grave danger. Asceticism run rampant is the mortal foe of mysticism. This dominance of asceticism in the Christian world, for example, has led to a loss of understanding of the nature of true religion. When man turns away from realism, he has actually made the choice to remain secure. After all, the secure way is usually the *safe* way. Asceticism has never completely felt at ease with the physical, with the material side of reality. Hence, it was safer to steer clear of the world of matter. Thus, we have suffered from Manichaeism, from Jansenism, from Puritanism — for all of these thrive on exaggerated asceticism. The necessary result of this has been the lessening of mysticism.

The very nature of monasticism however, is mysticism. It is a life of realism ever oriented toward the

Ultimate reality. It never tries to avoid reality nor to manipulate it. It aims always, no matter what, at embracing reality without reserve. This is why monasticism is a necessary corollary to authentic religion. The *raison d'être* for the monastic life is worship. It exists to express and give witness to that ineffable reality by celebrating that experience. It has nothing to do with ego trips for individuals. It is, naturally, the *individual* who enters the monastery to seek salvation and enlightenment, because the human being is made for this. But, as a *community*, the *monastery* exists to be a *sign*, a *paradigm*, a *symbol* of the ultimate condition of mankind, the *eschaton*.

Thus, monasticism is indeed a kind of peripheral life. Any and all social issues, no matter how crucial, are outside the pale of the monastic vocation. Religion all too often gets distorted into some kind of humanitarian social service agency. In reality, all man's social actions should rather flow from his *mysticism*, his *true religion*. Spirituality, after all, has nothing to do with *doing*. It has rather, everything to do with *being*. Dostoevsky said "monks are what all men *ought to be*." And monasticism, concerned with *being* above all else, exists to exemplify this purpose to the family of man, to point out how man can *practically* achieve this in society without leaving it, without rejecting the world. It exists because man needs a *living* reminder, a *real* sign of the ultimate reality that is beyond words and phases. □



THE WHALE'S TALE

Daniel Berrigan, S.J.

*I have a man inside me
like the universe.*

It all seemed like the most natural thing in the world. To begin with, a day of utmost beauty. I was steaming along on my own, a cloudless blue sky, the sea trackless and shimmering; an impressive argument for, so to speak, the providence of God.

Then, with shocking suddenness and no prior consultation, a storm overhead. Well, I reflected what, after all, is a storm to me. It merely heightens the joy and variety of the course — like running through a great forest instead of a mowed field. Blowing and spinning, sending up clouds of steam, I plow along, in wonderment at the harsh grandeur of the primary weather. Waves that break and form again, momentary cliffs; I leap off one, get carried along on the tip of another, the waters in perpetual ecstasy, forming, dissolving, taking shape, breaking up. So caught up in life, the waters like dancers, tossing aside, assuming moment by moment their guises.

Then, ahead of me, trouble.

A ship wallowing and limping along, half its yards sheared away.

What a scupperful of fools, I snorted, out on such a day. They have all the earth for their own, what more do they want?

But for all my annoyance, cursed with my great heart I kept drawing near, alongside or in her wake — though it was hard work, indeed, keeping that tortured mote in view in so monstrous a vortex.

I knew there was worse to come. As though a ship in distress weren't enough to contend with, there's the sailors. With them, you never know what's going to happen, once folly takes over. One mad move leads to another, they're capable of anything. I've seen them scuttle a perfectly sound ship and leap into the void in sieves one tenth the size of the decks they jump from. They pray to their gods, you see them shivering and yelling on deck, on their knees no less — and you know it; anything can happen. I've seen them dance around in a frenzy, then break off, break away, one after another, leap overboard, never loosening their grip on one another.

Now I could see. They were praying all right. The marathon was on. I pulled nearer.

They were kneeling in a circle on deck, a poor water-soaked bundle in their midst; they were attending to it with that ominous devotion that always precedes some horrible move, something religious. Then three of them picked him up, unresisting (he was probably religious, too). The others stood there in the fury of wind, the storm coming at them horizontal, demons tossing brimstone in their faces. Arms raised, faces a concentrated horror, imprecating, they stumbled toward the railing of that foundering scow, dragging the unresisting bundle along. A burial at sea, they were burying him alive!

Oh, I know their ilk, they and their gods. Why should they give a *sou* about one another? Their religion forbids it.

They threw him over, to hell and gone.

And I caught the bundle of misery neatly on a fluke, tossed it for'ard to a flipper.

Held him up there, like a newborn babe, eye to eye. Who was this castaway? A Prophet?

When that suspicion dawned, I almost pulled in my life saving equipment and let him go down.

How'd I know who he was? I didn't for certain. But in our line of work, and given our age on earth, the chances were overwhelming. We're always being called on to save their chestnuts. Prophets loud as thunder on the saving word, short as sticks on what one might term consequences. They never see the far end of their act; never want to, rush on, despising the anger, danger, bad-mouthing, death even. They talk up; that's their disease, called glory.

So it's good some of us are around, the bestiary of providence — whales, porpoises, ravens, lions, jackasses even.

Well, I had this morsel of misery on the end of my flipper, blinking back at me like the day of his birth. Storm blowing doomsday, we rising and falling in unison, a mad madrigal. A prophet, I knew it. It could only be.

They all look — how to put it? — like the half-drowned cat that just swallowed the half-dead canary. Not exactly living, better off than dead. He sat there looking at me steadily, as though he knew all along I'd be hanging about, just waiting for the sublime privilege of saving him. He had that salvation look, unmelting, unto himself, beyond circumstance.

I knew it. When they tossed him into the drenched air like a corpse in its canvas — he didn't care a shit! That's what his look said, louder than words. He didn't care; there might be nothing between him and salty oblivion, or there might be a whale's right arm to pluck him out of the sea.

Why should he care? There was always a third option, his look said. Savior whale or killer sea, that wasn't all there was. So I shouldn't get overbearing. What greater privilege for a mere whale anyway, than to save the Lord's anointed?

They always look like that. Of course, we're supposed to be at their beck, snatching them from ruin. By such a neat arrangement, all in their favor, they wipe out at a stroke the heroism, the coolheadedness, the near miraculous benignity, of our vocation. And in the process, canonize their own vagaries. Behold, the Lord's handpicked can do no wrong! He wasn't exactly jaunty,

though. After all, he'd had a shakeup, his future was uncertain. But he was confident! One blow doesn't bring a human out of innocence. One blow is more in the nature of a lark, an adventure, he hadn't lived long enough to realize life itself is like a triphammer, beating you out of one shape, into another (or so you hope, if you still hope).

His first venture overboard — he was like an infant tossed between playful adults. Younger than I, by a century or so, no beard, eyes too big to qualify for the world. He looked more like the captain's boy than the captain; all the harder to reason with. I thought, Go slow.

This conversation followed, I swear it. Too outrageous to be fiction. But you judge. By no means repenting his situation, he began, Good day, sir. Oh, he was cool. Here we were only half in this life, a small chip on the back of a large one, both caught in a tidal wave, and he wished me good day, sir!

I thank you for your service this day. You have saved me from a watery end. (Which minus the cliché was the naked truth.)

Blameless as I am, I was tossed overboard by heathen soldiers. They know no better, as you are aware, being worshippers of false gods. (He couldn't resist rolling out his big guns on me, perched a half inch from the abyss as he was, totally dependent on me for the salvation of his limbs. Improve me he would!)

You may be sure you have won a great blessing by your saving action, be blared.

You have preserved a servant of the true God, who rewards and punishes according to our service and his good pleasure. Blah blah. A fundamentalist to the end. Drowned he might be, or near it, from his chattering teeth to his blue toe nails. But his tongue? Limber to the end.

Did I call it a conversation? People like him don't hold conversations, they rent auditoriums, even the open sea and its tempests are not safe from their great lungs. What could I do, but blink in disbelief and take my medicine like the good beast I am?

A pause in his confabulations, while he gathered breath from the winds. I interjected, the first sensible

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remark of the exchange.

And what would you suggest we do now?

The question was really addressed to myself.

Was I to land him safe on some distant shore, a polyp on a platter? But we were nowhere near a shore, in mid-sea god had let go of him, midway so to speak, between unwelcome sky and bottomless wave. Jonah could point his prophetic finger where his fancy pleased: north, east, south, west, it was all equidistant; nowhere. We wouldn't make it; or more properly, he wouldn't. Not soaked and frozen in the extremities and half gone with hunger as he was.

Now with such serious issues at hand, I didn't like his preaching, finding it among other deficiencies redundant, badly composed and untimely. But that doesn't mean, let me add, that I'm theologically hostile. How could I be, plunged as I am in a watery world that even a blind shark could see is more laden with design than chance?

We whales have been around a long time. We may not have leather-lunged prophets to tell us the cosmic score. Maybe we don't need them. Nor, might I add, do we on occasion, carve them into sections, cast them overboard in storms, or crucify them to trees.

You can see why I don't mind now and again snatching one or another of their better specimens from ruin. These poor bug-eyed survivors are all they've got. Dim prophets, indeed, but where's their light to come from once these are snuffed?

Anyway you learn patience. We take life as it comes, step by step. Granted for a moment God signaled to me that morning; follow such and such a ship, they're making gull fodder out of my chosen, and I want it stopped. Granted he set the compass and synchronized the clocks. (Granted on the other hand, he also set the barometer plunging) I'm willing to waive the argument because the moment is a pressing one; viz., I've got the *Vox Dei* hanging on to me as though I'm the everlasting arms. Now what do I do?

Obviously, he's in no state to make a suggestion worth listening to; and hearken as I may, I hear no divine voice twitching at my ear lobe, telling me the next move.

So what *is* to be done?

There's not a moment to be lost. He's got a look in his eye like a poster on a picket line! WHALE STEAKS FOR JESUS. (Did you know, by the way, we have bigger brains than they do?)

I can all but read his next thought; no great feat, he gives it away sitting there wrapt, counting off on his fingers the proofs for the existence of God most apt to win a waterlogged pachyderm to the one true way.

I pursed my lips a bit, leaning in his direction as though rendered thoughtful by his wisdom, as though about to share a confidence out of earshot of the almighty.

And took him in like a smelt. Swallowed. He went down easy.

Jonah, are you down there?

He heard me all right. We're among the few mammals who can reverse their voice box. This unique gift of inward rumination is granted for just such occasions, when we've suddenly had to swallow someone for his own good.

Jonah, . . . are you...?

O, I knew he was there. You see, we're among the few mammals who can reverse our eyesight in order to check on inward operations, so to speak. For reasons of compassion already mentioned.

In consequence, he wasn't fooling me with his silence. I could even see him crouching in a corner of my guest suite, in a low mood, I judged, I couldn't see his face too well, he being too miffed even to light the candle I had thoughtfully provided on a shelf. (Along, I might add, with basic survival foods, warmth, soft wall-to-wall membrane; even, if he required sleep, a folded lap rug. These prerequisites snatched from a shipwreck some years before, never ingested or eliminated in view of just such a contingency.)

Ingratitude, in face of all this forethought, these class A accommodations? You get used to it.

Jonah —

He's humiliated, he's confused. No wonder he's withdrawn. Imagine, a whale for weathervane, world mother, lifeboat — providence! All his choices are gone. The planet's given him up; he's overboard. No one wants him, no one gives a damn.

I'm in charge. That comes down hard on the prophetic

spleen.

No idea where he's going, how he's to get there. No sailors, no compass, no captain. No night, no day. So he's unstrung, sleepless, pacing up and down, up and down my guts. Or tossing himself into a corner in a shit. I'm not his proper environment, he's lost all vim, stopped composing sermons. Given up converting me, in fact — the last thing to go being their flagrant apostolic fervor.

Sleep then, Jonah!

Sleep my son, my child.

My whole being, my breast, my womb is for you.

Sleep Jonah in the belly of a paradox. Now you need have no purpose, nothing to prove, nowhere to go.

You may, as of now, stop talking, stop planning, stop thinking. The God who thinks of you has no need of your thought. The God who loves you has no need of your love. The God who upholds the universe has no need of your strength.

Why should he? Are you then to hold him up?

Sleep Jonah, in a motion that is no motion, in a direction that is no direction. Does the unborn child order its mother about, when to sit, when to eat, when to go forth, what words to speak? Be still, then, and know that I am God.

There will be a time perhaps (perhaps!) when these things will be proper, in accord with right reason. But only when you have been born again; if, indeed, you are to be born, which event is not in your devising either.

Be still, Jonah, sleep at last (He sleeps at last). In the belly of your savior, in the perilous fathomless sea, where salvation is a miracle and death is most likely — sleep.

Let me whisper to you, prophet, maker, doer, voyager, weaver of words, serious browed one, rambunctious moody one. There is one greater than you, and he is silent. There is one who encompasses you, and he lets you go. There is one named Hope, and he casts you overboard. There is one named God and his servant is — a whale.

And who are you? Embryo, sleeper, mote, pin prick, blind eye, pretender, blusterer. Sleep awhile, and awak-

en and rub your eyes; then perhaps he will summon you.

Until then, I bear you through the pathless sea. Another than you plans for you, another than you breathes for you, another than you loves you, another than you sees before and after, yesterday and tomorrow. While you lie there, ignorant of where you come from, where you might be going, indeed, of who you are.

Who am I, you will ask on awakening, as your eyes open, as the light floods in, as you walk the earth once more. As over you floats, and then entwines, over shoulders and arms and legs and close about your head, the cloak of import, the cloak of office, the cloak so ample you must stand upright in order to wear it properly, and walk about to show it to best advantage, and speak sonorously to draw attention to its splendor. Why, this is my cloak, I am Jonah the prophet, man of the truth, man burdened with the world's weight, the world's sin, the world's error. And you will flick your cloak, impatient for time lost, your world encompassing man, and will make a noise in public once more, and breathe deep while the people cry: "Jonah, the prophet of the most high is in our midst; hearken to him, repent!"

And you will forget the days and nights you passed in the belly of a whale, in the belly of absurdity, in the belly of birth.

You great man! Only remember; once for a space you shuddered on the tip of a mortal dilemma out of which you were drawn by no power of your own, by no word of yours, by the unlikely flipper of a whale.

Sent to save you.

No archangel.

Not Providence.

Not a prophet.

Not God.

Behold! a wallowing insensate ugly fog-hued oversized paradigm of the inscrutable ways.

He wakens

in me

my son, Jonah! □

LOVE AND ORDER

Jacques Ellul

Who loves man?

Here is the question of our times, the question asked with all the anguish it implies, in the midst of all the promises, the competition for man's favor, the prodigious achievements and the veritable miracles that characterize man's life today.

Can we really call it a question? In our day? In our hearts, we know full well the matter has already been settled. The lots have been cast. The outcome is obvious. The only one who can claim to love man is the one who provides for his needs — better still, the one who feeds him! Yet, nothing is new here. *Panem et Circenses!* Bread and games never meant that the Caesars succeeded in feeding the mobs. Perhaps the mark of our age is that, as never before, we, unlike the Caesars, finally have all the means to provide for all man's needs, to assure and

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Love and Order translated by the Monks of New Skete.

re-assure them, to guarantee them, to satisfy them completely.

Yes, indeed! If you love man, feed him! That's the criterion! Or better, if you can feed man, you truly love him. Nor is this being unspiritual! After all, doesn't St. Paul say that all the good will in the world is useless without the means, the possibility, of realizing the best of intentions?

Today, we demand proof for grandiose claims — tangible proofs. We've had enough excuses for the failures in human life. Let's face it: if you really nourish man, honestly provide for his nourishment everlastingly — not just for a fleeting instant — only then can you claim to be man's benefactor.

Obviously. And it is equally obvious that when we speak of "feeding" man, we mean more than food. Yes, quite a good deal more! Today, "daily bread" means the car and the TV, caviar and all the other "ordinary luxuries" within the reach of all men! This is "raising the standard of living," is it not? This, when all is said and done, is the tangible proof of love. And the one who practices this real love must pay dearly, in terms of self-denial, patient and responsible research and considered calculation, to say nothing of just plain old generosity. Yes, elevate man's standard of living. Nothing else matters. All the rest is words, words, words. . . .

Today, we are well-acquainted with the uselessness of talk. Words mean nothing. Language is a sham. Were we not deluded indeed when we believed in words? What for? All talk is nothing more than a useless convention created by the cultures of mankind. It means nothing, really; it conveys nothing. And even if for one precious instant we might think that a word passing between two human beings might really mean something, we simply can't take it for granted. On the contrary, our subtle feeling must be subjected to cautious analyses. But this analysis only results in a horrible and meaningless mis-mash: we quickly see how empty it is indeed! How, then, can anyone trust language any longer? Words — instruments witnessing to authentic love? Impossible! Have we yet to understand the meaning of hypocrisy? Here, too, we can take heart from another bit of spirituality. Did not Jesus himself condemn those who talk and fail to act? No, today, action demands the company of silence. Words may no longer accompany our actions, for they meet our ears only to vanish into thin air. Our hands might touch, but never our being!

So, then, what's left?

Feed the hungry.

But let's not mistake the point. We don't mean we've communicated anything more than the obvious. But neither have we lied about it. We never said that our words were pledges of true love. We never tried to feed others with our empty dreams and desires. We've left behind all lofty sentiments. Today, we know only too well that we are all, each of us, completely alone in this world. The rule is dog-eat-dog!

But I stray. I was speaking of love, was I not. . . ? Who loves man?

So, let's get back to love.

Talk is cheap, and language is illusion. The thing that makes a human being of me is simply the real help I give my neighbor. It is perhaps not mere chance that we realize the meaninglessness of language at the time of the greatest proliferation of all kinds of consumer goods. It seems rather that on a full stomach man need not heed empty promises and pretty words — both artificial consultations calculated, in times past, to distract him from the pain in his swollen and hungry belly. The full stomach has no need of ears. Did not the prophet chide: "You've grown fat, Israel, fat indeed, and you no longer hear the words of your God!"

But that's the way it is.

True love recognizes its duty: feed man! The leaders of mankind know only too well that unless they continue to

raise the standard of living, they will soon be toppled from power. So they strive to employ every means of modern technology to achieve that end. And so we find ourselves confronted by a curious reality: those who love man lead and govern him, and those who lead and govern him are in fact the ones who love him most!

We are witnesses today to a great campaign. But it is not the small peanuts of petty politicians with their promises of dams and technicians and TV's and wheat and highways. The stakes are higher indeed! Today the bidding that overwhelms mankind smacks more of Dostoevsky's *Grand Inquisitor*, that famed "poem" told by Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*. And make no mistake: the Grand Inquisitor is by no means an evil politician. On the contrary. He alone loves man. Those who went before him were confidence men. They used man. Not so, the Inquisitor. Just watch him. He builds highways, factories, homes. He works out the complexities of economics, for, eventually, he will legitimately share the products of his farsighted industrialists with all mankind, with every man, woman and child. How could he but love man? He is, as it were, forced to it by the rising tide of these possibilities confronting him. It is as if he no longer had any choice in the matter. He must love mankind! And how consoling a thought indeed! For the first time in man's memory, he will be loved, really and truly! We have come out of the dark corridors of power-struggles and frustrated ambitions of man. Now everything is in the open. The evidence is irrefutable. To think that there was ever a time when one could appeal to *la raison d'Etat!* The State has no right in itself. How terribly ultra-simplistic! The State is not the ultimate reality, not by any means!

Everything done for the State used to end up in nonsense or destruction. But now we know that there is a right, legitimate and superior to the State. The State is motivated by the good of man. And today we know what is feasible. We know that the taskmaster is total self-denial. One undergoes dire pain and toil simply to spare mankind the same fate. Every worker applies himself assiduously, as every politician sets out to bring about the coming of age of mankind. They all do it not so much for themselves as for all. There may well be black sheep among us still, political men seeking self-aggrandizement, scholars craving for power. But we have already judged them, and many have already decorated the gallows. In any case, the final judge will be the Tribunal of History. We know what's going on. We need no longer be concerned with the confusion and

disorder brought about by jurists and theologians in endless debates on justice and love. We are, on the contrary, now certain who loves man. Every day shows us anew. This is not party politics or personal opinion. That kind of stuff is passé. We have gone beyond the methods and the goal itself. Behind the appearances of governments and ideologies (which are little more than words!) we are living in man's coming of age! There is no turning back! Our age has made us individuals, adults, diligent, well-fed and independent. And so the real humanist, in fact the only humanist is: the Grand Inquisitor himself!

So let us come to the Grand Inquisitor's greatest works. Our system contains a sort of logic that at once upsets and yet satisfies us. Living in hunger and terror, man could not be a man — he absolutely could not, understand! Now for the first time man does not depend on capricious Nature or on some hypothetical Divinity for his sustenance and safety. On the contrary, he depends on man for all this. Today, man has it made. Everything comes his way in abundance; so the rest — intelligence and goodness, a taste for beauty and the desire for justice — will be thrown in for good measure, for sure. No longer enslaved by his needs, he devotes himself to the superfluous — the arts and morality (for everyone knows that these are the luxuries of the well-to-do, as the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century demonstrated so well!).

But you might object, "What's so new about this? *Primum vivere!* The first priority is life, just as we have known all along."

But I answer: you haven't understood a thing! Our discussion is a different kettle of fish entirely! On the contrary, I behold the fine design of the world's architecture, developing under my very eyes, and it bothers me, the extreme intelligence of the Grand Inquisitor. In fact, he is so intelligent, yes, shrewd, that he knows he must appear before the eyes of the intellectuals as gross and superficial, crude and materialistic. This, after all, is part of his self-denial.

But the Grand Inquisitor has grasped fully the profundity of man and his world. He is not ignorant of the myriad spiritual truths and lies which haunt man endlessly. He has not missed the discussions — serious or foolish — which embroil men. Yes, he has understood something further, the most profound truth of all, and he knows that it can never be eliminated from man's life. Feeding man so that he will never be hungry will not do away with revolutions. It wasn't hunger that put the rock

in Cain's hand. Shiploads of food for victims of famine will not secure a ruler's power. Rising salaries is no cause for complacency in leadership. But for some reason, governments have failed to understand that it is precisely when men are no longer oppressed and hungry that they rebel, that it is precisely when they are no longer made destitute by deprivation that they rise up in arms. (They call this liberty! — and God forbid we should deny it!) But anyone who raised man's standard of living is well-aware of this simple lesson of life. He knows how far he can go before his position becomes untenable. He knows that, for all the goods he distributes, there is another which man needs desperately and which he, as a benefactor of man, cannot afford to overlook.

Yes, the Grand Inquisitor knows very well what the story is. He studies, reflects and considers the whole situation by weighing and comparing all the facts and statistics, and by applying his shrewd intuition to it all. The result of all this is that he clearly sees the importance of religion. Without religion in some form, he understands how precarious in his position and authority, that his power hangs in the balance. When man has been fed, when his stomach is full, he inevitably turns to worship. He feels compelled to worship something — the state, science, technology, race, communism, color, history, culture — even some curio-statue that one day attracts his attention from the stalls of the county fair.

Whatever we say, the truth of the matter is that man needs religion with all its rites and dogmas, and the best religion, of course, will be the most sophisticated one. Thus, regardless of his personal opinions, political or philosophical views — whatever his preferences in all these areas, the Grand Inquisitor realizes that his power can hardly be secure if he fails to take account of the spiritual in man. That, too, is a need for which he must provide. After all, man must be told why he should sacrifice himself, why he should obey, why he should work, and — most of all! — why he should go on living! Without this, all the physical nourishment in the world is tasteless and colorless, and man is left in darkness.

Power today keenly appreciates how untenable man's position is. It understands that its mission is to provide religion to complete what the temporal has initiated. But this religion must be a trim and well-disciplined spiritual force, able to meet head-on all the pride and anxiety of which man is capable — but no more — for it must be a religion which the powers-that-be recognize as actually empty and unreal. We must understand that the Grand Inquisitor must necessarily be skeptical. We must not accuse him of some kind of machiavellian motivation. On the contrary, he promotes man's progress for the simple reason that he loves man. After all, is not loving

him giving him all he needs, even when that is nothing more than mere dreams — deceptive and illusory?

Yes, power *has* to be skeptical. That is its proper role. It cannot afford to be overwhelmed by some spiritual experience that would reduce to nothing its ability for cold, detached, objective reasoning in every situation. Still, unless man worships, power cannot hope to remain in command. To achieve and maintain its own stability like a marble façade, power knows that anything goes, no holds barred. But let us not mistake this for cheap utilitarianism.

The attitude that everything must be useful is basic to our society, which a century ago fancied everything in life as either useful or useless, and itself able to decide which. Today, however, a deeper look into the heart of man shows us that nothing made by him has ever been totally useless. Everything has been geared to serve — even the unreal — even the simplest dream that lives like a phantom only in the deepest desires of man's heart. Everything has to be useful, for nothing is ever given gratis. If contemporary man has been able to drive down the boulevard of prolonged life triumphantly, it is precisely because he has availed himself of the solicitous utilization of all things by a paternal and tolerant Grand Inquisitor. It is not selfishness that maintains him in power, but rather his realization that man's condition cannot improve except his own power expand. So, in employing religion, he is not succumbing to some kind of bitterness or self-delusion. On the contrary, he is thus willing to sacrifice his own convictions, once again, his own clear-sightedness, so that man might once more be served. He hopes to spare man the cruel and inhuman curtailment and that unwavering clear-sightedness which he himself has known, to which he has vowed himself. If he himself denies it all by his own life, it is simply the more to affirm, to elevate, this adorable monstrosity, that man might stretch his hand toward it — for the spiritual goods which it contains are those which are readily consumable.

This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of the whole matter. The Grand Inquisitor risks a great deal here, for he knowingly permits a very grave and dangerous situation to develop in allowing man to strive for that Wholly Other. Yet, for all his striving man is doomed to frustration, for it is a striving that can never be achieved, never accomplished, thus leaving him always frustrated and dissatisfied while provoking in him the most violent and intense hope, total involvement, and unfathomable confusion. After all, the moment man stretches forth

from the circle of this earthly life, the whole of this life automatically comes into question. It follows that in this frame of mind, man is also very likely to spit at the very bread so generously offered him by the Grand Inquisitor. And in whose name would man so scorn that bread? In the name of an illusion? Or of some certainty? Does it really matter? Not at all. What really counts is the state of confusion into which man is catapulted by the entire experience. What really counts, in this condition then, is to *save* man — from himself!

Behold the genius of the Master! The very point in question now becomes the support of the whole system. What was previously debatable now becomes unquestionable fact! What was formerly an unbearable tension pulling man toward the Wholly Other now becomes a comfortable and adorable presence gently overwhelming the creature with its luscious fruit. What had been a tormenting emptiness now becomes the most obvious reality. Revelation in Christ is perverted by Christendom. Revolution in the name of liberty emasculated by being integrated into the State. Religion, in a word, made part and parcel of the ideological system by the very one who denies all religion. A simple matter of making use of what is the most dangerous and most contradictory — dangerously delicate work done on a basic instinct more unstable and powerful than nitroglycerine itself. Thus, the Wholly Other, now totally neutralized of its own reality and power, yet the same thing nevertheless, is now absorbed into the apparatus for the greatest good of man. So it is that man can now march on toward his Omega point, for everything fits perfectly, all the pieces of the man-eating puzzle are now in place. Everything works in total harmony, for after all, it's all progress, and we can rest easy in the fact that we, too, are therefore progressing toward higher and higher pinnacles.

But what fickle finger saddled man with the most difficult of burdens by placing before him such options — however quaint and out-of-date — as happiness, liberty, progress, truth? Today we know that only man's powerlessness has been responsible for this.

Since he could not achieve happiness, man pretended he was free. Since he did not realize his own potential for progress, he contented himself with truth. But now we have transcended these limits; we have surpassed these alternatives. We see the right path today — straight, simple, well-defined: happiness assures liberty, and the progress of history leads us unfailingly into truth. Since we understand the power of images and representations, of symbols and signs, we can guarantee what man could

never before accomplish. For in the final analysis, is it not sufficient that man *think* he is living these values of justice, liberty, and truth? Would this not be enough? After all, they have never been given any concrete definition, content or meaning by philosophers and theologians. Though they are deeply implanted in man, though he is a stranger to himself, nevertheless these values are well-known to him. Though he does not really comprehend them, neither can he ignore them. So, let him *think* he is living them. What's the harm of it? After all, what are they but concepts to be lived? What's all the fuss about, all the soul-searching? And anyway, what would be the criterion that they are being lived? What is the measure of liberty? And the constancy of virtue? What is evidence of justice?

For a long time, now, we've known how fleeting is that instant they call eternity! Totally subjective! For where does true prophet end and false one begin? How does one distinguish the ecstasy that comes from God from the madness of the would-be mystic? How does one distinguish the person who has really attained freedom from the poor devil in a strait jacket who fancies himself free? The Grand Inquisitor has said it clearly: "Never before has man believed himself so free." Isn't that what really counts? Allow man the *impression* of justice, the *feeling* of freedom, let him be *persuaded* that the regime is truthful. Possessed by these images and representations, let him survey reality through them! What else could he want, what else could he live? After all, even if it points to nothing, at least *the sign* itself exists. "I might be enclosed in the shell of a hazel-nut, and still consider myself the King of Space-without-limit." These are the words the Prince of Denmark utters about himself as he reflects on his condition. However, it is the Grand Inquisitor who actually achieves this, a bit more every day, in our unconsciousness, and for our benefit!

Now here is a strange turn of events indeed! It was the realist par excellence — the Grand Inquisitor himself! — who knew so well how to discredit the Word for the profit of bread. It was he who shoved back into the pages of history the One who had nothing more than the poor words he could speak to the people. Yes, he knew well how to denounce illusion. He did this all for the sake of that confusing task of raising the standard of living. But now, forced by on-going developments, he himself becomes the master of illusion! The difference, however, is that the Grand Inquisitor's illusion comes *after* the beggar's hand has been filled, while the Apostle could no more than offer pardon to the begging hand

before him. And so, we cannot but think that the old illusion, propagated in times past, was the real deception since it diverted man from the concrete, the palpable, accountable and measurable works — after all, there is no error possible with so many tons of steel, so many gallons of acid. Whereas, the illusion foisted by the Grand Inquisitor deals with such vague and inexpressible uncertainties that one might well deny they even exist. Because of this, we might wonder if it is really an illusion after all! Is it not its own entire reality? Would it not be better for man to live this volatile image of liberty rather than some terribly cruel uncertainty, however real it be?

In the past, then, there was this constant search for an indisputable spiritual force to which everything material was sacrificed, a force that necessarily cast doubt on everything that man might do, so that in the end it destroyed all his grandiose schemes, it made even Babel crumble. But now, everything is marvelously and exactly in place. The material has been realized. Every aspiration toward happiness is satisfied to overflowing by the accumulation of goods, goods that are ever more numerous, every more plentiful, in greater and greater variety. They deify our world by glorifying it. The material achieves its fullness, its completion, and in turn so does the spiritual realize itself through living the entire illusion. For the spiritual does have its place, it does have its own role, the only one man has given it. It is no longer an obstacle or hindrance. It crystalizes that element in man that had been so dangerous because its uncertainty, its intangibility. So, the spiritual doesn't have to be anything more than illusion since it refers to the uncertain, the intangible — but it must be lived if that unrestrained craving in man is to be satisfied. And the Grand Inquisitor enables us to do just that, to live it.

But is there something still troubling us? Are we somewhat reticent before the paternalism of one who would simply assure our complete happiness? Do we have the feeling of being treated as children? Or that there are perhaps some unseen and implacable mechanics at work here, either of technology or the State? It is the tale of the sorcerer's apprentice that flashes before us once again, and it disturbs us, for the very existence of that tale is itself what makes us fear it might indeed be taking place before us, though it tries to reassure us that it is simply fiction, only a story, not a reality. But no matter, we can rest assured that the Grand Inquisitor is a man like others. He manages everything, even this troublesome point, he guides the entire system,

but he is only a man. And we are used to thinking that what a man builds he can control and manage, and so the transition is made happily. Man hasn't lost a thing, he hasn't risked a thing. The Grand Inquisitor, after all, is a man, and so man is safe. So, I can relax, for I haven't lost the game. I can leave my dignity and my coming-of-age to those who know these things, who hold the threads of the woof, who know which buttons to press. For in reality, in spite of my modest place, I am actually one of them. And inasmuch as I am myself a product of the system, am I not also someone else's inquisitor? Still, I am not the *Grand Inquisitor*, so the same question returns to haunt me: who, to be blunt, is the Grand Inquisitor?

Our trouble is that we are always thinking in terms of the Spanish Inquisition. The tortures, the dungeons. . . . With the death of Hitler and Stalin, we tell ourselves that there is no more Grand Inquisitor in the world. There is no one who can incorporate into his person the complexities of either of these infamous individuals, or of the whole bad show. . . . All of that was an accident, like the Spanish Inquisition itself, and we should therefore beware of making them anything more than exercises in style.

Still, it seems to me that instead of trying to reassure ourselves that no one is the Grand Inquisitor, it might be more realistic to understand that the Grand Inquisitor is No One. Here we best touch his true being. Doubtlessly we can, in the words of Ivan Karamazov, describe him as a bloodless, dried-up nonagenarian, but this overlooks the fact that the Inquisitor always had his face veiled. It was of the utmost importance that he remain unrecognized. In fact, the inquisitors themselves were not supposed to know each other! This was to insure the objectivity of their judgements, to preserve the case free of prejudice and hatred, as well as to depersonalize effectively the protection of truth and the exercise of justice. For, if power is to be complete, total, beyond the usual human limitations, it must be anonymous.

The Prince of Macchiavelli, like all tyrants, has the face of a man and for this reason he can be loved or hated. For the same reason, people can rebel against tyrants, they can resist the visible and obvious oppression of one man over others. For the same reason tyrants are capable of mistakes, of human weaknesses such as pride, fear, and finally death. But the Grand Inquisitor has no face. No one can size him up. Be he ten or a thousand, he is always composed of strangers, each part of the whole and unknown to all the others, but always completely devoted to each other and the whole. This is why the Grand Inquisitor can be the reality itself of perfect justice and total self-denial, love without darkness, skepticism without scorn — and not such-and-such a person. In the

face of such a reality, also, man can still feel free because of this anonymity. There is no face to hate, no being upon whose person we can heap abuse and curse with the unhappiness of misfortune. There is no personified cruelty to denounce. There is no will to constrain his own. Wherever he goes, there is that anonymous hand guiding him for his greatest good. All about him the monolith aptly demonstrates that everything exists for his happiness and personal fulfillment. Everywhere, it exercises a flexible and benevolent guardianship. The very walls of his cell withdraw from man as he approaches them, and if, perchance, he succeeds in touching one, he finds it padded. But man must still occasionally get angry and so he is provided benevolently with several little worthless accessories upon which he may vent his self-righteous indignation under the appearance of being free. That's what they do to kids, calming them by giving them cast-off dishes to smash.

Thus, gradually, the Thing takes shape. Each one hastens to add his own constructive participation, his inventiveness, good will, love for others and his passion for justice. The Grand Inquisitor can make arrows of any kind of wood. For, what he himself is and what he gives is what we have made of him and what we have given him. It is simply order. Order itself. It integrates the sum of our dreams and aspirations. It is Order made of the blinding light of so many grand designs. It is Order made by no one, but by the contribution of each. And precisely because it is Order, it orders all that seems ill-matched and phony, incoherent meddling and blundering good intentions.

So here it is. Well beyond cold-blooded plans and compelling rationalizations, it all comes together in a sort of growth which cannot be called spontaneous because it is certainly the result of calculation. *But whose?* A sort of blind growth of a root as it stretches inexorably toward that which nourishes it — blind and yet directed. In the face of this reality, the most awesome reality of our times, we had best approach on tip-toes, almost reverently . . . lest anything spiritual interfere with this growth from which man draws all his profit, and which works entirely for the greatest good and happiness of this man. And that man is you. And me.

“What are you trying to stir up, you with all your questions? Who do you think you are?”

Who would dare answer. . . ? □

THE LANGUAGE OF THE BLACK CHURCH

Hycel B. Taylor

I

The anxiety of fate and death produces nonpathological strivings for security. Large sections of man's civilization serve the purpose of giving him safety against the attacks of fate and death. He realizes that no absolute and no final security is possible; he also realizes that life demands again and again the courage to surrender some or even all security for the sake of self-affirmation. Nevertheless he tries to reduce the power of fate and the threat of death as much as possible. Pathological anxiety about fate and death impels toward a security which is comparable to the security of a prison. He who lives in this prison is unable to leave the security given to him by his self-imposed limitations. But these limitations are not based on a full awareness of reality. (Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1952, p. 73.)

Paul Tillich's ontological analysis of anxiety points to the problem now facing black preachers who have not been able to move beyond that level of preaching that was efficacious for giving the black man courage to be in anxiety — to face anxiety as an appropriate emotion in

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response to the limitations placed upon black humanity by the overpowering forces of racism at a time when it would have been suicide to strike back. Therefore, black preaching has traditionally affirmed the self-limitations adopted by the black man to survive the forced limitations imposed by a racist society and to live in anxiety with the courage to be in spite of it. Tillich also calls attention to the inevitable damage too much of such preaching can do to people who are "pathologically fixed to a limited self-affirmation": "the castle of self-defense" is simply "another implement for avoiding the encounter with reality" (*Ibid.*, p.74).

The critical difficulty of black preaching for the present period of history when black redemption must be seen in terms of total liberation of the black man from the snares of racism, is that it has yet to translate its mythological language, both in word and deed, into eventful language that can deal with the possibility and actuality of black freedom. Black freedom is no longer a future possibility in the subconsciousness and consciousness of black men; it is a thoroughly conscious present reality that seeks the fullest expression by any means necessary. To be sure, the black masses, particularly those over thirty-five years of age, cannot readily accept this rude awakening to a radical sense of freedom, but young radicals of the race have sharper sensitivities and more dynamic courage. They are willing to affirm what Tillich states in such precise terms.

Much enthusiastic reaction to religious appeal must be considered with suspicion from the point of view of a realistic self-affirmation. Much courage to be, created by religion, is nothing else than the desire to limit one's own being and to strengthen this limitation through the power of religion. And even if religion does not lead to or does not directly support pathological self-reduction, it can reduce the openness of man to reality, above all to the reality which is himself. (*Ibid.*, p. 73.)

The two levels of responses to current black preaching are well articulated in Tillich's analysis. First, those blacks who "resist compulsively" are the young radicals who have the courage to be — to affirm self at the risk of death. Secondly, those blacks who are "taken into the castle of self-defense as another implement for avoiding the encounter with reality," are those older blacks who desire to limit themselves rather than to be open to realities and risks of freedom. It is between these two levels that the black preacher experiences anguish much like that referred to by Joseph Sittler in *The Anguish of Preaching*:

I am convinced that contemporary lassitude under conventional preaching of the gospel of grace is commonly neither ignored nor repudiated because its power and claims are assessed as untrue. The word of grace is ignored because it is unreal and uninteresting, because it does not intersect actual man with promise, power, and possibility and with a bigness appropriate to the public, materially-related, operationally-actualized character of his living days. (Joseph Sittler, *The Anguish of Preaching*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1966, p. 37.)

While traditional black preaching is not at all conventional in the sense of the world in which Sittler has to frame his judgements, it is nevertheless conventional when it comes to "intersecting actual man," *qua* black man, with promise and power appropriate to his radical sense of freedom. A concluding word from Sittler is helpful here:

Preaching is an act of the church in which the substance of her faith is ever freshly declared and reinterpreted to the lives of men who live within the instant and changing actuality of history. (*Ibid.*, p. 7.)

The black preacher must work to restore realness to the language of preaching. He must not only retain the realness of the language that formed the mythology that promised freedom for the black slave, but this must become eventful language that attests to the fact of

freedom and the positive prediction that the conditions of society that militate against the fullest expression of that freedom will be dealt with by an act of God. Such preaching is essential for the self-affirmation of the black man at a period in history when pathological anxiety grips his spirit to the point that moral action can have no systematic direction; hence — increased anxiety. Black preaching must make possible decisions that are related to present reality. If it cannot do that, then it leads black men into the horror of guilt, which Tillich holds responsible for the incapacity for responsible moral action. It is precisely insane guilt that underlies the anxiety of the black man. Preaching is important because the black man does not know what he is guilty of since he has not been confronted with reality. His inability to affirm self in a society that has declared him inferior, and his very color as the symbol of evil, makes him feel guilty and condemned. Preaching now has to delineate the realities and point up the contradictions that cause the anxiety in black men who for the first time feel the agony of those contradictions in an uncontrollable sense of freedom. The black preacher must become a theologian of a new order. He must discover his theology not in the narrow confines of the apocalyptic mythology that so long framed the unfulfilled promise of black freedom, but in the words of Luther: "A man becomes a theologian by living, by dying and by being damned, not by understanding, reading, and speculating."

The language of black preaching must itself witness to an experience of contemporary involvement of the black preacher in the continuum of the black experience and not just the recollections of the power and efficacy of that "old time religion." New realities face the black man that must come to language-event carrying all of the nostalgia of a past that finds dignity and honor in a victorious present and future. Black preaching must become eventful for the present without losing the eventful language of the past, and without denying the authenticity of the language of the present. They belong inextricably together and together gather the broken being of the black man that has been scattered in a forgotten history. The theological language of the black preacher must remain as bound up in the eventful past of the black man as the eventful present. There is no problem as to the possibility of the black preacher to heal the broken history of the black man through the anguish of a new order of preaching. The problem lies in the willingness to bear the responsibility and risk of creative change in the language, word, deed, and ritual, of the

black church. There is indeed a risk because the two levels of laymen in the black church mentioned by Tillich, (not that Tillich mentioned the black church specifically) namely: those who resist compulsively and those who are taken into the "castle of self-defense as another implement for avoiding the encounter with reality," cannot be immediately and mutually satisfied. The black preacher not only stands at the fork of a generation gap but in an ever widening cultural gap between the generations of the black community. He alone has the sense of history that can bring the two together through an awareness of God's redemptive activity precisely manifesting itself in black disalienation from his past, present and future. Therefore, the black preacher must search for that authentic language that brings to language-event the unified history of the black man. This he must do or there is no future to be realistically anticipated, as Heinz Kimmerle observes.

Language is the proper sphere of anticipatory thinking, since language demonstrates the respective effectiveness of a tradition in immediate life. As has been mentioned, the possibilities of language are stamped by the understanding of history, and thus so is the character of life itself, the life of an individual or a community. One should not therefore try to predict just anything, but only the future possibilities of language. (Robert W. Funk, editor, *History and Hermeneutic*, Vol. IV: *Journal For Theology and Church*, Harper & Row, New York, 1967, p. 120)

The possibilities of language are unlimited for the bold and courageous black preacher who dares to affirm the goodness and beauty of his eventful past language, in concert with boldly broken conventions of the present white oriented language styles and meanings, so that the language of the comprehensive black experience can be as it really is. The black preacher, uninhibited and creative in his language, is a powerful medium for a powerful message. He can fully live out what Sittler expresses with such profundity:

Preaching is not merely something a preacher does; it is a function of the preacher's whole existence concentrated at the point of declaration and interpretation. The act of preaching is organic to the placement of the man himself as believer, doubter, sinner, aspirer; organic to the rich magnitude of historical life of the catholic church in such a way as both to illuminate the particularity of his time, this place, this people — and to gather that particularity up into the prodigious patterns of the past. (*Op. Cit.*, p. 8)

That kind of sensitive insight that comes to few men articulates the profound meaning of the life of the

"believer, doubter, sinner, aspirer," the life of a brilliant black preacher like Adam Clayton Powell, C. L. Franklin, and others whose very lives are efficacious sermons fully preached "in such a way as both to illuminate the particularity of this time, this place, this people — and to gather that particularity up into the prodigious pattern of the past." These eloquent black preachers, who risk the danger of becoming the thoroughly human speech of the black experience, can speak with authenticity and authority because they dare to touch and participate fully in the sinful lives of self-alienated and despairing black men. And though they rarely escape without becoming in some measure the infected embodiment of black sinful nature, they are men "after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22) because they are the most relevant and meaningful expressions of that truth:

*Surely he as borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our
transgressions,
he has bruised for our iniquities;
Upon him was the chastisement that
made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.*

Isaiah 53:4-5

The poems which follow can do no more than to point to and unveil the unified history of the black preacher, i.e., his experience of becoming a theologian "by living, dying and by being damned," so that such realities can become conscious both to himself and his constituents. The theological profundities are implicit in the simplicity of the poems. They do not aspire to elegance by Western literary standards, for those standards are too often alien to the black experience, precisely because neither the black experience nor the black preacher who is the incarnation of it are elegant — "nothing human is elegant."

THE BLACK PREACHER

what great power has touched
uncouth and often broken
but golden tongues that
screech and thunder
expressing emotions pure
and cause the heart to
re-live
endure

what great passion enrapt
enthalls
the hearts of suffering men
vicariously partaking of
their griefs
sharing groans and
anguish
deep
until souls are set at
peace

what great spirits enter joy
transcend an ugly world
incarnates humanity
free of strife
compelling to jump
shout
full of life
breaking the shackles of
restraint
death
that men might live
again

BLACK PREACHER/PREACH BACK

Say it preacher, Say it preacher;
Yasuh, Yasuh.
Say it any how — Ha Ha! Well;
Say it again.

Talk on. I'm beginnen to hear ya,
Come on Jesus. Don't you see.
Yeah, Yeah,

O Jesus. Have mercy, Lawd have mercy.
Listen to him children.
Yasuh, Yasuh, Preach! O Jesus!
My soul feels good.

I feel alright now! Do you know
What he's talking about children?
Yeah, Yeah, Yeah! Have mercy,
Lawd, Lawd! Lawd! La—wd.

Come on master, fix me! mold me!
make me! Hallelujah, Hallelujah!
Come on Reverend. Let the spirit
Have its way.

Preach, Preach the Gospel, Preach
The gospel, feed me. O Jesus!
Oh Jesus! Oh Jesus!

"Amazing Grace"

I

It is the task of theology to make sure that the Church's thoroughly human speech, whether word or deed, agrees with the essence of the Church, that is, with Jesus Christ who is "God in his gracious approach to man in revelation and reconciliation." The Church cannot remain aloof from the world because Christ is in the world. Theology, then, if it is to serve the need of the Church must make sure that the Church is in the world and its word and deed are harmonious with Jesus Christ. It must make sure that the Church's language about God is relevant to every generation and its problems. Theology is not, then, an intellectual exercise but a worldly risk. (James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, Seabury Press, New York, 1969, p. 84.)

Unquestionably, the movement of the black church away from language that can be denoted as its "thoroughly human speech," and its movement toward the uneventful language in word, deed, and ritual of the white church, has reduced its effectiveness to be the redemptive agency among black people. The black church has been enticed to escape its thoroughly human speech in an effort to aspire to the white missionary demand to be civilized by imitating the language of the white church. It is no wonder that the theology of many black churches with theologically trained ministers and more learned laymen has been couched in strained language that was uneventful and obscuring in its attempt to express the black experience while playing down as uncivilized the "thoroughly human speech" of black life. Their theology has fallen into the irrelevant gobbledygook — an "intellectual exercise" evading the "worldly risk" of speaking in the authentic, eventful language spontaneously welling up in the black experience. Black redemption now requires that black theologians, both clergymen and laymen, must rediscover that "thoroughly human speech" that profoundly expressed itself in and through the primitive black church. They must raise it to a new level of order and sophistication that is expressive of the contemporary character of the black experience while retaining the beauty and power of its primitive simplicity. On the other hand, black theologians must recognize that since the black experience has been forced to find expression, although distorted and often perverted, through the language of the white church, there is a consequential and inextricable interdependence of the black experience and the language of the white church. The genius of the theology of the black experience will be in its creative

synthesizing of the language of the primitive black church with that forced upon it by the white church. Joseph Washington recognizes the necessity for not attempting the impossible task of trying to extricate completely the black experience from the language of the white church, and sees redemptive possibilities for the black and white church through black exploitation of the amorphous interdependence:

Freedom provides the Negro with the opportunity of using religious language and ritual taken over from whites for the purposes of deghettoizing the Negro and whites which is the singular concern of Negro folk religion, rather than to use religious language to keep Negroes and whites in ghettos. (Joseph Washington, *The Politics of God*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1967, p. 184.)

The profound contribution of the primitive black church is precisely that its language, both in word and deed — as expressed in ritual — did not withdraw from the eventful character of the black experience, and expressed that character in "language-event." Therefore, the language of the primitive black church was "worldly" and the "thoroughly human speech" of the black experience, unpretentious in expression, although handicapped by an uncritical use of the language of the white church. The problems of racism and segregation prevented black churchmen from experimenting with new language forms; so the primitive black church still lives and predominates among the black masses but is rapidly losing its power to be the redemptive agency because it cannot bring the power of its primitive language into concert with the radical thrust of the contemporary black liberation struggle. Therefore, Joseph Washington is correct in his assertion that the black church needs "deghettoizing," while at the same time through using the language of the white church to accomplish that end, it may serve also to deghettoize the white church. Gerhard Ebeling speaks, and I think correctly, about the Christian proclamation (he is speaking in the most general sense, which is to speak of the white church) as having become a "ghetto language" because it is not worldly in the modern, technological usage. As he puts it:

It is, moreover, unfortunately true that Christian proclamation has largely become a ghetto language. Seen superficially, to be sure, it has not by any means been driven out of public life; but in actual fact it has assumed the character of a group language for private use. The language of public life on the other hand, the language of the work-a-day world of politics, economics and industry, or science and culture,

has been secularized and has become on the whole so technical that the word of God is entirely out of place in it.

Amid the plurality of languages in the modern society, talk of God occupies only one narrow sector, and is itself in turn split into many dialects. (Gerhard Ebeling, *God and Word*, Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966, p. 34-35.)

Ebeling is talking about language in terms of the spoken word, but I think that his insights apply for the white church's language in the larger sense of word, deed and ritual. The point is that the deghettoizing process for the white church is in the creative use of language that he says is not "external, but belong intrinsically to the subject itself." In this case Ebeling is referring to the plurality of subjects of modern technological society which determines the appropriate language to be used. I want to expand this point because it is important that the black theologian recognizes that he must consciously and deliberately adjust his thinking and methodology to be different from that typical of the white theologian in dealing with this problem. The black theologian recognizes that the direction of movement into history for bringing experience to language-event for the white church is immediately into the present. Its language must move into the present from the ghetto language of the quasi-medieval churchly sector that is presently uneventful in the technological society. There is no future for the white church unless its language becomes eventful for present reality. As J. C. Hoekendijk states in a ludicrous fashion:

You can see it on a rather large scale: we take off in 1960 with a whole cargo of slogans about renewal and projects for the future; one would say we were bound to go in the right direction; but we still manage to set our course so as to land, for instance, about 325 (Corpus Christianum), or around 800 (parochial system), or precisely in 1517 (Reformation). You can see it in all possible ways, on a small scale also: for instance, we go searching for a new song (as we say) and then set course for Bach airport, or just manage to make an (emergency?) landing on Gregorian soil. (J.C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1964, p. 176.)

Hoekendijk is talking mainly about the Church's movement into the future. However, here, for the sake of the discussion, future is the emphasis upon tomorrow's present. The black church faces the same problem of making its language eventful in the present. To accomplish this, its entry into history requires a movement into the past and toward a rediscovery of the eventful language of the primitive black church — language

which has not been the subject of aesthetic appreciation and critical theological investigation. The language of the white church progressively lost its eventfulness as it consistently failed to give full value to the language appropriate to the changing secularizing and technological society in which it participates completely. The eventful language of the white church must go beyond playing catch-up with the eventful character of the technological world which determines its life to such a large extent.

The black church, on the other hand, has not had the privilege of full and meaningful participation in the changing, secularizing world of whites. Moreover, it has found too much of the technological language to be alien, obscuring, and disruptive to the black man's consciousness of his authentic experience. Consequently, for the black theologian to make language become language-event for the present means going back to the thoroughly human speech of the primitive black church to rediscover and affirm the value of the form and content necessary for restoring the continuity of the eventful language expressive of each successive period of the black experience. The obscured and unappreciated uniqueness that has been the redemptive force of the black church must be brought up to date. The majority of the indigenous black churches in America have been ghettoized by racism and segregation, unable to withdraw from the eventful language of the primitive tradition, which suffers the possibility of extinction due to a declining interest because of its increasing lack of efficacy. The black theologian, therefore is obliged to take all this seriously. He must hold it in the highest respect and preciousness as the only reference for developing the eventful language of the present and future.

The primitive black churches provide almost pure sources that yet retain most of the beauty and power of the past.

I ã X ã

The poem which follows dares to take seriously the simplicity of the primitive black church. It dares to talk in eventful language about the human stuff that makes the black church a language-event of word and deed, through a rich and vibrant ritual, that is real as being itself. The poem, hopefully, will be the third order of reality, attempting to let the black church be what life is for the black man in a racist society. It attempts to give full expression to the brilliance of black ignorance and innocence. It seeks to let things be as they really are for black people who have been alienated even in the only situation that holds the possibility for overcoming alienation. I love the black church and I must honor its blackness by preserving it and lifting it to a level of conscious reality constituting a new language that designates the redemptive role of the black American.

BLACK CHRISTIAN/CREDIBILITY GAP

Have you ever felt that the whole thing
was a lie
that you'd been lied to
sure you have black brother
God a lie
why not
Jesus a lie
why not
Heaven a lie
hell a lie
it's hard to form that word 'lie' on your lips
isn't it black brother
well
is it
you really have no way of knowing
do you
but you're sure that something don't jive
something ain't just right
I mean
you find it hard to do the things you believe
believe the things you do
you have guilts about that too
don't you
eats you up inside
you can never fully experience
fully enjoy
you're not sure
never sure

you are not confident in your judgements
not certain about what they tell you
you have this insane fear that maybe
it's not a lie
you know
that this vague notion of God might be real
his wrath might do you in
burn you in hell fire
no sense in doubting out loud
its saying it that scares the hell out of you
ain't it black brother
say it
say it
say it
it's a lie
it's a lie
it's a liiiiiii-E-E-E-E
God help meeee-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e
God
..GOD
...GOD

III

One can expect the emergence of a school of young black theologians in the 70's who will begin doing concentrated systematic theology from the evidence of their own first-order writings about the black experience. There is clear indication that such a black school is forming presently as themes of "liberation" and "revolution" are being discussed and debated in closed circles and are being given a measure of systematic interpretation in current theological writings. I think, however, that it is incorrect to regard the current theological writings by black theologians as being second-order in the definitive sense of the term. While it is the case that black theologians are attempting to objectify their experience, to withdraw from its eventfulness, it is also clear from reading their theologies that they are in dialogue with their experience and even inextricably bound up in it. So the contemporary black theologian cannot do systematic theology with the degree of objectivity too common to white theologians.

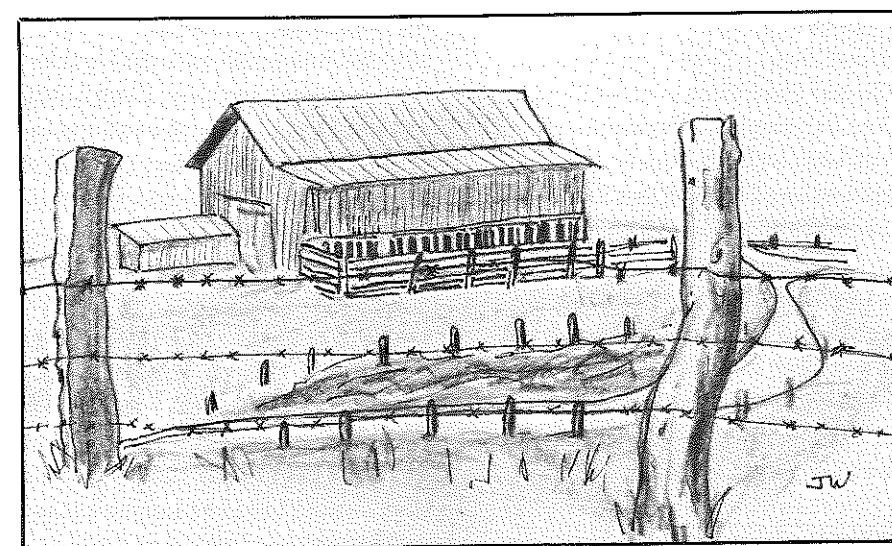
These closed circles of black theologians will not be typically esoteric as is the case of the exclusive world of white theologians. They cannot be because the nature of the black experience, the subject of their discourses, the language out of which they must speak, and the world which they must bring to language-event and being-event demand constant involvement. The relevant literary sources from which must come much of the material upon which to build a systematic theology will come mainly from secular writers whose language is as profane as the world it expresses. One can anticipate a religionizing of black secular writings, and a secularizing of black religious writings. Therefore, the theologian of the black experience will be as he should be — a worldly theologian. The libraries behind great ivy walls of antiquated seminaries will certainly remain important sources — but not the black theologian's sanctuary for reflection and critical thinking. The streets, the bars, the prostitution houses, the jails, and the thousands of stinking ghettos where black men are made to feel alienated from their authentic beings will be the study halls. The worldliness of this new breed of theologians will be further exemplified because they will not be readily distinguishable from the black secular revolutionary, nor will his writing, in content and style, be clearly definable as "Christian" or even "religious," i.e., by the standards of white Christian piety.

The most pessimistic prediction one could make is that the radical thrust of the theology of the black theologian will force upon him all of the marks of the "Messiah"

because he cannot escape being rejected and dispised, not merely by whites, but first by blacks — primarily the pharisaic blacks who have established a measure of security in the law and order world where the white experience dictates the truths of life. Then it can be expected that there will be a radical acceptance of that theology by a remnant of non-blacks who will embrace it as the most thoroughly Christian of them all. Moreover, I think that the black theologian will pass through a period when he will enjoy an extensive white audience wherein the salvific power of his theology will be more efficacious than it will be among blacks.

In the final analysis, it will be precisely the black people who will crucify the black theologian of the new order. But the black theologian understands that and anticipates his cross with graciousness. He knows that the burden of radical change for the black man, who yet wanders in an uncharted theological wilderness, will require of him to wish for the "flesh pots of Egypt." He knows that not many can "drink of the cup that he drinks of" and that they will finally "deny" him. He knows that one day he will be forced to say, "lo, I turn to the Gentiles." Before that end comes, he can be sure that there will be remaining enough disciples in whom the resurrection will be eminent.

The theology of the black experience must move toward universal acceptance as the most authentic theology of "human experience." It must have as its ultimate goal the revelation of the *imago Dei* for all humanity. □



THE TIME TWELVE WOMEN PRIESTS REWROTE THE PRAYER BOOK

Will D. Campbell

The messenger told Uncle Curt that one of his tenants had been shot at Leona and Pearl's house. Uncle Curt said we would go to the scene as soon as we finished eating. My brother and I were small, but we were allowed to go with him.

When we finished eating we walked into Uncle Curt's school bus and drove the two miles to where it had happened. Beside Leona and Pearl's house was a small, two-room building which had once been a schoolhouse for white children — before the progress of consolidation had closed it. The children who had previously attended it were now sent on buses to one of the larger schools in the area, there being no opposition in rural Mississippi in 1933 to that recently urbanized practice. Hundreds of these structures still dot the countryside and they seem invariably to be used for storing hay. This one was no exception.

The body of Noon Wells lay in the front opening, his feet and legs outside, his heels resting upon the ground. His shirt was unbuttoned and pulled open and a single

bullet hole could be seen near his left nipple. An open knife lay nearby.

By circulating through the group around the old schoolhouse we learned that the crime had actually been an execution. Noon Wells had enjoyed more than his share of the favors of the two women. When he had become quite drunk two other men on the scene had grabbed him up by each arm and led him into the yard. As they held him upright, Henry White steadied his pistol against a tree, and with careful aim, shot him through the heart. At the preliminary hearing the next day, the local Justice of the Peace, hearing only the testimony of the County Sheriff, declined to send the case to the Grand Jury. It was, he said, justifiable homicide.

(That double standard of justice continued to bother me for a long time. Then one day it occurred to me that within that system at least these *black* captives were released as Jesus had advocated. Since neither Henry White nor the others who had participated in that execution were ever in any further trouble until their life's end, what would have been gained, except revenge, by hanging them?)

My brother and I had never seen a dead body before.

Except in a casket. (Of those we had seen plenty. The schoolhouse we attended was fifty yards from the churchhouse. And despite our rigid Baptist tradition of separation of Church and State, when there was a funeral it was considered a school function. Not extracurricular and not voluntary. Every child from the primer to the twelfth grade was lined up and marched into the churchhouse, seated to listen to the funeral service, marched past the open casket for the viewing of the remains and then to the cemetery for the burial.)

As for this dead man and the scene at the old schoolhouse, we took our cue from those about us, looking upon the situation in an almost casual fashion. And in an atmosphere approaching carnival.

But in less than an hour that mood was altered by sounds we had never before heard. At first they were far away, and could not be recognized as human sounds, rising and fading in elastic fashion, coming from no certain direction, and from everywhere. Slowly and deliberately they drew closer and gradually we realized what they were. The black men formed a group under a giant beech tree, sheltered from the sun, each one hunkering on his calves, saying nothing. The whites hunkered in the same fashion but in a separate group. My brother and I sat on a tree stump, ignoring the heat and far enough away from both parties to be considered a part of either.

As the volume and intensity of the sounds became greater, one of the black men looked at another and said, "That's Noon's Mama." And that was all anyone, black or white, said about the sounds.

As Noon's Mama and her train of attendants came into vision we tried not to look. Yet we did not know what the proper, the expected, thing was. The mother was surrounded by an entourage of a dozen or so women, mostly her own age. They were supporting her from falling and part of the time almost carrying her. The dominant note was the wails, the moans, the shrieks, the whimpering of the mother. It could not be described as crying at all. These sounds were backed up by the more subdued ones of her attendants. It was as if they knew they were playing supporting and not starring roles, that they should let her be heard loudest and farthest of all.

Their pace did not quicken as they came closer to the body. Nor did it grow any slower. And the sounds did not change except to take on a more specific direction. For

the last hundred yards or so a few words could be distinguished from the rest of the lament. The women surrounding the mother picked up and duplicated each word and each sound as they were uttered, she giving them time after each word and each sound to complete their own faded replica of her words and sounds.

LORD!
Lord.

JEEESUS!
Jesus.

LORD!
Lord.

JEEESUS!
Jesus.

GOD LORD JESUS!
Lord Jesus.

LORDY GOD!
Lord God.

TAKE ME ON TO GLORY.
On to glory.

OR BRING MY BABY HOME!
Bring 'im home.

They were thrusting her more and more to center stage. As her incantations became louder, their response was more and more hushed.

It must have been half an hour from the time the first faint sound was heard until the women reached the old schoolhouse. Because the road had been built to skirt a certain property, miss a tree too big to be pushed or pulled down with the available equipment, or go around a rock too large to move, there would be times when it seemed they were almost there. But as the road turned the party would move in the opposite direction, taking them almost beyond hearing again.

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None of the men commented or acknowledged their presence when they finally did arrive. Both groups remained in place, hunkering in silence, staring or poking their fingers at the ground. My brother and I remained on the stump, sufficiently elevated to see the proceedings to follow.

The tone changed abruptly when all the women formed a semi-circle around the door opening where the corpse lay. All sounds and all words stopped completely as if by some prearranged and rehearsed signal. For several seconds there was absolute quiet.

As the mother, alone now, took one step up into the building the silence was ruptured by a vastly different sound. Now it was unmistakable crying. Sobbing, wailing, shouting, screaming, yelling. The broken heart of a mother and her Sister and her sisters, calling their hurt to the world. And then quiet again, everyone stopping as one.

The mother squatted beside the body of her son, not crying now. No more wails, moans — the ululation gone. With the corner of her apron in one hand she tenderly daubed at the caked blood from his nostrils, fiercely shooing the flies away with the other hand, as if they were doing him harm. And as if the cleaning of his nostrils would bring him life again. She sat for a very few minutes, rubbing his forehead, patting his now stoney chest.

"They didn't have to kill him. They didn't have to kill my boy."

Just those words over and over for as long as she was there.

"They didn't have to kill my boy."

Somehow she seemed to know when it was time to go. And when that time had come, not more than five minutes from the time they had arrived, she quietly stood erect and held her head askance, shaking it slowly from side to side, looking down at a body that was once alive in her own body, had cooed and sucked and slept at her then lithe and plump breast, now wilted and sagging with age — a body that now lay dead in a schoolhouse door, a door which would have been closed to him when it stood as a place of life and learning.

Her step from the building indicated to the auxiliary mourners that she had accomplished what she had come to do, and the recession began. The going was in exact reverse order of the coming. As were the sounds. First there was the unmistakable crying. Then the indistinguishable sounds which had been heard at the beginning, the modulation the same.

They moved as slowly in going as they had in coming. Down and around the curving and twisting of a tiny dirt road, as curled and circuitous as the history which had brought them, and us, to that day, a road that would later merge with a bigger one that led to the city. They would, of course, not go to the city. At least not yet, but would stop at the site of their own habitation, remaining for at least another generation on the land to which they had been brought. And leaving then only when they were driven off, not by blatant bigotry and designed exploitation but by a machine analogous to the one responsible for their being there in the first place. The mechanical cotton picker, first designed by a black named A.P. Albert, would take them away in the same manner as Eli Whitney and his machine had brought them — against their will, with neither technologist meaning them any personal harm, for they were both honorable men.

We watched them until they were out of sight. And listened until they were out of hearing. And we listened for a long time after that. To these sounds. Whether the sounds we were hearing were those of a buried or modified culture, merging with another as the dirt road merged with the bigger one leading elsewhere, it would not have occurred to us at the time to ponder.

But later we would remember them as the articulation and recitation of two hundred years of pathos, promises unkept. An emancipation which still had not reached them, nor us, if in fact it had reached anywhere at all. A manumission inferred by Christian proselytizers but undelivered by the Steeples and Structures they represented.

Whether West African or European, Nigerian or Mississippi in origin they were the pleadings of an African peasant woman to the son of a Jewish peasant woman to be with her in her travail.

They were Jesus sounds.

Absorbed from a nation and a culture He was alleged to have had a hand in founding and forming, drawing too on a nation and a culture where He had not been known at all, yet meaning more to that which was African in this scene than He had ever meant to that which was American in it.

And they were sounds which would not soon depart from us. □

STANDING AWAY FROM THE FIRE

John Garvey

I knew that I would write something about the inadequacy of religious language, whether it is the theology of the parish church or the theology which winds up in academic journals with German footnotes. I would write about the vanity of any enterprise which believes that what we are supposed to be about, as Christians, can be framed in words. I also knew that I would be spending some time in the west of Ireland, one of the most beautiful places in the world, in a house in County Kerry, right at the wild edge of the Atlantic. Monks used to build huts and chapels of stone in that region, in the times before there was such a thing as Catholic or Protestant or Eastern Orthodox. It seemed the best place for the writing I wanted to do, and I saw myself settling into the task.

When my wife and I got to the house we found that mice had invaded. There was mouse shit everywhere. Granted that the stuff is always unwelcome, this effort seemed choreographed. It was on pillows and towels, plates and chairs and kitchen counters and in coffee cups — as if some mouse Beelzebub had figured in advance the places we would *least* like to find it.

Outside, the Atlantic has rolled in, a steady thunder behind, a rising outward fade as waves dissolve on sand, saying something new every time, and something always

the same, something which is forever about to explain itself.

And I was distracted, violently distracted, by mouse shit. It isn't that bad; at least they aren't like pigeons; but it has to be cleaned up, and you have to make some move against the mice. Still, for at least half a day, a petty irritation with a few mice kept me from listening to the Atlantic Ocean.

Who, caught like that, can deny that there is a God, and He is just?

The point is not that *nothing* worthwhile can be said about living the life which Scripture turns us to. What is false is the distance which enters when ministers, priests, monks, or "religious" laypeople begin to think of themselves as professionals, specialists; when they act as if Christianity or Christian theology were another kind of discipline, a job of sorts, one every bit as respectable as sociology or law; when Christianity becomes an interest like literature or art or music. The problem comes when we try to make it congruent — part of the world we choose to inhabit.

The world we are called to inhabit is wider and wilder, and it includes unimaginable extremes. It is a world which is not deliberately unpacked; it is disclosed by One who calls on us to make a radical break with the world in which we are the manipulators. The choice and the terms are not ours to name.

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This is something we resist, autonomy and choice being at the top of our mythological heap. But the resisting we do is tone deaf — there are clues to its defeat all around us. We are willing to admit our own strangeness, our own depth, and even to ask forgiveness of a sort for our past (a forgiveness which allows us to move in new directions). We understand, looking at our dreams and angers and hopes, that we are not at all easily fathomed. Each one of us is as strange as a new continent, and as varied. But we try to make God an idea we can deal with more easily. We would rather be obedient to what we imagine we want, revising our desires as they reveal their emptiness to us, than to risk leaving that bondage, which contains just enough predictability to console us, just enough of the illusion of freedom. Moving into a truly free space means accepting the possibility of falling. It would be dreadful to fall into the hands of the Living God, because there is the possibility that those hands are not there, and all you will do is fall forever.

Although the lives we really want to live demand atheism, that choice leaves us cold: A God which fits is better than no God at all. If that God answers to the name our tradition has given us, so much the better.

The God of whom we can have no idea, the God we have no right to know, whose movement towards us is pure love, terrifies us. You cannot look on that one and live. Something dies, and that something is precisely what we do not want to lose.

The God we are allowed to keep must allow us to keep everything else as well, and Christianity is allowed to mean something only if it fits into the most recent mold cast by whatever it is that rules our fears.

The only correct language beyond Scripture and the words of a few saints is the kind that points away from itself, the kind devoted to uncovering without concession to idolatry what the words of Scripture and the lives of saints and prophets mean. What these things mean should lead to obedience, not endless discussion. The obedience is sometimes dark, and it is certainly unsatisfying in terms of the reconciling we would do, if it were up to us.

"For the true gnostic," Martin Buber wrote, "there is no unknowable; in the high ages of gnosis he draws a map of the seventh heaven and reports the destinies of the Absolute from the primordial beginning; in other ages he plants the mystery in the incontestable psychic. All that, naturally, involves no commitment, unless it be that of liberating one's self from all that impedes its pneumatic

sovereignty. There stands over against it, the gnostic self, then, nothing with any higher right, nothing that can demand of it, visit it, redeem it. . . .

"The gnostic cannot serve and does not want to be able to. The man of *devotio*, of the 'vow,' does not concern himself with the mysteries of his Lord, who is his friend and who at one time and another shares with him what he shares with him. . . . Gnosis is a great might in the history of the human spirit. Of the might of *devotio* there is not much to discover on the surface of history; its highest trial of strength is martyrdom. . . ." ("Christ, Hasidism, Gnosis," in *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*, Harper, 1966.)

No wonder we are more concerned with knowing, *gnosis*, than with serving. Gnosis, Buber says, has a love "which pretends to sleep with the universe." Our ordinary arrogance may set its sights lower, but the deception is the same: as long as we impress God into our service (and we do that when we *use* Scripture) it is not God but an idol we have caught. When Jesus said you can't serve God and Mammon he did not say that you *should* not; you really *can* not.

We can make an idol out of opposing idols. This is obvious enough, but some of the implications are not. When, for example, Christians see the interest in new religions as all of a piece, when they do not distinguish between the rather simpleminded therapy offered by Transcendental Meditation, the spiritual fascism of the Reverend Moon, and the Moslem Sufi saint Hallaj, they really are guilty of the sort of thinking which equates Jesus, Francis of Assisi, Oral Roberts, Billy Graham, Bible banks, and glow-in-the-dark madonnas. It is not enough to say that everything outside of Christian revelation is "religion." Hallaj was crucified for being offensive to religion in very much the sense that evangelical Christians mean when they reject "religion". To refuse to consider the possibility that the Word of God has been made manifest somewhere other than our tradition is, I think, another form of idolatry. It means that we have the right to say that we know exactly and completely what is meant by "believing in the Lord Jesus"; that we can plumb the depth of the words of Jesus: "No one comes to the Father except through me"; and that we deny that "the Spirit blows where it wills, and though you hear the sound of it you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." To *refuse* to see the Spirit of God in Gandhi's refusal to accept "religion's" definition of the status of the Untouchables may be to commit the sin against the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand there are some Christians who in the presence of other religious traditions are overcome by the same odd shame they feel in the presence of the secular world, and in both cases their response is to distance themselves from Christianity: they begin to look for an image of Christ which will fit anyone's desire, a Christ who would not scandalize a Buddhist or a Freudian or a Marxist. They believe in "religion in general," which as several properly skeptical people have pointed out is a little like being married to wives in general. Then there are the theologies of women's liberation, black liberation, third world liberation, process theology, the theology of hope, death of God theology. One priest, excited by the shallow revelations of transactional analysis, wrote a book which reinterpreted the church in TA terms. (The sacraments, no kidding, are "strokes.") The zeitgeist worries some church-people the way a cat worries a rat.

The problem is the notion that the primary problem is one of interpretation, as if we could put a distance between ourselves and God. Distance is not merely undesirable; it is literally impossible. The God who stands back to let himself get interpreted is necessarily false. (Even where we say that it is not God, but our words about God, which must be interpreted and revised to fit the age, our assumption is that we know what God is; else how could we claim that a phrase like "the ground of all being" is more appropriate for "modern man" than another phrase?)

Christianity is about a man who was God who was nailed to wood, and then rose from the dead. Familiarity blinds us to the fact that the cross is an instrument of suffering and death, and the Resurrection is *impossible* in any sense the world sanctions. God confronts us with this, and we set up workshops to discuss it. It is as if someone told us, "I love you." To which we reply, "What exactly do you mean by that?" Or, "I'm glad you brought that up."

The Word became interesting, and dwelt among us.

The problems are obvious.

The solution is *not* to denounce these things forever. This would be the modern equivalent of the old Holy Office heresy hunts, and it is finally as ineffective. We can look for, speak about, and even (this is the hard part) try to live alternatives. What are they?

They do not involve programs, but the realization that there is no great mystery about what the Scriptures would have us do. "Please believe that 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' as Pascal put it, 'and not the God of the

philosophers and learned men' will come to you one day, will take you by the hand and guide you, if you truly wish it." This was written recently by F. Korsakov, a young Christian writer who lives in Russia. ("Russian Destinies," in *From Under the Rubble*, edited by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Little Brown, 1975.) There is a clarity which has become necessary to Soviet Christians; it makes what passes for religious writing in the west look pale. A Russian monk said to me once (with some irony, I think), "In the West people erect great consistent theological architectures, and they do it much better than we do in Russia. If you ask a Russian peasant who has not had much opportunity to study his faith but who has suffered for it for twenty years in a concentration camp, if you ask him to explain it to you he will not do a good job. He simply *knows*." The monk who said this is another example of an alternative to be lived. He is the best sign I have met that faith is a matter of *being*, not doing. His life is focussed, uncluttered. He is alive with his belief, and his eyes could pin you to the wall.

There are other examples: I met a woman, old now, who has spent her life serving poor men and women on New York's skid row. She speaks with complete conviction of the need to obey the words of Jesus literally, especially "Judge not, lest ye be judged." There are others: Mother Teresa and Dom Helder Camara, people from the past like Francis of Assisi and the Quaker saint John Woolman, all those men and women who have left everything for the sake of the kingdom of God, which is gained by the pure of heart.

Kierkegaard said that purity of heart is to will one thing. And of course I don't. The passage in the whole of the New Testament which speaks most to my condition is Paul's: "The good I would do I do not." Maybe the point for me, and for others in the same place, is not to try to make Christianity congruent with my dreams and ambitions and inadequacies, but rather, taking up a suggestion of Kierkegaard's, to confess that I am not a Christian — but that if one were a Christian, here is how it would be: it would be the life of Christ, which is apparent in some lives, in people who have taken the words to heart: "If anyone would be my follower, let him take up his cross daily and follow me. . . . Be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect. . . . He who seeks his life will lose it, he who loses his life will find it. . . . Sell all you have, give it to the poor and follow me. . . . What you have done to the least of these my brothers you do to me. . . . No one who sets his hand to the plow and then looks back is worthy of the kingdom."

These words are not given for talk and endless interpretation. As uncomfortable as it is, what I have to do is admit that I have not taken them to heart. This might be part of the death that we are baptized into: the revelation of sin, leading — if we let it — to light.

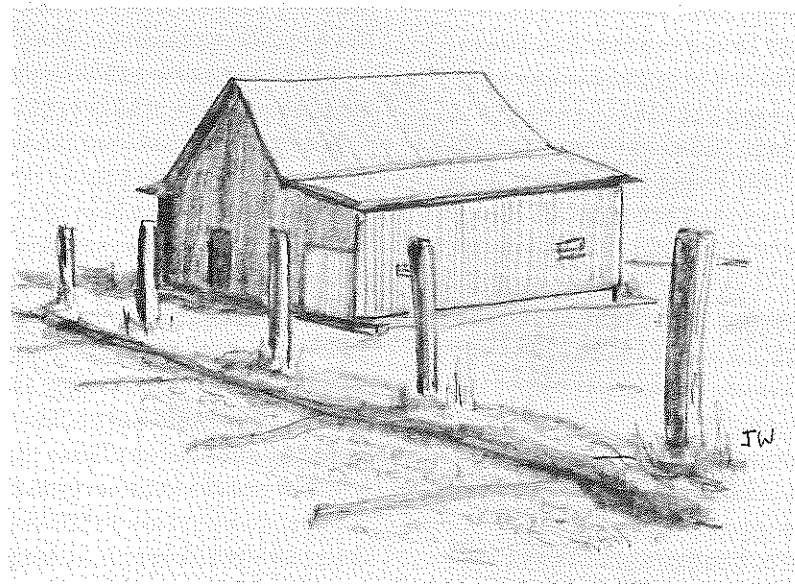
But once this posture becomes comfortable it is fatal. For Protestants the way out has been a consoling reliance on man's total depravity; for Catholics the way out has been a system in which morality and ethics, christened, are made almost equivalent to faith, with a special class of people — saints — become "extraordinary Christians," not who they really were and are, the only people who take what they have heard seriously.

To confess our sin easily means that what we are confessing is not sin, not the thing which really needs to be forgiven because it separates us, as long as we hold on to it, from ourselves and from one another, and from the God who loves without separation or conditions. The

fact that we are forgiven should prompt the response we do not give; we do not give it because it means a leavetaking as radical as death. But in whatever meager way it surfaces, the gratitude which we feel should be made manifest; this begins with the admission of ingratitude, and then we must confront it, allowing the life we claim to have been offered to overcome death.

It is not an easy life for those who want clarity and self-justification. Finally it has nothing to do with words at all, but with what we are, and are becoming. God showed himself to Moses as fire, which burns but does not consume the small bush which is its host.

"It is better to keep silence and be something than to talk and be nothing," wrote St. Ignatius of Antioch. "Teaching is an excellent thing, provided the speaker practices what he teaches. Now there is one Teacher who *spoke and it was done*. But even what he did silently is worthy of the Father. He who has made the words of Jesus really his own is able also to hear His silence. Thus he will be perfect: He will act through his speech and be understood through his silence." □



(ANOTHER "ABOUT THIS ISSUE....")

THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH

Søren Kierkegaard

It must be said, and as outspokenly as possible, that the so-called Christendom (in which after a sort all men are Christians in a way, so that there are just as many, precisely as many Christians as there are men) — it must be said that not only is it a wretched edition of Christianity, full of misprints disturbing to the sense, and of senseless omissions and additions, but that it has abusively taken Christianity's name in vain. In a small country there are born hardly three poets in every generation, but of priests there are a plenty, many more than can get appointments. With regard to a poet people speak of his having a call; but as for becoming a priest, it seems enough to the generality of men (and that means of Christians) that one has taken an examination. And yet, alas, a true priest is even more rare than a true poet, and the word "call" originally was used in a religious sense. But with respect to being a poet people still retain a notion that it is something, and that there is something in it that a man is called. On the other hand, to be a priest is in the eyes of the generality of men (and so also of Christians) a thing bereft of every uplifting conception, lacking the least trace of the mysterious, *in puris naturalibus* [i.e., without mincing words] it is a career. "Call" means a benefice; people talk about getting a call; but about having a call — O yes, they talk about being "called" for trumps.

And, alas, the fate of this world in Christendom is like a motto for Christianity as a whole. The misfortune is not that Christian truth is never uttered (just as it is not the misfortune that there are not priests enough), but that it is uttered in such a way that at last the generality of men

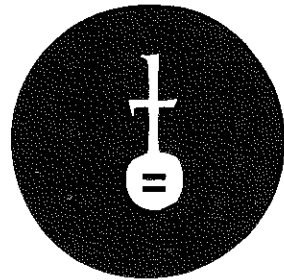
attach to it no significance whatever (just as the generality of men attach to being a priest no other significance than that which goes with the week-day occupations of a merchant, attorney, book-binder, veterinary, etc.), so that the highest things make no impression at all, but sound out and are heard as something which somehow, God knows how, has become use and wont, like so many other things. What wonder then that certain people, instead of finding their own conduct indefensible, find it incumbent upon them to defend Christianity.

After all, a priest surely ought to be a believer. And think what a believer is! A believer is surely a lover, yea, of all lovers the most in love. With respect to enthusiasm a lover is after all only a stripling in comparison with a believer. Think now of a lover. He would be capable, would he not, day in and day out, as long as it was day and well into the night, of talking about his love. But dost thou believe it could occur to him, dost thou believe it would be an abomination to him, to talk in such a way as to try to prove by three reasons that there is after all something in this thing of being in love? — pretty much as when the parson proves by three reasons that it is profitable to pray, so that this thing of prayer has sunk so low in price that there must be three reasons alleged to bring it a little bit into repute. Or as when the parson (and this is the same thing, only still more laughable) proves by three reasons that to pray is a bliss surpassing all understanding. Oh, priceless anticlimax! The fact that something surpasses all understanding is proved by three... reasons, which, whatever else they may be good for, surely do not surpass the understanding, but precisely on

the contrary make it evident to the understanding that this bliss does not surpass the understanding; for, after all, reasons certainly lie within the compass of the understanding. No, for that which surpasses the understanding, and for him who believes in it, the three reasons signify no more than three bottles or three red deer! — And now further. Dost thou believe it would occur to a lover to put up a defense for his love, that is, to admit that to him it was not the absolute, unconditionally the absolute, but that he thinks this thought of love along with objections against it, and from this proceeds the defense; that is to say, dost thou believe that he could or would concede that he was not in love, denounce himself as not being a lover? And in case a man were to propose to a lover to talk thus, dost thou not believe that he would regard that man as mad? And in case, besides being in love, he was something of an observer, dost thou not believe that he would suspect that the man who made to him this proposal had never known what it is to be in love, or would like to get him to betray and deny his love . . . by defending it? — It is not evident that it could never occur to one who really is in love to want to prove it by

three reasons or to defend it? For in fact he himself is that which is more than all reasons and more than every defense — he is a lover. And he who does this is not in love, he merely gives himself out [*udgiver*] to be that, and unfortunately — or fortunately — he does it so stupidly that he merely denounces [*angiver*] himself as one who is not in love.

But this is just the way Christianity is talked about . . . by believing priests. They either “defend” Christianity, or they translate it into “reasons” — if they are not at the same time dabbling in “comprehending” it speculatively. This is what is called preaching, and it is regarded in Christendom as already a big thing that such preaching is done and that some hear it. And it is precisely for this reason that Christendom (here is the proof of it) is so far from being what it calls itself that the lives of most men are, Christianly understood, too spiritless even to be called in a strictly Christian sense sin. □



A FEW WORDS TO OUR READERS ABOUT:

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

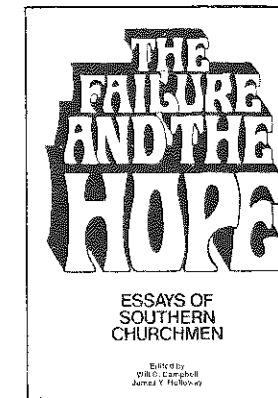
We have tried to follow our readers when they move from one part of the world to another. But now we need your help! We want to keep up with you, but our resources are limited. We shall no longer be able to make the ‘change of address’ without your help. So, if you want *Katallagete* to follow you, send us as soon as possible your new and old addresses (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. Thanks!

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

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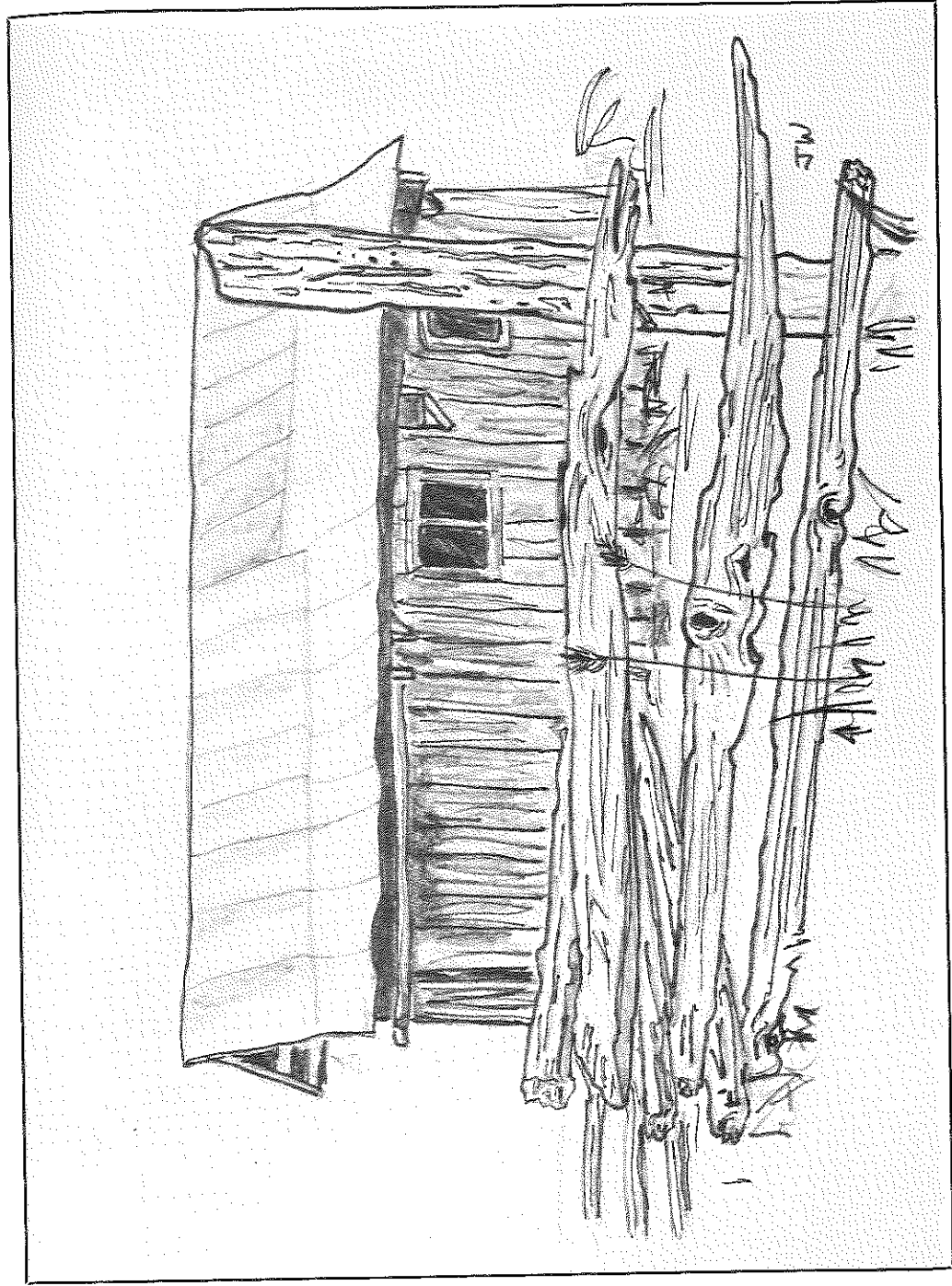
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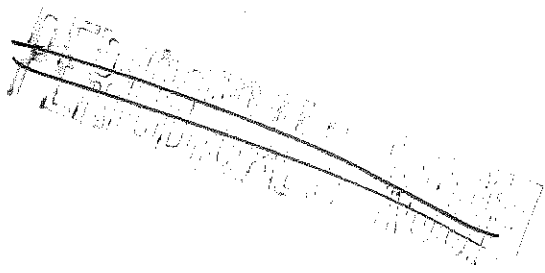
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