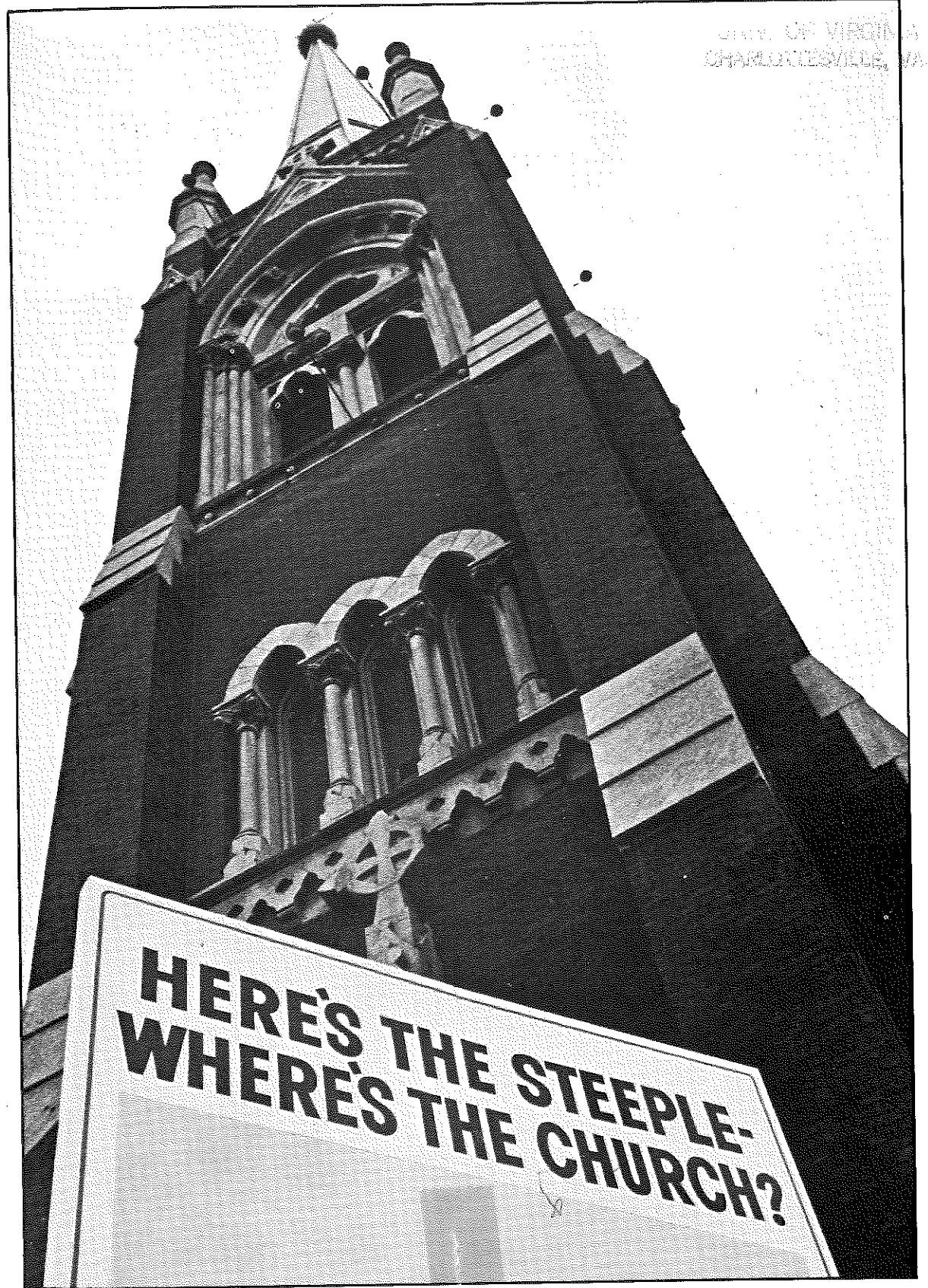


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WINTER 1979

A world divided

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

The text of the address given at this year's Harvard Commencement ceremony.

The split in today's world is perceptible even to a hasty glance. Any of our contemporaries readily identifies two world powers, each of them already capable of entirely destroying the other. However, understanding of the split often is limited to this political conception, to the illusion that danger may be abolished through successful diplomatic negotiations or by achieving a balance of armed forces. The truth is that the split is a much profounder and a more alienating one, that the rifts are more than one can see at first glance. This deep manifold split bears the danger of manifold disaster for all of us, in accordance with the ancient truth that a kingdom — in this case, our Earth — divided against itself cannot stand.

There is the concept of Third World: thus, we already have three worlds. Undoubtedly, however, the number is even greater; we are just too far away to see. Any ancient deeply rooted autonomous culture, especially if it is spread on a wide part of the earth's surface, constitutes an autonomous world, full of riddles and surprises to western thinking. As a minimum, we must include in this category China, India, the Muslim world and Africa, if indeed we accept the approximation of viewing the latter two as compact units. For 1,000 years Russia belonged to such a category, although western thinking systematically committed the mistake of denying its autonomous character and therefore never understood it, just as today the west does not understand Russia in Communist captivity. It may be that in the past years Japan has increasingly become a distant part of the west, I am no judge here; but as to Israel, for instance, it seems to me that it stands apart from the western world in that its state system is fundamentally linked to religion.

How short a time ago, relatively, the small new European world was easily seizing colonies everywhere, not only without anticipating any real resistance but also usually despising any possible values in the conquered peoples' approach to life. On the face of it, it was an overwhelming success, there were no geographic frontiers to it. Western society expanded in a triumph of human independence and power. And all of a sudden in the 20th century came the discovery of its fragility and vulnerability. We now see that the conquests proved to be shortlived and precarious, and this in turn points to defects in the western view of the world which led to these conquests. Relations with the former colonial world now have turned into their opposite and the

A decline in courage may be the most striking feature which an outside observer notices in the west in our days. The western world has lost its civil courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, each government, each political party and of course in the United Nations. Such a decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling groups and the intellectual elite, causing an impression of loss of courage by the entire society. Of course there are many courageous individuals but they have no determining influence on public life. Political and intellectual bureaucrats show depression, passivity and perplexity in their actions and in their statements and even more so in theoretical reflections to explain how realistic, reasonable as well as intellectually and even morally warranted it is to base state politics on weakness and cowardice. And decline in courage is ironically emphasised by occasional explosions of anger and inflexibility on the part of the same bureaucrats when dealing with weak governments and weak countries, not supported by anyone, or with currents which cannot offer any resistance. But they get tongue-tied and paralysed when they deal with powerful governments and threatening forces, with aggressors and international terrorists. Should one point out that from ancient times decline in courage has been considered the beginning of the end?

When the modern western states were created, the following principle was proclaimed: governments are meant to serve man, and man lives to be free and to pursue happiness (see, for example, the American Declaration of Independence). Now at last during past decades technical and social progress has permitted the realisation of such aspirations: the welfare state. Every citizen has been granted the desired freedom and material goods in such quantity and of such quality as to guarantee in theory the achievement of happiness, in the morally inferior sense which has come into being during those same decades. In the process, however, one psychological detail has been overlooked: the constant desire to have still more things and still better life and the struggle to obtain them imprints many western faces with worry and even depression, though it is customary to conceal such feelings. Active and tense competition permeates all human thoughts without opening a way to free spiritual development. The individual's independence from many types of state pressure has been guaranteed; the majority of people have been granted well-being to an extent

oneself, one must also be ready to die; there is little such readiness in a society raised in the cult of material well-being. Nothing is left, then, but concessions, attempts to gain time and betrayal. Thus at the shameful Belgrade conference free western diplomats in their weakness surrendered the line where enslaved members of Helsinki watchgroups are sacrificing their lives.

Western thinking has become conservative; the world situation should stay as it is at any cost, there should be no changes. This debilitating dream of a *status quo* is the symptom of a society which has come to the end of its development. But one must be blind in order not to see that oceans no longer belong to the west, while land under its domination keeps shrinking. The two so-called world wars (they were by far not on a world scale, not yet) have meant internal self-destruction of the small progressive west which has thus prepared its own end. The next war (which does not have to be an atomic one and I do not believe it will) may well bury western civilisation forever.

Radical mistake

Facing such a danger, with such historical values in your past, at such a high level of realisation of freedom and apparently of devotion to freedom, how is it possible to lose to such an extent the will to defend oneself?

How has this unfavourable relation of forces come about? How did the west decline from its triumphal march to its present sickness? Have there been fatal turns and losses of direction in its development? It does not seem so. The west kept advancing socially in accordance with its proclaimed intentions, with the help of brilliant technological progress. And all of a sudden it found itself in its present state of weakness.

This means that the mistake must be at the root, at the very basis of human thinking in the past centuries. I refer to the prevailing western view of the world which was first born during the Renaissance and found its political expression from the period of the Enlightenment. It became the basis for government and social science and could be defined as rationalistic humanism or humanistic autonomy: the proclaimed and enforced autonomy of man from any higher force above him. It could also be called anthropocentrism, with man as the center

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SONG OF OUR WESTERN VINEYARD: TWO VOICES

John Garvey

*Let me sing for my beloved
a love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill
He digged it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
and he looked for it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.*

. . . .

*And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and briers and thorns shall grow up;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.*

Isaiah 5

When Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn addressed Harvard's graduating class he was supported too easily by conservatives, who ignored the fact that his indictment of the West included colonialism and capitalism. Their support is understandable, though: conservatives have supported so many dreadful causes that they could be expected to find something heartening in a genuinely moral and authoritative anti-communist message. Solzhenitsyn has a true moral authority which a Westmoreland will never have.

With few exceptions, liberals immediately dismissed the speech. The reactions ranged from scorn to patronizing pity — the poor man, never having known liberty, can't be expected to understand a free society. There is, however, something suicidally short-sighted about this attitude.

First, what did Solzhenitsyn say? The Western point of view, he says, is arrogant. It has imposed itself on the rest of the world, insisting that its cultural biases are the ones which should triumph over the slow, delicate evolution of native genius, and the post-enlightenment European/American limitation of human experience is seen as the sole reality, the framework for all judgement, the grid to be laid over the rest of human experience.

Solzhenitsyn believes that the exaltation of human autonomy which entered Western thought with the Enlightenment was a disease, a murderous displacement: suddenly human beings were assumed to have the ability to measure themselves by yardsticks they themselves constructed; they could judge the divine, they could be absolutely clear about themselves and their place in the universe.

Other Russian Orthodox writers have criticized the West in similar terms. The West counters, when it bothers to reply, that our culture is less static than Russia's. Our turmoil is a sign of life. Westerners accuse the Orthodox of a cramping nationalism, a yearning for Byzantine glory, in which coercive state power is allied with organized religion. The West sees the separation of the sacred and secular as positively good, and we have examples to point to: the Spanish Inquisition and the pogroms of Eastern Europe were results of an ungodly unity, a single vision of church and society. When people like Solzhenitsyn (or Dostoevsky, in *The Possessed*) point out what happens when people lose a spiritual sense of life, they are accused of trying to drag the rack and the thumbscrew back onto the stage of history. The worst passages of Christian history are held up as examples of what is wrong with everything involved in religious culture. The much more relevant (because more recent) use of human beings, the reduction of human beings to mere objects of the State, escapes Western notice. It is not seen as the infinitely more dreadful thing it is, the sacrifice of human flesh to the religion of our time — the worship of the State Which Defines Everything That Matters.

That's the point here: we have come far enough to know what was wrong with medieval Spanish Catholicism or the Orthodoxy which never questioned the godliness of its implication with state power; it is obviously not the best defense of the gospel to prop it up with coercion. In fact it is the defeat of the gospel, the turning of the gospel into an idol which, if it does not demand blood, is at least bathed in blood, or tears. In coercion of any sort there is no place for the acceptance, the heartfelt "be it done unto me according to thy will," which is the essence of obedience to the gospel.

We Westerners may understand this. But we have, in the process, made of religion a wholly personal thing. The realm of the spiritual is seen as subjective and interior — a matter, almost, of taste. We think we live in a larger world, one which includes the private area of religion and spirituality (it becomes a community affair only when those sharing these private beliefs gather for public worship) and the overarching social realm, the world of law and politics — the world in which things really happen. We look for solutions to the big problems

there, leaving religion for those private and untouchable interior things, like grief or despair.

Solzhenitsyn called down the fire of the liberals for suggesting that the anti-war movement is responsible for the current misery of the Vietnamese and Cambodians. This is, of course, a simplistic view and begs a number of important moral questions. But the liberal response includes an element of bad faith. It ought to be possible for Solzhenitsyn to be wrong on one point and still have something of importance to say. Righteous indignation over Vietnam has been the excuse for dismissing the heart of Solzhenitsyn's argument, which is in fact less an argument than a warning: the realm of the spiritual is real, much more real than our society is willing or able to admit, and if we do not heed this fact we will die. In the *Washington Post* Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (whose association with the Kennedy's should have shamed him into a less than self-righteous response to Solzhenitsyn's words about Vietnam, but did not) accuses Solzhenitsyn of being "mystical" and quotes some lines of Emerson to the effect that he's glad he isn't a monk. Well, monks are in fact quite realistic about the world, the world, that is, that Arthur Schlesinger is apparently incapable of understanding.

One of Solzhenitsyn's most important criticisms has not been answered at all satisfactorily. Western society is based, he says, "on the letter of the law. The limits of human rights and righteousness are determined by a system of laws; such limits are very broad. People in the west have acquired considerable skill in using, interpreting and manipulating law, even though laws tend to be too complicated for an average person to understand without the help of an expert. Any conflict is solved according to the letter of the law and this is considered to be the supreme solution. If one is right from a legal point of view, nothing more is required, nobody may mention that one could still not be entirely right, and urge self-restraint, a willingness to renounce such legal rights, sacrifice, and selfless risk: it would sound simply absurd. One almost never sees voluntary self-restraint. Everybody operates at the extreme limit of these legal frames. An oil company is legally blameless when it purchases an invention of a new type of energy in order to prevent its use. A food product manufacturer is legally blameless when he poisons his product to make it last longer: after

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all, people are free not to buy it." Now this argument seems to have gone right by many of the conservatives who praised Solzhenitsyn's speech — it is the sort of thing they reject when it comes from environmentalists and consumer advocates. But in speaking of the limitations of law, and in recommending self-restraint as a basic virtue, Solzhenitsyn is, of course, not making a reactionary point — he is taking a lonely stand.

"I have spent all my life under a communist regime," he goes on, "and I will tell you that a society without any objective legal scale is a terrible one indeed. But a society with no other scale than the legal one is not quite worthy of man either. A society which is based on the letter of the law and never reaches any higher is taking very scarce advantage of the high level of human possibilities. The letter of the law is too cold and formal to have a beneficial influence on society. Whenever the tissue of life is woven of legalistic relations, there is an atmosphere of moral mediocrity, paralyzing man's noblest impulses. And it will simply be impossible to stand through the trials of this threatening century with only the support of a legalistic structure." Our only standards of conduct, Solzhenitsyn says, prove insufficient. We are surrounded by noise and constant distraction, and we live in a spiritual void. Unless we change we will not survive.

It is his spirituality which most bothers Solzhenitsyn's critics. His being wrong about the war in Vietnam is their excuse. Solzhenitsyn dares to assert that democracy and tolerance alone are not enough — in fact, if we do not believe in more than that we are in trouble. Most liberals don't really believe in anything much more than civil liberties. They resent being told that their houses are built of straw, and so they call Solzhenitsyn the worst words they can summon: fascist, conservative, slavophile, reactionary.

Unfortunately for those who would dismiss Solzhenitsyn's arguments as simple-minded right-wing ranting, another recent criticism of Western society is so startlingly like Solzhenitsyn's that the two bear comparison. If it is fair to say that Solzhenitsyn is more comfortably placed on the right than on the left, the same cannot be said of Jacques Ellul. His recent book *The Betrayal Of The West* (Seabury, 1978) addresses much of its anger to the left, because the right is no longer, in Ellul's opinion,

worth arguing with. Its time has passed; its defense of the West was always hypocritical. Ellul reminds us that no one was ever so critical of capitalism and other prevailing westerlies as he has been. But he feels obliged now to defend the West — not the West Solzhenitsyn attacks, for Ellul sees a similar set of evils. He means the West of the Holy Grail, the West whose deepest conscience is tormented by its own continuous betrayal of Christianity, the West whose death began (in Ellul's mind as well as Solzhenitsyn's) with the Enlightenment. Granting the validity of most of the criticisms made of the West, Ellul says, he feels obliged "to show that there is also a different side to the West. The West represents values for which there is no substitute. The end of the West today would mean the end of any possible civilization." The Western world, this knot of culture and religion and ethics and expectation, which began in Greece and Rome and encountered the Jews, the Christians, and the barbarians, is the inventor of an unprecedented self-consciousness about history, the individual, and of the concepts of freedom, the dialectic of reason, self-control and coherence.

Ellul rejects the argument that people are free and rational by "nature." "Freedom," he says, "was something unexpected and incomprehensible, attained through a long slow process. That is why it is so odd to see Rousseau claiming, on the one hand, that man is endowed with reason, and on the other, attacking in a most violent fashion the laws, customs, and courtesies men follow. He did not realize that laws, customs, and good manners represented a set of processes necessary for man if he was to control his own action, processes that were all the more necessary in the degree that he became free and fully an individual.

"In my view, then — and this is my second remark — we are not dealing with a reason that is natural, nor is the man of the western world a product of nature. He is not the expression of a 'human nature,' but is, in the fullest sense of the terms, something invented, something artificial, something slowly created in the course of history. Western man is not 'man as such' or 'man in himself.' He is only one of many possibilities, for he is the result of a special historical process and the product of certain choices. . . .

"We, too, are now confronted with a choice: Shall we continue to will western man? We must make this choice with the clear understanding that if we cease to make it, western man will cease to exist. We cannot go on indefinitely flouting reason and freedom. We Westerners at the present time are treating our world and the human type it has produced in exactly the same way as the technicians (the masters of rational methods) have, in the

view of the ecologists, treated the air, water, oceans, and forests. The technicians thought these things were so vast and inexhaustible that they could do anything they wanted with them: 'Pour millions of tons of waste into the ocean — the ocean will always be there.' Not so! We are suddenly discovering that the ocean is dying — and we are panicking." The implication of this extends into every area, and Ellul brings his insights to bear upon everything from ecology and politics and the poor to sex education and manners. "No one seems to realize that there has never been a society without a moral code, and that the chief thing lacking in our Western world is precisely an ethical code and a system of accepted values. As soon as there is even a tiny blossoming of values, the intellectuals rise up to reject it and jeer at it. In doing so, they give no proof that they are free and intelligent, but demonstrate only that they are impotent and have surrendered to the madness in which negation becomes an end in itself."

Not that Ellul makes an idol of morality; he is simply clear about what we can expect where it is ridiculed, and he makes his case well. The West was at its greatest where it was striving for the impossible, he believes: the impossible was built into it from the beginning. Reason and law, the highest and most sophisticated instruments of manipulation, met the nonviolence and self-humbling message of the gospel. "The West has never been able to reach its logical end because it was pierced to the heart by a gospel that was its utter opposite and constantly undermined all its grandiose projects. Christianity, on the other hand, has never been able to be fully itself because it has been tangled in a network of systems that have constantly been endeavoring to assimilate it." This contradiction revealed the weakness of the West and made it great at once. But it was haunting. The West has begged to be left alone, and God now seems to have granted that wish. Without the contradiction which the West carried through the world like a wound, all that is left is dehumanization. "God's absence means the abandonment of the world, but in this world man will discover that he himself is likewise absent. When the West claims a monopoly of the truth and seeks to proclaim it to others, it will arouse only anger and hatred. The West is dying because it has won out over God."

Because he is a man of the West, Ellul understands the West better than Solzhenitsyn does. This is what makes his criticism so interesting: it converges with Solzhenitsyn's at every important point. Both understand that it is an absence of spirituality which is poisoning our time. Both are Christians, and both have been called prophets. It is Christianity, the spiritual dimension both point to, which allows the world to reject them. It is so impolite to advance such personal and private views as if they mattered to the rest of us; religion, after all, is a personal affair. . . .

There really is something to Marcuse's idea of "repressive tolerance." It has been comically misused by its Marxist adherents, granted. But when Caesar tames religion by making it a lap-dog, by circumscribing and tolerating it, even encouraging White House prayer breakfasts; when we can speak of a "religious life" the way we speak of a "sex life" or a "business life"; when we make it a private and comfortable affair; then we really have seen its defeat. Honest spirituality is light and torment and rising from the dead. It will make people squirm. Ellul is ignored and probably always will be; Solzhenitsyn cannot be ignored, so he is attacked.

In Russia they pay religion the courtesy of persecution; this is a terrible testimony to its true power. In the West, we squirm, and try to fit in, and squirm some more. It is certainly more comfortable to believe that things are not every bit as bad as Solzhenitsyn and Ellul say they are. But what if they are right? We have forgotten the fate of people who ignore prophets. Perhaps history has narrowed now to a point at which, following the spiritual collapse of our culture, each of us is uniquely responsible for the whole of the enterprise. We are called to hand on what we have been given, and we must be clear about what that is, and how important it is to simple human survival. At the close of his Harvard address, Solzhenitsyn said, "If the world has not come to its end, it has approached a major turn in history, equal in importance to the turn from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. It will exact from us a spiritual upsurge, we shall have to rise to a new height of vision, to a new level of life where our physical nature will not be cursed as in the Middle Ages, but, even more importantly, our spiritual being will not be trampled upon as in the modern era.

"This ascension will be similar to climbing onto the next anthropologic stage. No one on earth has any other way left but — upward." □

CONFESSIONS OF A SPIRITUAL CAPITALIST

Dear Tom,

I sit here at sunset, looking out to the fields in back of my house, half-listening to the birds, half trying to think of how I will answer your letter. Your questions about "this radical change" in my life were good, and are a reflection of your own searching, your own struggles for integrity and wholeness. To answer honestly, I will have to remember, and there is a lot I do not like to remember, because I don't think I'll look as admirably as I'd like to think of myself. Remembering is often painful, as are most examinations of conscience, and if I were to call this letter anything, it would be the confession of a spiritual capitalist. I trust your gentleness, though, to know you will accept my confession with compassion and in a spirit of non-judgement.

A year ago, my view was not fields, but noisy city streets. The only birds were pigeons, who added their droppings to the mosaic of dirty papers, cigarette butts, wine bottles, and broken glass on the sidewalk. A year ago I knew that I was tired of that view, and no matter how many times I repeated to myself that my life was contributing to social justice, to building a new order of humanity, that idealistic view was not enough to com-

pensate for the noise, the violence, and the physical fear I lived with. I was a pretty poor anarchist, I admit that now. Though I espoused anarchy as a desirable social philosophy, I was always grateful to see the police (the protectors of property, instruments of the oppression of the state, etc., etc.) when my own physical safety was in question. I didn't want to be a martyr to my anarchy! To die in a revolution is different than to die on an inner-city street, one more in an endless list of victims of crime! So it is with a lot of things I remember tonight: there grew to be a discrepancy between what I stated I believed (or what I wanted to believe myself capable of believing, and acting on) and how I really acted in moments of crisis.

We can all live with a few contradictions, and with good humor I accepted a lot of mine. A daily one is my love of coffee: while I can "critique" coffee — a cash crop, non-nutritional, raised on land in Third World countries that could be better used to grow food for that country's starving people — I know I could never practice detachment and give up my morning three cups for peppermint tea. I used to joke about it: my concern for the Third World expressed in so many days of picketing, leafletting, getting arrested, and my morning coffee. (To my credit, though, I did boycott Gallo Wine, grapes, and lettuce, and do not use Nestle's or J.P. Steven's products!)

Contradictions more serious than my indulgence in

coffee grew larger and more persistent, though. I used to publicly state what I was: a radical, an anarchist, a nonviolent revolutionary, a committed radical, a worker for justice, a voice with and for the poor, the powerless, the disenfranchized, a radical Catholic (isn't it hard enough to be a Catholic!) Tom, I said it so many times, almost wishing that the public recitation of those words, like some religious litany, would make them truly a reflection of who I was. Perhaps, ten years ago, that might have been true; but by the time I was asking the questions I realized that if love, compassion, and a vision of a different way of living were my reasons for joining the group, then later on they were replaced by arrogance, a sense of obligation, and pride. Pride, and the jockeying for power that went with it, were my greatest sins, for I never even questioned my motives, and without questioning my motives, how could I ever begin to change my actions?

All this is getting ahead of my story. You saw our group as a friend, but also as an outsider, so I'd better start by telling you a little of our history, and of the political and theological beliefs that made up that identity. You came to know us early on in our communal life, but beginnings are really the times that define one, that give one a history, an identity. We started as an experiment in living nonviolence: not a nonviolence that was politically right or expedient, not nonviolence as tactic, but a nonviolence rooted in spirituality: an attempt to be faithful to the spirit of the Gospels (and what that means is something we can debate for a long time). Some people read the Gospels and find a defense of slavery or the domination of man over woman; others read the Gospels and find a mandate for socialism. Rather than allowing ourselves as believers to stand under the judgement of the Word of God, we want to have that Living Word as a stamp of God's favor on our beliefs. God is on our side. I wonder if I was really that different from those who sang "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition" when I'd blithely say, over and over again, that it is "easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," conveniently forgetting, of course, the end of that passage: "For men this is impossible, for God everything is possible."

I still believe in nonviolence, and my understanding of what nonviolence is, as a philosophy and as a way of life, has been deepened and tempered by those ten years of experience. There were a handful of times over those years that I think I was truly nonviolent, when I cast aside

my fear (which led to violence many times, because I sought to be "protected" or I wanted "revenge") and my desire for power and "winning," and had the privilege to glimpse the spiritual power of nonviolence.

One of the most important teachings of nonviolence, and what makes it significantly different from other philosophies, is the belief that the ends do not justify the means — that is, of course, a principle I violated many times, but that did not mean I did not strive to be obedient to that teaching. (It was reading Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means* that deeply influenced Thomas Merton's thought, and of course, Merton decidedly influenced many who were activists in the sixties — including myself.)

I believe that both the Gospels and nonviolence speak to a new understanding of what it means to be a human being (this is not to contradict what I wrote on the last page!); and that is the reality of the Incarnation: "That God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. . . ." That says to me that there is a new sense of what it means to be human: despite our proclivity to greed, violence, despair, selfishness, and pride, the fact of the Incarnation and the triumph of the Resurrection impart a dignity and sacredness to being human.

There is a totality to the Resurrection also, that we always want to deny — the total, unconditional, universality of redemption. All people, regardless of whether or not I consider them "worthy," have been redeemed, and we are always seeking to exclude someone, or some group, declaring that they are outside the human community. And that really is the beginning of violence, because you cannot do violence to another unless you see them as less than human, as somehow basically different from yourself. Violence really starts as attitudes, not as acts.

I think you know my friend Father John — he told me a story one time that I "borrowed" for use in workshops, and I share it with you, because it speaks better to that last idea than my "theologizing" does. He had taken a long overdue, long deserved vacation at the lake to go fishing, and on the way there, on some deserted country road, his car broke down. As he started walking the 2 miles to the general store, Sonny pulled up with a tow truck, towed John's car to the garage, and his "vacation" was spent second-guessing Sonny's "working" on the car. He tells it much better than I ever could, with what is his obvious emotional involvement, but the last line of the story is: "The day Jesus died to save Sonny, He made a big mistake."

I love that story, because we are *always* finding Son-

nies. I can name you a listful of my own private "Son-nies" right now — but the fact is that Jesus *did* die to save Sonny, regardless of whether or not I think Sonny is *worth* it.

It seems to me that the "hope" of nonviolence is the same hope of the Gospels — the hope, or rather, the belief, in metanoia, in conversion. It believes that all people are capable of change, capable of turning from violence (i.e., from that sin which separates us from the rest of the human family, and which separates us from God) — even the oppressor, for it is the oppressor, the perpetrator of violence, who is diminished and injured as much as the victim of that violence. The unlimited forgiveness that is the sign of the Kingdom, of the way God deals with us, is also to be the way we deal with other people. Gospel nonviolence is not only the Sermon on the Mount, but it is also Peter's dialogue with Jesus:

"Lord, how many times can my brother sin against me and I have to forgive him? Seven times?"

"No, not seven times," answered Jesus, "but seventy times seven. . . ."

That command, to forgive "seventy times seven," is to say that no individual is beyond the hope of conversion. There are *no* exceptions. Tom, I have seen so much of the "heresy of good works" in the religious Left, a belief that is based on the arrogance that *we* have to save the world, and a very real denial (if not in words, then in actions) that the world has *already* been saved. And believe me, it is very tiresome to go around feeling like the fate of the world rests on your words and on your deeds — I mean, you can't even take a vacation! But, Tom, we're just not that important, and it's a little arrogant to assume that role. Sometimes I think that numbers of arrests have replaced indulgences in the "new Church", and that is *not* spiritual progress.

Forgive me if I sound like I'm preaching to you. I have to remember this is a letter and not a workshop, but I know you have serious and deeply felt and articulated reservations about nonviolence, particularly as a way of confronting systemic violence. I see this as my last "chance" to try to explain what the philosophical basis of nonviolence is. One more idea, and then I'll cease: I mentioned earlier that Thomas Merton deeply influenced my understanding of nonviolence. In one of his essays he says: "Nonviolence is not primarily the language of efficacy, but the language of *kairos*. It does not say 'we

shall overcome' so much as 'This is the day of the Lord, and whatever may happen to us, He shall overcome'." Earlier in that article, he states that nonviolence is not for power, but for truth, and that if it is used merely as another means of expressing a desire for power, then it will fail. So much of what parades under the name of nonviolence is another expression of a "will to power," is political rather than prophetic, that we diminish the very real power of the spiritual — we say we are different from the world, yet we use the "ways" of the world to oppose the world. It is absolutely incredible how easily and completely we can become seduced by "the world" and by its "wisdom," and forget that God's ways are not our ways, forget that we are called to be "in the world but not of it."

But let me go on with my story.

The group started at the height of the Vietnam war, and our beginning efforts of organizing and education were mainly focused on that conflict: demonstrations, peace education, organizing in churches and schools, street theatre, going to Washington for demonstrations. Traveling all night on those buses was a variation of monastic vigils, of keeping watch during the deepest hours of the night. I always remembered Dorothy Day's comment that parents up all night with sick children were keeping the vigil as truly as any contemplative. Her statement helped me to remember not to divorce religion from life, but to try to understand the *intent* of religious observances. They are to be a sign, I think, consecrating our lives, directing our attention to God; they are not supposed to be ends in themselves, but all too often we make them that.

My first arrest took place in those days, and sitting in jail those 16 hours before we were released, I fantasized that I was the new Emma Goldman. How much longer than 16 hours that fantasy could have sustained me, I don't know. (I think now that if I had been along with Emma in those days, I'd have walked a safe distance behind her. To die in a revolution isn't that great either! My memoirs could truly be called the *Life Story of a Cowardly Revolutionary*. I know now, having read enough history, that the risks we took were minimal, and yet for me I was reclaiming a part of American history in acting the way I did: a history of indigenous American

radicalism, that embraced Big Bill Haywood, Sacco and Vanzetti, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, and all the unknown men and women who organized in the factories, the sweat-shops, the fields, who fought against slavery and resisted oppression. That was very important to me: to understand that I had joined myself to that legacy, however minimally. I love the old labor songs so much that the only explanation I have for it is that, a generation or two back, some woman in my family history had helped to found the ILGWU!

We spoke and worked against the war, and we knew that on some level it was remote from us, an exercise in "arm-chair" radicalism. When we were forced to move out of our first community house (which had been sold to developers and later made into an Esso Station!), we moved, almost providentially it seems now, into the neighborhood on the fringes of the inner city, which is where we first met you. For the first time, I think, most of us were confronted with the reality of systemic violence: poverty, hunger, malnutrition, sickness, despair, racism. Our house was large, and somehow we found the room to begin housing some of the families that had been evicted from their homes, or whose homes were uninhabitable in the winter due to freezing pipes and no heat — thus began our first efforts at hospitality. The local schools claimed they didn't have the staff to do it, so we opened a breakfast program for the children in the neighborhood, and found that it quickly grew to more than children, and more than breakfast. In the rented storefront we used for that purpose, our conversations with mothers developed into more formal nutrition classes for pregnant women. That grew, too, to neighborhood discussions about health care, and again, through what seems providential, we met a doctor and a nurse practitioner who came to our storefront in the evenings to set up a clinic/first-aid station three nights a week. We were asked to go to court with some of our neighbors, and we came to see the reality that parades under the name of "justice" in our society — and often we went to the jails, to visit the imprisoned.

All of this grew organically, of course, with no "plan" from us. There was an evolution, a growth in maturity, as we underwent this growing commitment to our neighborhood, seeking to be nonviolent not only in national and international matters, but in our own city, in our neighborhood, in our homes. With this growth of

commitment, we developed a strong belief in the need to live voluntary poverty. Our work became more well-known (this work being more acceptable than our demonstrations!) and we were amazed at the kind of assistance we received: food, clothing, money, medical supplies, and, most importantly, people's time and talents. We saw ourselves from the very beginning involved not with charity (giving out of our excess to the "deserving" poor) but with justice (that people had a right to food, clothing, shelter, medical care) all of which were necessary for the sustenance of human life, regardless of their ability to "pay" for such things. Such an attitude rubs deeply against the grain of capitalism, where food is seen as a commodity that can bring one a profit, rather than a human right.

To "know" with the mind is much different than to learn through experience, and violence came to mean different things to me when I saw it first hand. I also came to a growing belief that privilege was a violent way to live. I know that I, with my education, my white skin, my ability to be articulate, my earning power, could never be in the same position as my neighbors. Voluntary poverty is always voluntary, and I never deluded myself into thinking it was anything but that. I always knew I could walk out of it if I chose to, and knew that because of that option, I was spared the powerlessness and despair that are the greatest burden on imposed poverty. I've often wondered what it would be like to pray the words "Give us this day our daily bread" and really *have* to pray it — not knowing that my daily bread would be assured. Our culture, and I think that I, too, value winning and winners — poor people are by definition losers in this culture, which is one of the reasons why we treat the very poor with such contempt, derision, and fear: they remind us of what we might be, were it not for our privilege. I came to believe that to live as a privileged person in an unjust society was morally wrong, believed that it was only in living with the marginal, the dispossessed, that I could really learn the truth of our society. I knew that for me, if I wanted it to, the society could work very well: I had learned its tools, I was one of its favored people. Complicity can be very seductive, as I'm sure you know.

I remember speaking to a group of very hostile seminarians one day, and giving a brilliant critique of the "clerical life-style": they were called to be servants, but ended up served. They were kept men. Their conscience was bought with tax-exempt status, and with wealthy

parishioners. Sexism and racism aside, the Church was infected with power, and priests relished that power. In the heated (to use a mild word) discussion that followed, I was challenged a number of times with the question: "What about you?" While I defended myself adequately, I think, the seeds of doubt were planted in my mind. If I looked honestly at my situation, I realized they were right. I didn't have money, or security in the conventional sense of the word: no job, no bank account, no insurance, no property. I did have a lot of things to take their place though: prestige, respect, free goods and services from friendly professionals — I even had subsidized vacations! There was a certain romanticism to the kind of life I was leading, and in subtle and not so subtle ways, I capitalized on it. People would take me to dinner in exclusive restaurants or give me the keys to their beach houses so I could get away for a weekend and rest, and though I'd always say "I hope the revolution doesn't happen while I'm here" I never once said no to those gifts. Sure, I was appreciative, but I really did think I deserved it.

Here I thought I had given up privilege, but found that not only was I not vulnerable like the truly poor, I had more privilege than most middle-class people did. Take medical care for example. I know that you've had a rough time with your son's dental bills this year, so it'll be a good example. I can critique the health care system in this country as well as anyone else: as elitist, sexist, racist, hierarchical, profit making, etc. — but I never had to experience it that way. My friendship with the doctor who staffed the clinic assured me personal, caring, competent, free medical care. I knew I could call her at any time; that I would be treated as a whole person and not as a set of symptoms; I knew that my options were to call her, or to spend hours sitting in the General Hospital, and I always availed myself of that phone call. Really, who in this day gets house calls when they're sick!

Here I thought I was involved in this big sacrifice by working full time for peace and justice — and here's that seductiveness again — when actually I was gaining another privilege: the privilege of not working at an alienating job as most people have to for the necessities of life. I really believed in personal responsibility, and when I talked it was always to tell people that all of us, individually, have a responsibility to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless — for doing the corporal works of mercy. Individuals, not churches, not governments, I would say. The truth of the matter was

that I judged those un-involved lives. I had washed my hands of the sins of middle-classism, was baptized in the truth of a radical Jesus, had become one of the elect, the saved, the faithful remnant, I cloaked myself in the robes of prophecy. You think I exaggerate, but I don't. If Emma Goldman wasn't a large enough role model, throw in John the Baptist, Simone Weil, and Dorothy Day. I hated the isolation and emptiness of middle class life so much, that in hating the sin, I came to hate the sinner. I wanted personal responsibility to become the norm of human existence, not the exception, and to enlarge the scope of concern from those we know as friends and relatives to those outside of our class and religious and racial circles. The fallacy of my life, though, was that I was so different from these people I tried to "convert" that I found myself separating myself from *our* common humanity.

You should have heard some of my workshops (maybe I'm glad now you didn't, for I really am ashamed of them. I, who believe that so much of nonviolence involves communication, thought that my storming and rhetoric were communication, while actually they were nothing more than walls I built up. Rhetoric is never helpful, and I guess if my radicalism were real and deep I wouldn't have to depend on rhetoric, which only cheapens and satirizes reality.) Matthew 25. The Last Judgement. Take it literally. You. No one can be the slave of two masters. Zacchaeus. Lazarus and the rich man. Do not store up treasures for yourself on earth. Faith and works. I cringe now when I think of the arrogance that was not well-hidden behind idealism and righteousness. It got so bad that not only did I believe the model we had created was the only way to be authentically Christian, but I also believed that what I was doing was a spiritual work of mercy: instructing the ignorant! Here, I was privileged to have this vehicle to do the works of justice, and instead of being grateful for that privilege, I turned it into a club to beat people's guilt feelings with.

All of that took place on a public level, but on a deeper level the results were more disastrous. My moral arrogance led me to the conviction that I, and I alone had the TRUTH, which is to venture into the dangers of idolatry. I've always loved the Exodus story: of God leading His people out of slavery, protecting them as they wandered through the desert, punishing them, but not abandoning them when they worshipped idols, and leading them to the Promised Land. I had always as-

sumed that I could recognize the idols of America: success, money, security, privilege, greed, etc. Me? An idol worshipper? Impossible. I was a radical Catholic. Ah, but there I was wrong. I made an idol out of my radicalism, and that's as dangerous and as wrong as making an idol out of money. I started out seeking justice and I ended up unjust. The means justified the end, a concept wholly refuted by the nonviolence I believe in. I became judgemental, arrogant, self-righteous, accusatory — and so much more. Let these words cover a multitude of sins, Tom, an untold number of acts and attitudes that were violent and coercive. So many times I would say to myself that I wanted to be a good radical but I also wanted to be a good human being. Strange I'd set those in opposition, isn't it? As happens with idol worshippers, though, I became obedient to the point of losing sight of my original vision, and I violated that which is most gentle and healing in myself.

I once had a fascinating discussion with a Benedictine monk when I gave a talk at a symposium on "Faith and Action." We later began a correspondence, and he wrote in one of his letters that "the way back to God is the path of obedience. Listening with the ear of the heart to what the Holy Spirit is saying within is at the very heart of St. Benedict's concept of obedience. The word obedience is derived from the Latin *obaudire*, which means 'to hear.' What is the Spirit saying? That's what we are listening for. . . . But remember, God speaks in silences, in the quiet depths of your heart. It's easy to miss the message."

That was a gentle reminder three years ago, but I assumed I heard the message. How could I have heard the silences when I talked so much! There was, and is, a part of me that wants to be obedient. I chose to be obedient to radicalism, and I interpreted the Gospels as radical — so, therefore, I was obedient to the Gospels. If others weren't radical, therefore it meant they were *not* obedient to the Gospel. What a marvelously simple and ethical little world I constructed for myself! And how false, for if life is anything it is complex, and ambivalent, something I couldn't allow myself to appreciate. Everything was so clear: black and white were the only colors I saw, no grays and no shadings. My idolatry was parading around under the mask of religious righteousness, and I was so sure that this was what God wanted of me that I couldn't hear the silences in the quiet depths of my heart.

About eighteen months ago, the first questions, the first doubts, started coming into my mind. You might

find that incredible, that for nine years I had no doubts, but it's true: I had such a passionate commitment, my identity was so tied to my work, that I couldn't question my commitment because the questions would pierce my very identity. I was masterful at dismissing the criticism of others by blithely saying, "isn't it a shame, they aren't committed enough when the going gets rough," "when the heat gets too bad, get out of the kitchen," "the buck stops here" (imagine me, who every August 6 and 9 demonstrates against nuclear weapons, and in memory of those who died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, quoting Harry Truman!), "these things separate the men (sic) from the boys (sic)," etc., etc. I constantly wrote people off, be they "defecting" radicals or the insular middle class — not to mention the rich. I condemned people without knowing the realities of their lives, and it is for that sin that I feel the greatest remorse now. I never knew what it was like to labor at an alienating job eight hours a day, to come home to a domestic situation that was often stifling spiritually and emotionally, and could very well be physically violent. (Not that community living was always without tension, but that was the cost for building a new kind of life). I've just finished reading Studs Terkel's *Working*, and it's as much a story about violence as Michael Harrington's *The Other America*. I don't want to romanticize work, or workers, just as I hope I no longer romanticize the poor. Neither group is made up of all saints — or of all sinners. And that, of course, is the point: both are human, as I am. I rejected the society's condemnation of poor people as sinners, but I turned the equation around and condemned the rich, the comfortable, the politically conservative (even when that conservatism came from fear, and was the result of conditioning).

Tom, you cannot know how many times I gloried in my association with this work. I traded on the prestige it gave me. I loved this image of myself as a radical, as an escapee from American culture. I use the word image purposefully, because that was what it was: an image, though a good one, I must admit. As time passed, as my questions became more insistent, I realized that there was a substantial gap between the image of myself that I presented to the world, and my identity. The tragedy I lived was that my identity had become so obscured by my image that when I found myself unable to live the image anymore, I thought there was no real identity to take its place. Very capitalist, to identify so closely with "the company", to merge myself so completely with "the group" that I lost my sense of uniqueness, my sense of self. My life story could well be called *The Revolutionary in the Gray Flannel Suit*.

By this time, I knew it was time for me to leave. I called myself earlier a spiritual capitalist, and by that I meant that the attitudes of capitalism had infected my spiritual life, my vision of myself and of faith: the need to do, to be in control, to dominate, to have power over others, to WIN! I had given a talk about the poverty work we did, and after an hour of presenting the theological and political reasons for why I did what I did, the very first question was "Why do you do it?" My quick response was "Because I'm worried about the Last Judgement, and you should be too." I meant it as a joke, a trite response tossed off because I was angered by the question, but I was haunted by it for a long time afterward. Did I really believe that? Had it really come down to that — that I was trying to earn spiritual insurance? I shared Gandhi's sentiment that insurance was the highest expression of atheism and had never even considered taking out life insurance, property insurance, health insurance, car insurance — but, here I was, paying by daily installments on spiritual insurance! I felt so spiritually empty, so shamed that not only was I a capitalist to my bones, but that I was classifying God as a capitalist also. I rejected then, and still reject, faith without works, but the heresy I acted out of was just as grave: the heresy of trying to justify my life by good works, the heresy of acting as if I didn't believe that the world was already saved, but that I had to save it by my actions. I had dismissed the reality of grace.

How to leave, though. Physically and emotionally I was exhausted, burnt-out (I even went so far as to come up with a technological euphemism for burn-out: disengagement!) I resented the demands of community living, resented the demands of meeting the needs of others, resented the lie my life had become. With full force all my juvenile spirituality came back, and I was so fearful that if I abandoned God's poor, He would abandon me. I was so fearful that I would never again meet anyone interesting, because my association with the work had opened the doors to so many people, so many places. I was so fearful of letting go of my concepts of justice. I was so fearful of being branded a failure. I kept thinking that, yes, I was tired, but all kinds of people get tired: housewives, mothers, fathers, factory workers, teachers, lawyers; what gave me the privilege (and

there's that word again) to say, I am tired, and therefore I am leaving. How much I berated myself with my failings, my lack of strength (capitalism does run deep) — I fantasized a wonderful "escape": contracting a "mild" case of TB, and being carted off to a Magic Mountain-like sanatorium to be treated with milk, cream, fresh fruit, and wine for medicinal purposes. What a perfect way to get my rest, and at the same time, all could say that I was a martyr to the cause, even to the giving of my health. But, to my dismay my body stayed physically strong, and my growing medical knowledge finally forced me to realize that the marvels of modern medicine now treat TB with pills and not isolation.

The fatigue I felt turned out to be a blessing (as, perhaps, much is that we see as "bad" in our lives) because I couldn't DO, and had to begin to listen. The only thing I could DO was to lay around and read trashy spy novels, to which I always guessed the ending. There is something very compelling about trashy spy novels when you are in the midst of moral despair, because authors delineate good and evil so clearly, and there are no, absolutely no, ambiguities to disturb you.

Finally, fearfully, after ten years, capitalist me had to tell people I was leaving. Ten years is a long time, and as the years mounted up, it became something of a track record. "Ten years!" people would say "How do you do it?" I'd smile and give the "right" answers about the inner balance of activism and spirituality needed to sustain one through the struggle all those years. I was so good at lying to myself, thinking I had "made it," that lying to others was easy. I told people I was leaving, and found to my amazement that rather than being critical, people were supportive. Why did I think I had to struggle through all this myself (but that's another capitalistic trait: the need to feel extreme independence, or at least the illusion of it; that's what makes living in community, which calls for healthy dependency, so difficult). I was told over and over again, in countless ways by countless people, that it was time to give myself some of the love, concern, attention, and caring that I had given so many others over the years. People could accept my vulnerabilities and my fears and love me with them, once I had ceased to project the image of perfect control of my life, of having all the answers. That is perhaps the beginning of my growth in humility.

I left. I am living in this small town in Indiana, where the mail man knows me because of the strange literature I receive and the amount of letters I send out. I'm working

as a receptionist in a dentist's office, having searched for a job for a month with my savings dwindling as my expenses increased. The lilies of the field look a lot different from here than they used to, for now I am in the world, but trying not to be of it. That concept is for me the only "answer" the Gospels give us about how to live our lives: there are no specifics, only this call to be in the world, but not of it. The values of the Gospel are so much in opposition to the values of the world, that if we live in faithfulness to those values the world will be moved to discover the reasons for our differentness. Before, I wasn't of the world, but I wasn't actually in it either, which really is no virtue. Before, I counseled tax resistance, but never had a paycheck, so never had to wonder what I would do. Now, I have a paycheck, and for three months now my taxes have been going to pay for a new round of armanents build-up, but I have as yet done nothing; and know that if I decided to resist it would be for personal as well as for political reasons! I now see that paying my gas bill and electric bill is different than critiquing energy sources in this country. I now see that all my knowledge about agribusiness does not make it hurt less when I pay my food bills. I now see that working eight hours a day, coming home and shopping, paying the bills, and cleaning the house, is a different kind of voluntary poverty — a poverty of time that I've never experienced before. I want to write during this time, but after a day at the typewriter at work, I just don't have the energy; I've found myself having to develop new attitudes toward time, hopefully more healthy ones. Will I forget my radicalism? Will I just go through another illusion, thinking I am still pursuing the TRUTH? Before, my radicalism was rewarded with acclaim and recognition; now, my radicalism, if it expresses itself in actions, will probably be met with misunderstanding and derision.

Shortly after I left, I wrote to some friends, a couple I deeply respect for their integrity and gentleness, and raised with them the question of how I make the transition from a very active, involved, "significant" life, to one more private. There is a certain "powerlessness" involved in that also, I think — while I once knew everything that was going on, was connected, and therefore able to connect others with expressions of justice — now I know very little. Reading about Seabrook in the daily paper is different than reading about it in movement magazines (most of which I cannot afford to get). I look at those people, and while I too am opposed to nuclear power, I know that I couldn't afford to take off x number of days from my job and travel to New Hampshire to get arrested. That knowledge, and that freedom to be "where the action was" was a real privilege (we do keep

coming back to that word!). The questions I raised with them were there because I hadn't then (and am not sure if I have now) resolved this lingering feeling that I should be active.

In their response, they shared a passage from Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidism*: "... the things that happen to me day after day, the things that claim me day after day — these contain my essential task and such fulfillment of existence as is open to me. It is said of a certain Talmudic master that the paths of heaven were as bright to him as the streets of his native town. Hasidism inverts the order: it is a greater thing if the streets of one's native town are as bright to him/her as the paths of heaven. For it is here, where we stand, that we should try to make shine the light of the hidden divine life."

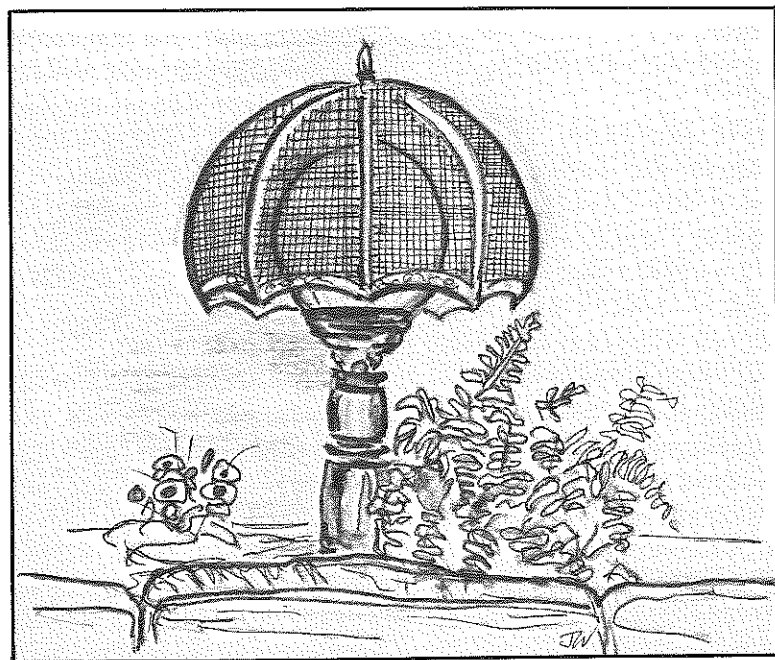
I want to be anonymous, to see if I can live my life without trying to justify myself by good works. I want to be ordinary, and while I once thought that I could only be "holy" by being extraordinary, I have begun to doubt that. Spiritual elitism is dangerous — it's that split between "lay" and "religious," the saints and the rest of us. I want to reclaim, if I can, a humility that I see as essential to any "real" religious life, not a humility based on self-abnegation or self-contempt, but a recognition that "I" am nothing and that God is everything — a humility that will allow me to listen to the quiet depths of my heart, without "knowing" beforehand what I will find there.

For ten years I sought a career: that of the good radical. I realize now that that career was not so dissimilar to working for corporate America, or for the church (we all know priests who are angling to be bishops) or even for the military. I was upwardly mobile and I wanted the acclaim and the recognition that I got. I am bereft of a career goal now, but that is not as frightening as it might have been for me to contemplate a year ago, because I now believe I have a vocation. Not a vocation to the religious life as it is known, but a vocation to be "in the world but not of it".

I feel sadness at not being physically close to many friends, but friendships can flourish in letters also (though most of my letters are not as long, nor as confessional as this one is!) and I am grateful for this change in my life. I was once so full of my ideas of what justice was, of what it meant to live "morally," that I assumed God's justice was the same as mine. I tried for so long to "earn" grace, which is, you must admit, a great contradiction in terms. When I could no longer DO, could no

longer be extraordinary, when my pride wasn't enough to continue the lie I was living, when my words turned around to condemn *me* and not the people they were first directed to, when I died to my own self-sufficiency, when I finally let go of all of that, more out of desperation than of anything else, I came to understand the meaning of grace. Grace is a gift, not something I could earn, not something I could prove my worthiness of. It is a gift, freely given, and which I can accept, now that I know I cannot earn it. I accept it in a spirit of gratitude, for the mystery of my life is this: I had judged people, yet when I was most afraid of judgement, I was not judged. I was forgiven of my pride and my arrogance and was given this gift of grace.

My spiritual struggles now are no less important to me than my political struggles of a decade ago. Will I be "political" again, you ask in your letter. I don't know how to answer that, but I would hope if I am, I will have the maturity to be political without destroying my own humanity and the humanity of others. I don't know the answer to a lot of questions but feel a growing sense that, more and more, my life is in God's hands, and that He will continue to speak to me. I look at my thirty-one years now, and rather than seeing "accidental" events, people, ideas, books that influenced me, see them as part of that language that God uses to communicate with me.



For now, I know that it is time for me to rest, both physically and emotionally; for being quiet, for healing myself in body and spirit. I did not mean to go on so long with this confession. The sun has now set and all I see now are the fireflies. I am grateful that your letter was an opportunity to put this "journey" of mine on paper.

I believe in the Communion of the Saints (doesn't that sound very pre-Vatican II!) and I know from our last conversation that you have questions about your commitment, your work; questions of meaning in the many years you have spent (many more than my decade) and the efforts you have expended. I share your frustrations in seeing no fruits from our labors; I share your fears of repeating mistakes; I share the wondering if our lives and our work really make any difference. But, as I wrote this letter, Tom, I kept thinking of the idea of the Communion of Saints: in my own words, it means that God uses us, imperfect, weak, confused, ("grotesque" is the word Flannery O'Connor uses) as we are, as instruments to communicate His love and His reality to others. Even at the height of my spiritual capitalism, I still believe that I was used to reach some people, despite my imperfections. Regardless of how worthy or unworthy we are, by some mysterious process we are bound together in that Communion, and what we are not capable of alone, the mystery of God's grace completes.

Love,
Diotima

**"NOW I KNOW IN PART;
BUT THEN SHALL
I KNOW FULLY
EVEN AS ALSO I
WAS FULLY KNOWN."**

(I Corinthians 13:12)

Carl Fjellman

*I who am freed from revel in my past
Conjuring up that knowledge which informs my will
I nudge events along this way or that
Because what was, I bring to bear on fleeting now
And will the future something different – or the same.*

*I see no threat in those events gone by,
So quickly born and quickly borne away
I own them in the spacious present of my knowing.
The future, though, holds times as fleeting
To make me, too, the stuff of memory.*

*And would I own the future as the past?
Hold it in the precious present of my knowing?
What then would be the nature of my willing?
Events to come cannot be changed by being known,
Cannot be known if yet to change are subject.*

CARL FJELLMAN is a Lutheran clergyman living in New Jersey. He is director of the Turrell Fund, which supports the efforts of low-income young people to complete a college or university education.

*To have the future'd be the end of all my willing.
To know the present rich with future as with past,
To will no change but grasp the fullness of what is –
This cannot be the gift of freedom which I am;
Freedom's Source alone yields such divinity.*

Commentary:

Our experience of freedom demands a source that transcends even freedom. The world as we know it provides no clue as to where freedom might have originated. Causal necessity is everywhere, even if we take the hard edge off "necessity" in the name of quantum physics. If we name the source *God*, can we not say the source of our relative freedom is Absolute Freedom? Is God free? Surely this is nonsense. Can He who knows no possible inhibition of His will be spoken of as willing freely when there is no other way He can will? Or is He then "free" by "necessity"?

Absolute freedom is a contradiction, for freedom cannot be understood apart from at least potential limits. "Absolute" never modifies; the Absolute *is*.

Stanza #1

Consider the nature of the freedom we experience. The human exercise of freedom requires change, and change requires time. The exercise of freedom is our modest conquest of time. We call up the past — be it near or distant — and repossess it and say "I will . . ." And the course of events is changed because the past has been brought to bear on the present through a human act of recollection and willing. The open, undetermined future in which we glory through our freedom is inextricably bound up with the closed, fixed past. The intervention of our wills between closed past and open future is the mystery of our freedom.

Stanza # 2

The fleeting character of past events, as seen in retrospect, does not threaten us because *we possess these events* in the act of knowing. We can "use" the past. We also know that the past, no matter how distant, held us in its future. We can acknowledge all the greatness of past Caesars and feel no threat because we know them but they did not know us. The future of the past included us, but what of the future of the present? We can, and do, contemplate a future without us. The past is "ours," but we are the future's, for any present holds within it its entire past. We dominate the past in our knowing it. In the future we will be known.

Stanza # 3

Is this, our fear, the truth? Or is the future contained in the present as much as the past is? If so, do we want to possess the future as we do the past? To call events-to-be into the present where we can contemplate them, compare them with what has been, what is, but lose forever the realm of what-might-be? What would we will then? What conquest of time would then be ours? We cannot influence the future with itself, or the past with the past. We cannot have the future and still form it.

Stanza # 4

If we could have this fullness of knowledge of the present, full with its past and its future, would this be the demise of all our willing, or its fulfillment? Complete fulfillment, according to Nietzsche, can only mean to will nothing different from that which is, to will nothing but the eternal return of the present moment. This could only mean to know in the fullness of the present:

a stillness that is not static;
heights that do not threaten;
depths that do not depress;
breadth that is not pallid;
inwardness without guilt;
transcendence which loses nothing of that
which is transcended;
the present rich with future as with past.

If this can be, it is not by the freedom of our temporal wills which makes us men, but by the gift of Eternity which makes us gods.

Are we, then, to be gods? Are we truly to know as we are known?

If we are drawn to this prospect, it is with fitting awe, for to know as God knows would shatter the knowledge we prize. Our knowledge is power and we are jealous of it. We know what has been and use it to impose our wills on what is to be.

To know as God knows — is this to be fulfilled, or consumed? He has made us free creatures and only in His light can we rightly think our freedom. We thank Him for this gift, which is our very being; and we praise Him for the dominion He has granted with it; but are we called to a knowing that transcends even this? A knowing so embracing that it transforms even our free spirits, without which we cannot conceive of our *selves*?

Are we truly to know as we are known? God! are we, then, to be gods? We pray "Thy will be done" not knowing what it means to exercise a Will beyond freedom, beyond change. And we tremble at the thought that His will for us may not perpetuate the freedom He has given us.

In awe and trust we glorify God — who is Absolute, not free — and pray that His will be done, not knowing what we ask but only what we must be prepared to offer, even our freedom, that is, our very selves. □



A FESTIVAL OF SEX, VIOLENCE AND DRUGS: THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE IN OUR WORLD

Richard Stivers

Carl Becker once remarked that the more brutal the present becomes, the more we tend to live in the past and the future; he might have added, or lose ourselves in ecstasy. Religious ecstasy is perhaps most identified with the cult of Dionysius which, among other things, involved the transgression of sacred taboos. Sex, violence, role reversal, the consumption of enormous amounts of food and drink, in short, almost every excess was permitted during the Dionysian festival. Historians of comparative religions tell us that such festivals are nearly universal: they exist in every society in which myth and ritual abound. Upon hearing this we smile,

assuming that in our "demythologized" world, myth and ritual, especially those of transgression, exist only in memory. But what if, despite our lack of awareness of it, we still live a mythical and ritualistic existence? Preposterous as it may seem to the scientist and technician, it is a hypothesis capable of being "tested," for the sacred from which myth and ritual are nourished always leaves imprints.

I.

The sacred and the profane identified.

If we live in a sacral world, exactly what is sacred? Following Jacques Ellul in *The New Demons*, I am asserting that the relation between technology and sex on the one hand and between the nation-state and revolution

on the other hand are sacred today. Other relations are still sacred, e.g., money and its transgression, but not nearly so intensely as those other axes of the sacred. In this article, I shall examine only the alliance between technology and sex.

Modern man is in awe of technology in exactly the way "primitive" man was in awe of nature. It represents both security and threat. Technology is our succor: it guarantees our future, solves our problems, creates order, yes, is even our primary environment, as nature was the primary environment of the primitives. Yet concurrently technology threatens our future, for is it not technology that has provided nuclear weapons of total destruction? Likewise, in solving our problems, it inadvertently creates new problems as evidenced by pollution. Again, as the creator of order, technology gives rise to disorder through its repressive effects. Finally, as our new "nature," it does not invariably enhance our self-esteem. Witness the plethora of advertisements in which we are invidiously compared to a machine. What am I, armed with merely a shovel, next to a snowblower?

Moreover, there is our tendency to depict ourselves as *homo faber*, to see our history as the history of technological achievements. As Philip Rieff observed, our preoccupation with progress and evolution goes hand in hand with a scorn for the past. Didn't history, *real* history, begin in 1780? Mircea Eliade's research on comparative religions has demonstrated that some societies turn to their supreme god only in cases of dire emergency. Communist and capitalist alike turn in supplication to "technology" to solve our "social problems".

Perhaps the clearest indicator of the sacred regard for technology is our preoccupation with "how to" questions. From *How to Win Friends and Influence People* to *How to Be Born Again* the concern with technique is dominant. In a world to which we must yield while trying to manipulate it, the "how to" does not so much supplant the "why" as it amalgamates the "why" to itself. "How to" becomes both meaning and purpose.

The well-known explanation that science takes away a sense of mystery because it lays bare reality is true only at the theoretical level and for the individual scientist. At the level of application and operation science actually induces a state of the mysterious and even the occult. Who but the specialist and technician (and even here one is limited to one's own specialty and particular know-how) understands the inner working of machines, computers, bureaucracies, and the almost infinite number of techniques?

Immediately, however, objections are raised that

technology could hardly be sacred with so many people criticizing and poking fun at it. This reassuring view shows little insight into our relationship to the sacred. Humor is a way of defending oneself against the sacred, of lessening its almost certain blow. Hysterical, contagious laughter in church has always been rather common. And who has not momentarily turned against his god(s) in the face of adversity?

But what about sex? Is it as readily evident that sex is sacred? Yes, I think so. Many writers have discussed the technologizing and politicizing of society; Maurice North in his perceptive *The Secular Priests* claims that we are now confronted with the "sexualization of everything." Explicitly, or more often implicitly, love is portrayed as erotic love or at least dependent upon sex. Our sex manuals and textbooks tell us that over 50% of the population suffers from sexual problems. Marital happiness is contingent upon sexual adjustment. Even old people are not left alone, for popular magazines admonish the elderly to maintain an active sex life, in part for health reasons. Successful people seem to have a strong interest in sex. "Early to bed, late to rise, makes one healthy, wealthy and wise" might well be the slogan of the sex generation. No book sells like a sex book, and our popular magazines invariably contain several articles about sex. Pornography is an enormously successful business. Children need scientific sexual education in the same way that decades ago they needed moral instruction about sex. Today's concern is more with "normal" and "scientific" sexual adjustment than with "moral" sexual behavior. Many formerly immoral sexual practices — premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, group sex — are everywhere in great evidence. Never before have so many worked so hard to achieve sexual ecstasy. Masters and Johnson are our gurus. Happiness and even life itself are made contingent upon sexual fulfillment. Sex is indeed the elixir of life. No wonder our motto is: "Get it on!" Yet one is struck by the obligatory nature of the new morality and the compulsiveness of those who adhere to it. This is nothing more nor less than inverted Puritanism.

So technology and sex are very important today, perhaps even sacred. But what is this about an "alliance?" Evidence is accumulating that there is such an axis between technology and sex. Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride* broke new ground when it first appeared in 1951, for it showed both pictorially and verbally the sexualization of technical objects and the

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technologization of sex. He noted the link between technology and sex as the dominant pattern in advertising. Yet, despite his suggestive and at times penetrating analysis, he found sex and technology what might be termed "strange bedfellows."

The sexualization of technological objects reaches its climax with the automobile, and more recently, as Hunter Thompson has shown in *Hell's Angels*, with the motorcycle. It is not merely that voluptuous women are shown next to the automobile or motorcycle, implying that the use of the product will get results. It goes deeper than that. The technological object is actually infused with human sexual properties: to possess this object is a sexual experience. The body of the automobile is often described in terms one would use to describe a woman — curves, "satiny smoothness." The automobile is referred to as a "date with a dream" or as a "sweetheart." Thus the automobile becomes an attractive and desirable organism whose possession is sexual. The automobile was only the first of many technical objects to become a sex symbol.

But the reverse has occurred simultaneously: sex has become mechanized. One obvious example is the tendency to focus on one part of the woman's body. Men often talk about being a "leg-man" or a "breast-man." A machine is composed of parts some of which, when disassembled, are appreciated in themselves. The various parts of a woman's anatomy become the focus of a mechanized sexuality thoroughly separated from its human context. The body comes to be seen as a love-machine whose parts can provide specific thrills if correctly manipulated.

Along with this disembodied view of sex, advertising sometimes portrays the woman as an interchangeable part in an enormous machine. Commenting upon an advertisement in which four women in girdle and bra were in an assembly line, McLuhan noted that the women imply the power to set the line in motion. Another advertisement begins with the question, "what makes a gal a good number?" — to which McLuhan replies, "looking like a number of other gals." Personality and attractiveness have been reduced to techniques so that "love goddesses" should look alike. There is enormous gratification in losing oneself in a crowd, statistical or otherwise. "Telephone numbers of girls who are good numbers, smooth numbers, hot numbers, slick numbers, Maxfactorized, streamlined, synthetic blonds — these are at once abstract and exciting," McLuhan notes, before summing up. "Girls become intoxicating 'dates' when they are recognizable parts of a vast machine."

Something very strange is at work in the sexualizing of technical objects and the technologizing of sex. It is the dialectical transformation of an entity into its opposite. Sexual orgasm as nature, instinct, and raw emotion is just the opposite of technique as culture, artifice, and instrumental reason. Hence, in the sexualizing of technical objects we find the attributes of sex transferred to the machine, so that its possession is an orgasmic experience. Likewise, the technologizing of sex means that the properties of technique are transferred to sex so that sex becomes rational, deliberate, and artificial.

There is a common denominator to technology and sex — power and the desire to possess and dominate. Technology provides enormous power and energy, which appearing to be harnessed by its user, actually resides in the technical system. Sensing this loss of actual power and control, we unconsciously fight against an abstract and collective power (technique) by an explosion of power within ourselves (sex or violence). Sex and certain forms of violence are unwitting attempts to escape the technological juggernaut. The spirit of conquest, the desire to possess and dominate, is best seen and understood in consumption. Technology's overwhelming importance to the individual lies in the goods and services it provides for consumption. But sex, and not merely automobiles and other technological objects, is up for consumption. Never before has sex been so programmed and packaged. But what does this consumption really mean? It's very repetition in everyday speech dulls the mind to its meaning. To consume is to increase one's comfort and one's power. The power of that which is consumed is transferred to the consumer while at the same time the consumer becomes the thing consumed. Technology as the extension of man in a world of radical immanentism represents an attempt of man to make his dominion omnipresent. While the frantic consumption of sex, violence, and drugs is quite different on one level, on another there is no difference. Compulsive consumption, whatever the object, remains compulsive consumption. Even more important is the fact that the frantic and frenzied consumption of sex, violence, and drugs has become increasingly technologized.

So something very strange is at work in our sacral society; the sacred and the profane, nature and artifice, are transformed into their opposites. Nature is becoming the secular, the free zone in which man can live without

great fear and reverence. The escape into a profane existence characterizes much of our "return to nature." However, campers complete with their elaborate gear vilify their effort to return to nature, for it seems that we cannot do anything without turning it into a technique. There is another tendency at work here as well: the resacralizing of nature. Surely the religious fervor of health food advocates, conservationists, and exercise buffs is evident. There is no question that for some individuals nature has once again become sacred. For the majority, however, nature is the province of the profane, a free zone to which we can escape.

II.

The sacred and the profane defined.

There is nothing more difficult to understand, I suspect, than the ambiguity of the sacred in relation to the profane. The work of Roger Caillois and Mircea Eliade is devoted to clarifying the nature of the sacred. The character of sacredness and of profanity cannot neatly be located in objective terms; they cannot, that is, simply be located in certain objects. (I wish to stress here their socially subjective and relative character.) Virtually anything can become the repository of the sacred. The sacred appears as power, as the source of life and as the locus of its destruction. As the power to give and to take away, the sacred evokes a dual response; it is at once desired and dreaded, attractive and repellent, respected and feared. Our ambivalence toward the sacred is rooted in the character of the sacred itself: we respect that which is greater than we are, desiring to possess and control it, but we also fear it, wishing to avoid its negative and threatening power.

The profane is the "world of ease and security" away from the intense presence of the sacred. It is a neutral zone in which to escape the power of the sacred and the heightened effect it produces. But the profane also has a dual character. It is, on the one hand, the secular, the common, the neutral. (On the other hand, it is that which desecrates the holy. Traditionally, the secular was safe or clean for man but not for the gods, while desecration was safe for neither. From our previous discussion one can see that "nature" fits the former meaning, "sex" the latter.)

Notice, both the sacred and the profane have two meanings. First, each as a power positively defines its "world." Second, each contains a negative moment, a capacity to destroy and to desecrate. It is in the second meaning that "sacred" and "profane" cease to be two neatly opposed terms. An "overlap" is found between them in their negative sides. This ambiguity of the "overlap" has prompted Roger Caillois, in his brilliant *Man and the Sacred*, to suggest that there are actually three terms involved: sacred of respect, sacred of transgression, and profane. The sacred of transgression refers to the overlap between definitions; it takes into account that the desecrated or impure is sacred at the very moment it is profaning the holy. It is *sacredly* profane and *profanely* sacred.

The function of taboos in traditional societies is central for understanding this account of the sacred. Following Caillois' terminology one can see that the sacred of respect (the holy) is protected by taboos; the sacred of transgression involves their violation. Taboos had a preserving and limiting function, protecting the holy from violation and desecration. The taboos "primitive" man inserted around nature were to prevent its misuse and eventual depletion. Although there was abundance in nature, man lived in relative scarcity, partially self-imposed. Totemism reveals that man saw his self-increase intimately tied to preserving the abundance of nature. Hence, the imperatives were prohibitive, against man's using up nature.

Today the identity of the sacred and the profane and the function of taboos have undergone a major reversal. This is not simply the traditional ambiguity of the sacred and the profane but a complete transformation of their meaning. Taboos today are positive. Technology provides a situation where our self-increase is not tied to conserving but to using it up. It is only through mass consumption that the economy can continue to grow. Therefore, the ethic demanding consumption relates to technology in the same way that prohibitions against consumption relate to sacred nature. This new imperative arises from the new technological morality which is positive, based on efficiency, success, bigness, and whose model expression is "how to."

The evolution of technology eventually allowed man to profane ever larger segments of nature climaxing in a major reversal: technology became a sacred of respect, nature became the secular (profane), and sex the sacred of transgression. Technology has become the paramount organizing force, the basis of order in society. Today the sacred is located in society and not in nature. Technolog-

ical order supplants natural order. What this means, however, is that instead of conceiving himself in harmony with nature, man considers himself in opposition to nature and clearly superior to nature. Therefore, sex while still part of human "nature" is not an aspect of nature (the cosmos), for the human is now defined in technological terms. Technology, as the extension of man's rational power, and sex, as man's instinctual power, are set in opposition to secularized nature. Technology and sex both share in the spirit of conquest fueled by man's deification of himself, which in a world of "radical immanentism," to use Gabriel Vahanian's fine phrase, was inevitable.

At first glance, then, sex and technology appear to be opposed and in conflict in today's technological order. It appears that sex today represents an attack upon the repression and boredom of the technical system, an attempt to become autonomous and to assert one's self in the face of necessity and collectivization. (What is less rational, calm, deliberate, and efficient than orgasm, the ultimate in the instinctual and irrational?) At first glance the opposition of the two is set up as the conflict of reason, organization, and artifice (technology) against instinct, disorganization, and spontaneity (sex).

However, it is my argument that beneath the surface of opposition one finds a deep and hidden compatibility between modern sex and technological order. The compatibility (overlap) lies in the spirit of conquest, the eroticism, and the narcissism which underly the technology/sex axis. But it is more than mere (passive) compatibility that we observe on this deeper level. It is an active complicity in which modern sex serves the technological order, a complicity that disarms sex as a revolutionary force. Dionysian sexual disorder is integrated into the very heart of the technological order.

Two apparently divergent institutions are responsible for bringing sexual disorder into line with our technological order. I wish to examine these two institutions and how they function to reinforce rather than provide an alternative to technology: the festival and therapy.

III.

The sacred and the profane institutionalized: from festival to therapy.

The sacred of transgression is institutionalized by being set within the context of myth and ritual. Contradictions on the concrete level of the sacred (respect vs transgression) are resolved in myth and ritual. As Eliade demonstrated in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, almost every society has possessed a myth about the creation of the world, of the passage from chaos to cosmos. The myth of creation is sacred history, a fixed point of reference to what is "real" and "meaningful." Profane time is relative and thus meaningless. Mythical time, especially the "beginnings" or the time of creation, is that moment when the gods instituted order into the world and when the ancestors lived in relative bliss. Reality for primitive man is mythical time, a repetition and renewal of the creation of the world. For him secular history was terrifying because it was a time of becoming and thus the unknown. Mythical time, on the other hand, signaled the known of being. The creation of the world, albeit perfect (or in some cases to be perfected at the end of the world) had to be repeated ritualistically in order for man to participate in it. If man refused to renew creation, he was doomed to a totally profane existence. The renewal of mythical time transported man back to the beginning and mythical time repeated itself in the present; historical time was abolished.

Festivals, one of whose main components was the orgy, represented a return to the chaos preceding creation. Chaos was a stage in which things were undifferentiated, formless, without order. A return to disorder (chaos) is the meaning of transgression, for the taboos represent the order of creation. Chaos is a time of ecstasy which accrues to the crowd or mass in its unity. There is no greater basis for unity than wholesale transgression, so it is not without a certain attraction. Eliade observed that there are two distinct types of religious nostalgia for the "beginnings": (1) a desire to return to the primordality of the ancestors after creation (sacred history) and (2) a desire to lose oneself in the primordial chaos before creation. For those societies in which this occurs, there is an inordinate emphasis on rites of transgression: orgies, violence and destruction, status reversal and over-all ecstasy.

Both of these conditions hold today. The repression evidenced by technology and the political state generates an enormous appetite for rebellion against the technical

system. Equally important is the condition of hopelessness modern man lives out as evidenced by his unprecedented cynicism. Our mythical belief in progress has failed for a number of reasons. First, progress was always set within history and with a few exceptions projected the past and present into the future; that is, progress did not offer hope of a radically new creation, but instead offered a little bit more of what we already have known and experienced. Social planning is a good example. The myth of progress is unsatisfactory, especially for those who have experienced the void of technological consumption, because it never frees one from the terror of history. What can living for the future really mean to a "radical immanentist"? (More of the same?) Second, and related to this, technological consumption (the sterile hope of progress) has not proved to be satisfying beyond the present moment. For Third World countries and even for the Soviet Union the promise of technological consumption remains a great motivator, but in the United States we have nothing more to hope for, living unfulfilled as we do in the very midst of technological cornucopia. Hence, the return to chaos. The plunge into transgression and orgy at least promises ecstasy and communion. It represents a return to "beginnings" which faith in history does not provide. Marxism offered a more radical hope than historical progress; after the chaos of revolution comes the Golden Age of world-wide Communism. The state of total bliss. However, Marxism preached a kind of inverted progress in which events are progressively worse until the utopia bursts forth, at the end of history.

Several questions stand out. What today approximates the sacred festival? Are its participants conscious of the myths which guide their ritualistic actions? Among the sacred festivals, we would have to include: rock-concerts (especially the open-air variety), urban riots, the riots during and after sports events, and the rites of spring practiced on many college campuses. In addition to festivals with more or less open membership are those which are restricted to members (the ritualistic phenomenon of secret clubs such as Hell's Angels and the Manson Family). (I shall omit obvious references to political festivals.) Sex, violence, drugs, and orgiastic music are common to these gatherings.

Though not sacred in themselves, violence, drugs, and music are religious expressions; in association with sex they transgress against the technological order, specifically during the festival rituals. There are many forms of

violence, but the religious variant is the anarchial kind pursued for its ecstatic effect. Likewise with drugs and music; they are religious when participants seek the ecstasy and communion.

Eliade explained that it is not necessary for sacredly transgressive acts or festivals to occur at preordained times. Whenever the need arises to return to the beginnings, mythical time can be re-enacted. Transgression can be diffuse in highly segmented modern societies; consequently, Caillois and Ellul argue, the sacred festival is not rigidly institutionalized any longer. If by that they mean, "subject to conscious control and planning," I agree to a point; however, the open-air rock concert and the collegiate rites of spring seem the exceptions.

The open-air rock concert with its blatant sexuality, intense drug usage, and orgiastic music usually spills over into violence. What else can the setting of the time for the concert, obtaining financial backing, the partitioning off of an area, and the isolating of the participants, be but institutionalization? Rock concerts are moneymakers and as such are fully integrated into the entertainment industry. The so-called "rites of spring" provide an example of even more effective institutionalization. These annual rites, openly sanctioned by many university officials, demand and receive an enormous amount of planning and preparation: tickets, refuse baskets, first-aid stations, guards at every point of entry to the campus, entertainment, etc. Typically the scene involves thousands of students jammed together on the grass in the center of campus with various rock groups entertaining. Beer, wine, and marijuana are everywhere and expected. As the day wears on into the evening intercourse and other forms of sexuality become more frequent. Toward the end of the festivities violence, in the form of insults, fights, rock-throwing, and property destruction take over. Campus and city police wait on the outskirts of the campus to make sure the delirium and mayhem do not spill over into the surrounding town. The next morning student volunteers pick up the refuse. Come Monday, everyone is back in class, studying for a technical career.

Counter-culture enthusiasts, rites of spring devotees, the group sex laity, are conscious of the renewal and rebirth which they hope sex, and to a lesser extent, violence and drugs will bring. They are seeking both ideologically and behaviorally ecstasy in communion with others.

The urban riots and riots at sports events, on the other hand, seem more spontaneous and contagious, more

existential and less speculative. Victor Turner's distinction between existential and normative transgression is helpful here. Often the result of a repressive social structure or a decaying religion, existential transgression is spontaneous but very quickly becomes normative, i.e., myth and ritual rise up around it. Or, in other words, it becomes a period of disorder with its own rules inserted into the dominant order. We have seen this happen: the open-air rock concert has been domesticated into the collegiate rites of spring, and orgies have been converted into group sex clubs. And surprisingly enough even the urban riots and sports riots seem destined for a similar fate. Assertiveness training, the recent ideological emphasis on conflict as a positive force in family life, and the therapies advocating psychological and physical violence are harbingers of the taming of violence, and I might add, evidence of the gradual sacralization of violence taking place today.

The dialectic of order and transgression is perhaps best grasped in therapy. We must recognize that the behaviorist-humanist debate in the applied social sciences is false and misleading. The behaviorists rely heavily on non-verbal techniques that produce a "desirable" result — an efficient, successful, or normal outcome. As Skinner has already explained, behaviorists are interested in the advancement of a complete behavioral technology as a way of eliminating "social problems." Humanists respond that although behaviorists are effective, they are superficial in treating only symptoms. Relying upon verbal techniques to a greater extent, humanistic psychologists have moved toward advocating mystical and ecstatic experiences and the counter-culture ideology. Advocates of the Human Potential Movement, encounter groups, T-groups, gestalt therapy, etc., are in Andrews Malcolm's words, "magical humanists." Very important to their programs are techniques of communion, ecstasy and transgression (sex and violence).

Not so with much of humanistic therapy. Following integration into the group, the ecstasy, communion, and transgression continue unabated. They do not end after the liminal period. There was always a paradoxical exception to primitive initiation rites as well: secret clubs organized to continue to transgress the taboos after initiation, but only according to the strictest regulations. In certain societies the rites of transgressions were performed only by those in secret gatherings.

Behavioristic therapy is technical initiation positively

reinforcing efficient, normal, and successful behavior, the norms or "taboos" of our society. Humanistic therapy, on the other hand, as a ritual of initiation (secret society) advocates transgression of these very taboos but within the overall technique of therapy.

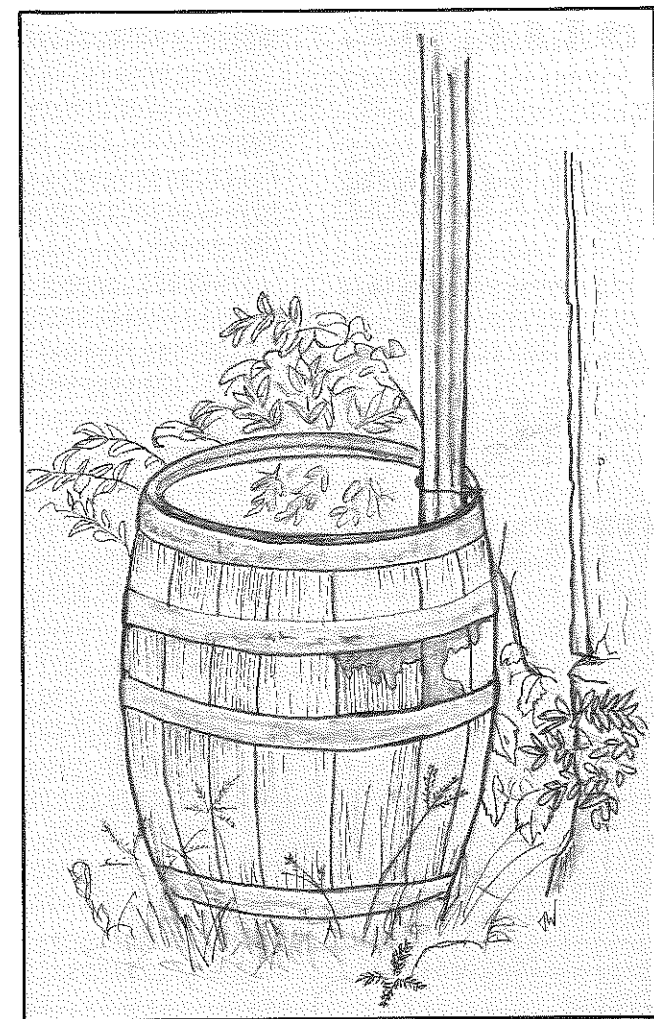
There are important differences between today's sacred festivals and yesterday's. The latter were integrated into society through a myth which justified, even necessitated, their performance (transgression symbolized the chaos preceding creation). Thus the social structure allowed man's instinctual need for ecstasy to be met in a way which reflected his culture. But this is not the case today. The myths which today justify the sacred festivals are "anti-myths" directed against the dominant myth of progress. Furthermore, the social structure does not provide for ecstatic release in a way in which the dominant culture permits.

Technique as it is institutionalized in the social structure has a repressive effect upon us insofar as it denies the release of man's instinctual and ecstatic needs. At this level our society suffers from too much order, and because humans apparently cannot easily accept such mechanization, they rebel (if not actually, at least vicariously, through the media). Furthermore, our technological order is meaningless, that is, it does not reflect culture, or where it does, it proves inadequate. For instance, technology's sacred impact upon man is largely experienced in the spiritual value attributed to consumer goods and services. These, however, do not provide meaning beyond the momentary pleasure they provide, and not enough meaning to provide for our hope and purpose. The result is that we attempt to find meaning in actions opposite to those which are sacralized. If technology is held sacred, so will sex be held sacred as an attempt to create meaning in a meaningless situation. Sex then serves two needs created by the technological order — ecstasy and meaning.

It would appear, then, that our sacred festivals are not integrated into society but are a protest and rebellion against it. Surely this is so subjectively for some of the devotees of sex. Actually it is just the opposite on the sociological level. As Ellul has shown, the logic of the technological society is that each attack upon it, each inefficiency and disorder, eventually becomes subject to technique. Just as the molten lava which spews forth from and tears away mountainous rock eventually solidifies into rock as it cools, so each attack upon the technological system eventually becomes part of the

system. The psychological convulsions that the technological order produces creates only more order. While it is true that the sacred festival today is not "integrated" (in harmony with man's psyche and culture) into society it finally becomes part of the technological society against which it rebels. If this line of reasoning is sound, we shall continue to see our spontaneous, sacred festivals transformed into technique.

Is this the fate of our current sacred festivals — to end up as therapeutic performances before small groups? As the rites of spring are more efficient and safer than the open-air rock concert, so too is transgression within therapy still safer yet. But this is just as Huxley foresaw in *Brave New World*: sex, violence, drugs were reduced to therapeutic techniques played before transitory groups of faceless and interchangeable individuals. □



THE CONSOLATIONS OF WAITING: REFLECTIONS ON BEING UNEMPLOYED

Ronald M. Kawano

The statistics and figures on the unemployed never meant much to me until I became a part of those statistics. Then it dawned on me that those statistics were not as inscrutable as they seemed; from a country of approximately two hundred million people, one half of whom are part of the workables, every percentage point on the unemployment rate equals approximately one million people. Thus, every time the White House releases its figures, and the unemployment rate jumps by half-a-percent, that indicates approximately another half-million people out of work.

I have been out of work about a year now. I've learned how to collect unemployment benefits, to wait in those interminably long lines, as everyone else has to do. Everyone else turns out to be black, Spanish-speaking, with a sprinkling of whites, and fewer Asian-Americans like myself.

Normally, clergy like myself would not be able to collect unemployment benefits because neither we nor the parishes we serve pay into unemployment insurance. But the job counsellor at the State Employment Office explained that former President Nixon signed a bill, Special Unemployment Act (SUA), that allows those employees who don't pay into the unemployment kitty to draw benefits; this applies not only to clergy but to hotel maids, and state civil service workers. Unfortunately, one could only apply for SUA up to the end of 1977. After that date, those individuals who would normally be covered under SUA must depend on their ingenuity, friends and relatives, and a bank loan taken out before they left or lost their job.

For a whole segment of the American population, unemployment is a way of life. These include many of the younger blacks, the elderly and the new Asian-Americans, the native Americans. In some sectors, unemployment is endemic. The fact that it is endemic should allow us to call this phenomenon something other than unemployment. For being unemployed implies that one is looking for a job, an assumption not always true. I

am no expert on this large scale American phenomenon. I am an expert on only one particular aspect of it — my own situation and what I've learned and encountered in the past year of looking for work and learning to be the houseman of the family.

At the beginning of this period, a friend of ours surprised us by sending a copy of *George MacDonald And His Wife*, a biography of the MacDonald's by Greville MacDonald, their son. It was the writings of George MacDonald, that so profoundly influenced C. S. Lewis. Lewis says in the "Preface" to *George MacDonald: An Anthology* that he doesn't think he's ever written a book without quoting George MacDonald. My wife started to read it and read it right through. When we had some quiet moments together, she would explain certain events in the MacDonald's lives and read aloud some passages to me. It was a ritual identification to realize that many of the experiences we had undergone, the MacDonald's had experienced also.

George MacDonald had already taken an M.A. when he decided to study for orders in a Congregational seminary. The four year course was halved for him since he already held a university degree. MacDonald served his first, and only, parish in a congregation in Arundel (south of London) and was slowly pushed out of that parish by the faction in power. When MacDonald finally left the parish and took his family to another city to look for a job, he wrote his father that never again would he allow himself to be subservient to anyone who would prevent him from expressing the will of Christ as he understood it.

MacDonald never had another parish and spent the rest of his life as author and father (the MacDonald's had eleven children). One of the stock figures in his novels is the "stickit minister," the clergy figure who did not make it in the parish because of idiosyncratic circumstances and especially for failure in the pulpit. "Stickit ministers" in MacDonald's novels are usually quiet souls who end up with a small teaching ministry and yet who are very knowledgeable about the depth and wealth of obedience in Christ. I always sense that George MacDonald is writing about a figure like himself when he draws for us his "stickit ministers."

George MacDonald was an individual who was cast out, thrown to live upon his wits, into the wilderness, so to speak, and not upon the sometimes all too confining situation of a parish. Greville MacDonald titles the chapter concerning MacDonald's lengthy search for a job,

"The Wilderness." It was from this wilderness that he found his way as an author. Another writer tells us of his own faith in moving out of well-defined spiritual structures and institutions into the wilderness. "I wager," says Jacques Ellul, "on the faithfulness of God. I advance into the wilderness on the sole guarantee that God has promised He will be faithful to me" (*The Ethics Of Freedom*, pp. 356-7). Faithfulness and wilderness. One cannot speak too much about faithfulness, for it must be experienced. It must be experienced, for the wilderness will come at one time or another to the faithful. It is, so to speak, one of the assumptions of the spiritual life. The spirit led Him into the wilderness, the spirit will often lead us into the wilderness.

We need not fear that. We do, however, need to recognize that the wilderness does not grant forgiveness of sins, absolution, guidance, glory, beneficence, or blessing. It is. It is nothing but the tearing and drawing away of our supports — and with nothing to lean upon, we must go forward. Or we do not go at all. Middle ground does not exist.

Jacques Ellul explains that freedom is insecurity, that freedom lies in this wilderness where all is unshackled, where there are not limits, where we have already transgressed beyond. We wait here; we are tempted — tempted to flee, tempted to run, above all, tempted to go back, to return to the onions and leeks of our Egypts, and to our past taskmasters, of whom we forget too easily the hardships. We are afraid, and rightly so, when we have no direction.

Many of us grope during these times for direction, a direction necessary for us to find our way, to feed our families, to do the work which the Lord has for us. It is, of course, in the sensitive, and the obtuse, too, the lingering doubt which asks if the present time, the period of "infertility," of waiting and watching, is not as much a time of God's presence as any other time. Certainly, I have never had so many people remind me that we are constantly in their prayers and petitions. Nonetheless, it is important that one do good work; yet not only is good work necessary but good relationships. Elizabeth O'Connor puts it this way:

If I have work of great meaning and scope to do but my relationships are not satisfactory, I am a person in trouble. Conversely, if my relationships are warm and satisfactory, but I have no meaningful work to do, I am a person in trouble. Until I find my vocation, I have energy

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that has not found its flow. Love and work are essential to any feeling of well-being (*The New Community*, p. 13).

She is right. Yet it is not often that any individual finds both these vectors satisfied in his or her life. We are most of the time left hungry for these conditions.

My wonder lies in the faithfulness of the Father. The question is not fear of failure (though we cannot put that itching question aside). Rather, it is the question of going on without the stabilizers of the past. We cannot always focus clearly, and without that we do not have the necessary reality. We do indeed bank upon the faithfulness of God. So we cry with the Psalmist:

Arise, O Lord, "Why are you sleeping?"
Arise! Do not reject us forever.
Rise up, and help us,
and save us, for the sake of your steadfast love (Ps. 44).

The Psalmist banks his whole case upon the faithfulness of God. He is recalling the Lord, reminding him of the Lord's own character. He recounts how he and his people are doing poorly, yet they are faithful to the Lord. The catch is that the Psalmist is asking, almost demanding, the Lord to be faithful as He promised, as He taught, as they know His character. In *Trial*, the Psalmist is certain that the conditions about him do not reflect that the Lord is treating his people neglectfully. Yet, the Psalmist is careful. The outward circumstances are in opposition to his own understanding, often too clear, of his own place with Yahweh. The Christians always want to be vindicated by Yahweh, or by the circumstances about them. The Psalmist is no different. He desires the blessings of Yahweh; and he laments for them.

But blessings come in the strangest ways. It is an axiom of the works written in the field of unemployment and the job hunt that being fired, being terminated, is often a hidden blessing. Termination, that rite of passage from the institution to, shall I call it, liminality, a period of transition, between cures or being unemployed. It is to be between two worlds, one dying, the other yet to be born. This is certainly a place of insecurity, but we have precedent for being in this place. The Lord himself had

no place to lay his head, even though the birds of the air and the lilies of the field were taken care of.

We do not always like to be reminded of our identity with the Lord here. If there is any consolation, it is the sense that we have, in our small way, retaken a path which Our Lord and many others before us have trod. Yet we are reminded of this in the closest ways. First, there are always the Job's comforters who say that everything will work out, and that there, they hope, will be certainly something equal or better in store. Then there are the popular chaplains of the absurd, who have been teaching us to give thanks to the Lord, not only in, but for all things — even for those most adverse; we are admonished to give thanks for the particulars, the particularity of adversity.

Strangely enough, we are taught here by our betters. A poet, no less than Rainer Maria Rilke, counsels us to do the same, in his way, of course. He says in his *Sonnets To Orpheus* (II, ii), "For the serene, all that is, is good." That probably needs no explanation at all. But then, Rilke goes on. One of his themes is the transformation of the inner person, and a transformation that leads to an acceptance even of the most difficult, the sorrowful, the depressing. These conditions, Rilke says, are like seasons of our life. We grow by them.

The difficult period, the suffering times, are as much a time of our maturing as the times when we are not suffering or experiencing difficulty. It is almost an axiom that the times of our difficulty can certainly be the humus of our best work and thought. The times of our difficulty can often make us more humane, more profound, perhaps even more courteous, as with Mr. Bultitude in F. Anstey's obscurely known fantasy, *Vice Versa*. After Bultitude's strange and curious sufferings in this fantastic work, he returns to his former manner of life with a harmony that reckons the importance of the change that had come over him as more important than the desire for vindication. In the voice of the omniscient onlooker, the author writes:

Bitter as he had suffered, and in spite of the just anger and thirst for revenge with which he had returned, I am glad to say he did not regret the spirit of mildness that had stayed his hand when his hour of triumph had come.

His experiences, unpleasant as they had been, had had their advantage: they had drawn him and his family closer together (*Vice Versa*, in *Humor And Fantasy*, p. 283).

As much as it is possible to recognize that our past experiences may be converted in their impact upon our lives, it is necessary to admit for many people this does not happen. Some may be simply encouraged in their sloth, their bitterness, and their guilt.

It is important to add that in any great effort in which we take part, whether it be ecological efforts, the disciplining of our spiritual life, or work for our daily bread, opposition and difficulty is a matter of course. Whoever thought it would be any other way is yet a beginner. Perhaps the stout and courageous heart is the best that we can commend to anyone undergoing the usual trials which make up our daily givens. Any creative effort not only implies but demands this. Romain Rolland in his *Jean Christophe* expresses it this way:

Art which is not also a profession, and supported by a healthy, practical life, art which knows not the necessity of earning the daily bread, loses the best part of its force and reality. It is only the flower of luxury. It is not — (what in the greatest, the only great artists it is) — the sacred fruit of human suffering.

Of course there is a caveat. We may endure and even accept suffering and go through great difficulty, but we do not emerge unscathed. We grow then, as Rilke reminds us, by these seasons of our life.

This discussion concerning the relationship of our wilderness, the trial of our faith and the possible fruitful changes in our outlook because of our experiences is, I believe, the beginning of a eucharistic theology. This would be a theology which examines the whole in a disciplined reflection concerned not only with the wilderness but with the total experience. In any experience of wilderness, two elements can be distinguished: The event itself, and the later perspective and appreciation on that event. Archbishop William Temple put it this way:

In this sense the event is always unalterable, and not even God can change the past. But it is not true that the value of the past event is unalterable; when it is seen in the context and perspective of a longer vista of time, what was, as an isolated event, evil may be appreciated as an element in a total good — not only as a price paid for a consequent good, but as an indispensable element in what as a whole is good (*Nature, Man And God*, p. 209).

From this perspective, it is important to recognize that the event was evil and to call it by its true name. Then, too, one can recognize the place that the event has in the total experience of our appreciation and acceptance. For the Christian, the Crucifixion and Good Friday must not be at all glossed over in favor of the events which follow.

From this particular example and of particular personal ones, it is possible to draw out a principle which discloses the relation of the event to a future interpretive appreciation of that event. Archbishop Temple attempts it in the following manner:

The principle is that *the future does not merely disclose in the past something which was always there, but causes the past, while retaining its own nature, actually to be, in its organic union with its consequence, something which in isolation it neither is nor was . . .*

Consequently the value which the past has, or had, in isolation from the present and future is not its real value at all, whether expressive or instrumental. The evil thing remains in itself evil, but where as it *was* a bad thing that it should happen it is a good thing that it did happen (His italics. *Ibid.*, p. 210).

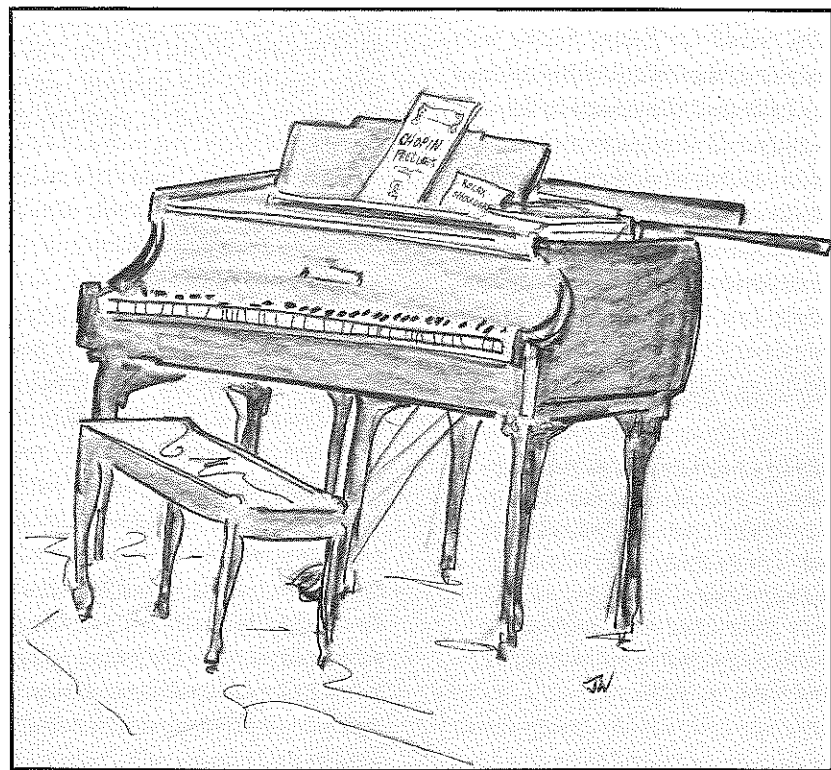
This is what I would call a eucharistic principle, taken from the primary cultic meal in which Christians have shared. This is a way of learning the perspective of appreciation, of gratitude, out of the very events which may have brought bitterness or sorrow. It is a thanksgiving for a very particular defeat. We are not giving thanks for *Christus Victor* but for the defeat itself. It is the old story but it is the ancient memory which most often is layered over, and in modern terms, repressed.

We have begun with a concrete fact of unemployment, a wilderness for many people who have journeyed into these lands. In our reflections on this condition, we have been able to look at this journey as a pilgrimage of faith and insecurity. Finally, we have been able to go to a more generalized understanding of this pilgrimage, which I have termed simply a eucharistic principle, a principle which is applicable to many other different situations along the Christian pilgrimage. One might even go so far as to say that the making of this eucharistic principle is the Christian pilgrimage. We are always having our perspectives changed. And to be able to know that perspective in relation to the event itself is to have prophetic insight.

Moreover, the further we continue on the Christian pilgrimage, the more certain we become that all things lie in the hand of the Father. At the same time we learn to become less certain that all our decisions are perhaps the best ones. Our trust turns more and more away from ourselves and more to our Lord. We recognize that the path we tread in our times is more like an experiment whose final outcome we are not to know even during our short lifetime. As much as we try to organize all the variants which go into shaping our lives, to "organize our luck" as Fr. Richard Bolles terms it, our vision is never total. We are never able to grasp all elements which go into decision. There is always the unforeseen. Nonetheless, we go forward. We decide. And acting on those decisions is often exceedingly difficult. This is why our common Christian life is very much like an experiment. Yet, the greatest difficulty is indeed taking the first step.

The first step involves a return to the beginning, to the world of work. The place of work itself is so supremely important that everything else waits upon it —

community relationships, friendships, our church life, our vocation. If that is so, then we must recognize this but at the same time not be fooled. The basis of any consolation in waiting while one is out of work lies in the fact that this supremacy can be subverted. If our vocation is to mean anything at all, it can give us another view of the world of work. Our vocation teaches us that our pilgrimage in this life is not towards our own happiness nor our own salvation, but rather towards that of others and the Glory of God. If this is an insight of the eternal life which we are just beginning, then perhaps we can learn to take more lightly, and perhaps with greater humor, this world of blood, sweat and tears. For the subversion of this world of work and its supremacy lies precisely in our vocation to worship, the worship which itself is an intimation of our role in the final role of worship of the Father. Thus to worship is to remember with C. S. Lewis that "Joy is the serious business of heaven." We can surely begin here. Work is of the world of necessity. Joy is of the world of vocation and play. That is the change of perspective necessary. We do not worship to salve our consciences and plead for forgiveness, though admittedly this had its place. We worship, this our supreme task, and in doing so we recognize that we are being delivered from a great principality of this world. □



REVIEWS

HOMO LOQUENS

Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 335 pp., \$8.95; paper: Noonday 528, \$5.95.

James H. Stam

The book is a collection of fifteen essays written over some twenty years and concerned with the philosophy of language broadly construed. The author is a nonprofessional — his training was in medicine — in a theoretic hive aswarm with professional queen-bees, workers, and professional drones of variegated species. Structuralists, transformational grammarians, logical positivists, behaviorists, phenomenologists, semanticists, and many more whose hum is louder than their sting, all buzz the intellectual territory obliquely indicated in Percy's title. Already in that title, Percy, the nonprofessional, keeps his certain distance: the enigma begging to be decoded, combined with the ironic/heavy-handed subtitle, which might have read, more accurately flat-footed, "How Queer the Philosophy of Man Is in Light of the Known Quirks of Human Nature; How Queer the Philosophy of Language Is in Light of the Unknowns of Human

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Language; and How Little Each Discipline Has to Do with its Subject."

Readers of Walker Percy's novels will detect a parallel between the author's sparring, sometimes near quixotic, stance in these pieces and the "alienated antiheroes" (as the reviewers type them) of *The Moviegoer*, *The Last Gentleman*, *Love in the Ruins*, and *Lancelot*. Percy the philosopher of language has a kinship with these dated, outdated outsiders: he harks back to older traditions of language theory (of which he is not always master), he mimics the style and visual aids of his contemporaries (transformational sentence diagrams with sets and subsets of noun and verb phrases, semiotic triangles and tetrads, stimulus-response chains with arrows and other real or imaginary connectives). At points one is not quite sure whether Percy is offering a "serious" alternative or a critique through parody. Like the passer-through in "The Man on the Train" essay, who both is and is not in Metuchen, New Jersey, Percy both does and does not care to engage in the philosophy of language professionally construed. And that is surely his rightful choice, even

if most of his reviewers will inevitably be mainstream or marginal professionals. Again, his position is akin to his role as novelist: "The Christian novelist nowadays is like a man who has found a treasure hidden in the attic of an old house, but he is writing for people who have moved out to the suburbs and who are bloody sick of the old house and everything in it" (p. 116).

The essays in the volume group themselves roughly around three interrelated themes. First, there are several which deal directly with the estrangement of modern man and "the aesthetic reversal of alienation by art" (p. 85): "The Loss of the Creature," "The Man on the Train," and "Notes for a Novel about the End of the World," the last clearly a companion piece to *Love in the Ruins*. These deal the most directly and obviously with the motifs dominant in Percy's novels. In what sense is a man travelling by rail from Philadelphia to New York in Metuchen, New Jersey? Why, nowadays, does it take a train wreck or the like to put the traveller into the human situation which for residents and others is Metuchen, New Jersey? What is the being of the transient? (An unpublished translation of Heidegger rendered *Dasein* as "transience.") There are dim hints here that man's unhappy estrangement somehow relates to the nature of language and that transience may be the unmapped road to transience.

Next, about half the essays, mostly shorter ones, deal specifically with the theory of the symbol and of meaning. These draw heavily on Ernst Cassirer via Susanne Langer, on Charles Pierce with modifications, and on a range of other thinkers. The basic distinction underlying all these pieces, including some flawed excursions on intersubjectivity, is the difference between signs — which stimulate responses, more or less effectively — and symbols — which are offered up for interpretation, analysis, and understanding, which can be taken or mistaken (p. 178).

Finally, there are several longer essays in which Percy attempts a (more) comprehensive theory of language:

"The Delta Factor," "Semiotic and a Theory of Knowledge," "A Theory of Language," and the title essay itself. Percy tries to construct a theory which would run between (or beyond or around) the two unsatisfactory poles of behaviorism and logical positivism on the Scylla side and structuralism, transformational grammar, and other work of "linguisticians" on the Charybdis. "Behaviorism does indeed offer a plenary model of language as phenomenon, which meets all specifications of explanatory theory except one: It is wrong" (p. 303). "The behaviorists in fact seemed more anxious to fit the model to the phenomenon than to take a good look at the phenomenon" (p. 32). Generative grammar, in contrast, Percy alleges, is not an explanatory theory at all, "but rather a formal description, an algorithm, of the competence of a person who speaks a language" (p. 304). In fact it is a grand *petitio principii*, an illuminating circularity in which Chomsky's "language acquisition device" is "a black box whose contents are altogether unknown" (p. 302). Although many of Percy's criticisms are telling, however, and many of his suggestions suggestive, he is hard pressed to come up with a satisfactory alternative "plenary model." Take "the Delta factor," for example, one of the solutions, and the language in which it is explained and identified: "A nonlinear nonenergetic natural phenomenon (that is to say, a natural phenomenon in which energy exchanges account for some but not all of what happens)" (p. 39). "Here indeed was . . . the ultimate and elemental unit not only of language but of the very condition of the awakening of human intelligence and consciousness . . . Alpha was the beginning, omega will be the end, but somewhere in between, some five billion years after alpha, and x years before omega, there first occurred delta, Δ . The Delta phenomenon lies at the heart of every event that has ever occurred in which a sentence is uttered or understood, a name is given or received, a painting painted and viewed. What Helen [Keller] had discovered, broken through to, was the Delta phenomenon" (p. 40). Whatever the merits, this is neither the language nor the substance of explanatory theory.

Percy protests at several points that his own sympathies by intellectual instinct and training incline him toward the more "scientific"/empiricist model (pp. 33–34, 216 ff., 303). But one does not know whether to take these evocations of his medical training entirely at face value. He is perhaps more interested in empirical evidence than in empirical explanation, as suggested by the perfectly legitimate question he poses about the breakthrough into language: "Was not in fact the sudden 54 percent increase in brain size not the cause but the consequence of the true urphenomenon, the jumped circuit by which Delta Δ first appeared? The spark jumped, language was born, the brain flowered with words, and man became man" (p. 42). Percy quite clearly is interested in something, evidentiary or explanatory, which would satisfactorily connect the physical and spiritual in man and the audible and mental in language. Thus his concern with "semophones," combining a semantic and phonetic element. Ultimately, however, this quest leads Percy to vague hypothesis about a recently evolved brain structure, "the human inferior parietal lobule, which includes the angular and supramarginal gyri, to a rough approximation areas 39 and 40 of Broadmann" (p. 326). This is a curious turn indeed, for at least two reasons. First and most obviously, it was the reading and control of just such Broadmann areas which was the madcap scientific preoccupation of Dr. Thomas More in *Love in the Ruins*. Secondly, Percy treats Chomsky's interest in Cartesianism and innate ideas as though it were a recidivism feeding on an atavism (p. 300 *et al.*), but it was Descartes, the "dualist," who pursued the missing linkage between human mind and matter in the pineal gland. Both Descartes and Percy finish off their quest with a resounding question mark. And there is nothing wrong with that: it depends on what exactly Percy is trying to do and, more important, whom he is trying to address.

Another reviewer, Walter Michaels, concludes that "the major weakness of this book turns out to be its limited sense of its own audience" (*Georgia Review*, vol. 29, 1975, p. 974). Again we have Percy the

outsider, arguing against scientists and philosophers but not always with them, entering into the scholarly game but partly disdaining its rules. And some of those rules deserve closer observation than Percy gives them. There are dozens of footnotes in *The Message in the Bottle* and probably some hundreds of quotations or other direct references, yet not a single footnote gives a full citation for a single quote or attribution. There is a five-page bibliography, but it is a mere list, and we do not know of what precisely it is an account — of works consulted? of works which have influenced the author? positively? negatively? Percy brings a healthy skepticism to the work of "the experts," but a proper scholarly apparatus is at its best an author's acknowledgement of his readers' right to just such skepticism.

The defects of the book are curiously related to its strengths and undeniable attractions. Percy himself emphasizes the importance of the addressee for any adequate explanation of language as we actually use it. "The second person is required as an element not merely in the genetic event of learning language but as the indispensable and enduring condition of all symbolic behavior. The very act of symbolic formulation . . . is of its very nature a formulation for a *someone else*" (p. 200). "In judging a piece of news, everything depends on the situation of the hearer" (p. 131). "The real issue seems to be whether the utterances of . . . anyone . . . can be understood by a textual analysis which abstracts from the behavior of people who utter sounds to each other about one thing or another" (p. 312, cf. p. 248). Speech is not only *about* something (intentionality), it is *to* someone, who can also interpret and misinterpret (p. 251, 178). "Consciousness . . . means a knowing-with! . . . The *I think* is only made possible by a prior mutuality: *we name*" (pp. 274–275).

It is a fascinating theme and deserving of more extensive pursuit. What do the situation, thinking, and responses of my addressee — be he my closest friend or some unfamiliar reader of this review — have to do with

these *my* statements? with their character, style, honesty? with their very truth or falsity? Why is the assignment of true and false values to the bland assertions of logic textbooks such an exercise in inexistential inauthenticity? Because nobody talks that way! Because we do not go around making random, unrelated assertions in a sequence ordered by no principle other than increasing formal complexity. We make statements, rather, which answer questions, someone else's questions more often than not, and which are normally addressed to somebody. Unless, of course, we are touched by the milder insanities or some poetic inspiration. Lying is a common enough linguistic phenomenon whose ethical implications cannot be drawn in abstraction from the speaker and the person spoken to. And irony is a form of language in which the same "statement" is addressed in one sense to one listener and in quite a different sense to a second auditor who may be seated on the same couch with the first. And aphorism is a medium, like the oracle at Delphi, whose meaning depends upon the interpreter. Wrote Heraclitus: "The Lord, to whom belongs the oracle at Delphi, neither speaks, nor conceals, but gives a sign (*sēmaínei*)" (fr. 93) — and *we* are still in the process of determining the meaning of Heraclitus's utterance.

The aphorism has as often as not been the form of choice for the great philosophical outsiders from Heraclitus to Nietzsche. Feuerbach chose to write his best philosophical work in serial aphorisms as a visually emphatic protest against the overstructured edifice of Hegelian systematics. There are logical connections and sequences between the separate insights, but the very separateness of their form suggests that Hegel's philosophic palace is a structure of brilliant brick with faulty mortar. Pascal, having distinguished the *esprit de finesse* from the Cartesian-rationalist *esprit géométrique*, made that distinction the more palpable by writing disconnectedly brilliant *Pensées*.

Percy, too, is at his best when he conducts guerrilla warfare against the establishment(s) of linguists, logical positivists, and behaviorists, when he abandons mere mundane prose (the normal discourse of normal scholarship) for the aperçu and fleeting insight. He is more

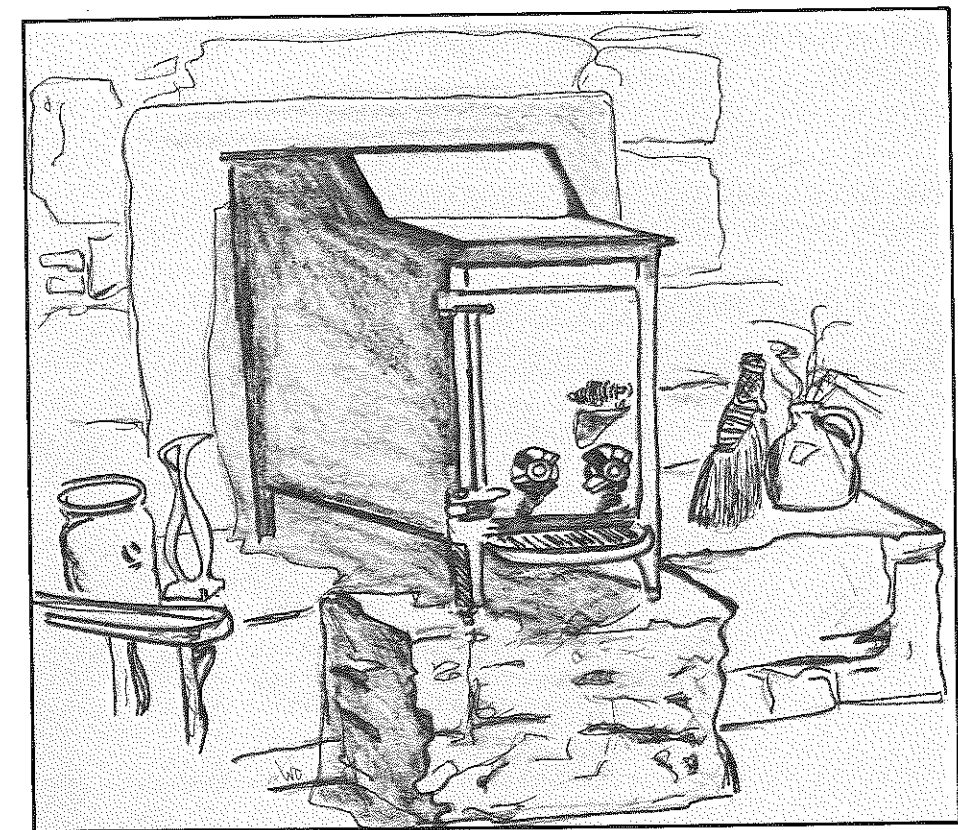
successful in identifying the problems and dissecting the solutions of others than in offering alternatives of his own. He does more in the way of telling us what an adequate philosophy of language should do than he does to tell us exactly how his philosophy of language accomplishes it. His case and cause are weakened when he engages in the conventional warfare. It is an ingenious twist when Percy replaces the accepted distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions with his own (or "the islanders'") differentiation of pieces of knowledge from pieces of news (pp. 122 ff.). But to this reviewer the message of "The Message in the Bottle" is the more effective as it is less blatantly philosophical or theological. (Would one could only *not* think of all the theological flatulencies generated by Samuel Beckett when reading the sentence: "The castaway is he who waits for news from across the seas" [p. 146].)

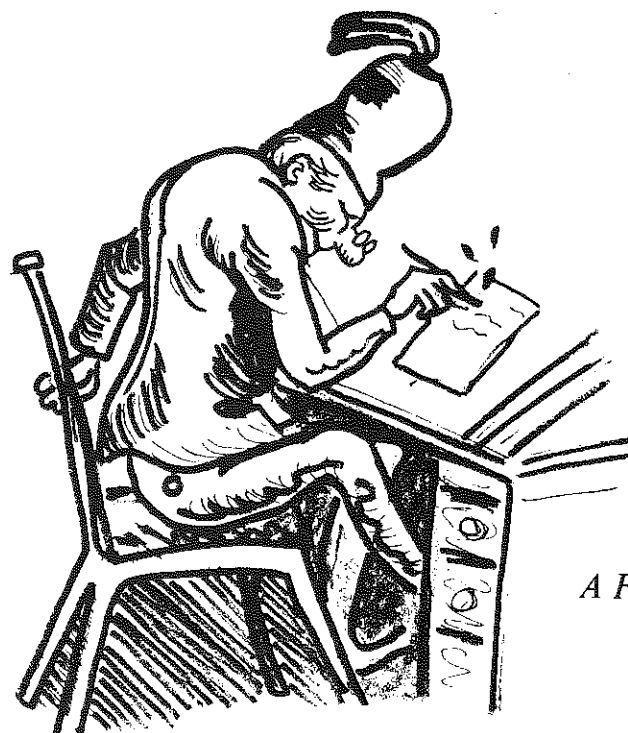
Percy is at his best when he poses questions and sports with paradox. "Why does man feel so bad in the twentieth century? . . . in the very age when . . . he has succeeded in satisfying his needs and making over the world for his own use?" (p. 3). "Why is a man apt to feel bad in . . . Short Hills, New Jersey . . . ?" (p. 4). "Why is it that the only time I ever saw my uncle happy during his entire life was the afternoon of December 7, 1941 . . . ?" (p. 4). "What is the difference between . . . a commuter who feels bad without knowing why, and another commuter who feels bad without knowing why but who begins to read a book about a man who feels bad without knowing why?" (pp. 4-5). "Why was . . . Jean-Paul Sartre, sitting in a French café and writing *Nausea* . . . the happiest man in France. . . ?" (p. 5). "Why is the metaphor *Flesh is grass*, which is not only wrong (flesh is not grass) but inappropriate (flesh is not even like grass), better and truer than the sentence *Flesh is mortal*, which is quite accurate and logical?" (p. 5). "Why is it that scientists have a theory about everything under the sun but do not have a theory of man? Is it possible that a theory of man is nothing more nor less than a theory of

the speaking creature?" (p. 8). "Why not look at [man] . . . as *Homo loquens*, man the talker, or *Homo symbolificus*, man the symbol-monger?" (p. 17). "In the very age when communication theory and technique reached its peak, poets and artists were saying that men were in fact isolated and no longer communicated with each other" (p. 25). "Man did not lose his self in the modern age but rather became incommunicado . . . , invisible. That is why people in the modern age took photographs by the million: to prove despite their deepest suspicions to the contrary that they were not invisible" (p. 26). "The truth is that man's capacity for symbol-

mongering in general and language in particular is so intimately part and parcel of his being human . . . that it is all but impossible for him to focus on the magic prism through which he sees everything else. In order to see it, one must be either a Martian, or, if an earthling, sufficiently detached, marooned, bemused, wounded, crazy, one-eyed. . . ." (p. 29).

There is much more of this — and it leads places. □





A FEW WORDS TO OUR READERS ABOUT:

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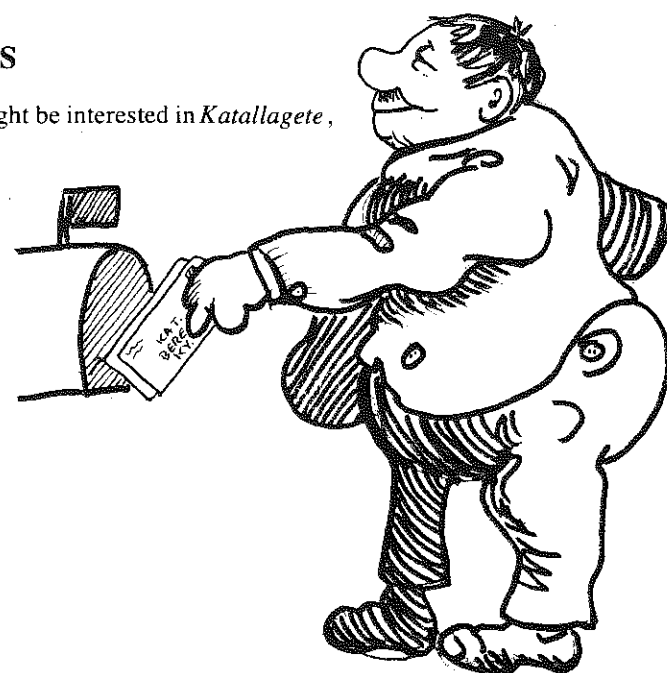
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physical well-being and accumulation of material goods, all other human requirements and characteristics of a subtler and higher nature, were left outside the area of attention of state and social systems, as if human life did not have any superior sense. That provided access for evil, of which in our days there is a free and constant flow. Mere freedom does not in the least solve all the problems of human life and it even adds a number of new ones.

God's creature

However, in early democracies, as in American democracy at the time of its birth, all individual human rights were granted because man is God's creature. That is, freedom was given to the individual conditionally, in the assumption of his constant religious responsibility. Such was the heritage of the preceding 1,000 years. Two hundred or even 50 years ago, it would have seemed quite impossible, in America, that an individual could be granted boundless freedom simply for the satisfaction of his instincts or whims. Subsequently, however, all such limitations were discarded everywhere in the west; a total liberation occurred from the moral heritage of Christian centuries with their great reserves of mercy and sacrifice. State systems were becoming increasingly and totally materialistic. The west ended up by truly enforcing human rights, sometimes even excessively, but man's sense of responsibility to God and society grew dimmer and dimmer. In the past decades, the legalistically selfish aspect of western approach and thinking has reached its final dimension and the world wound up in a harsh spiritual crisis and a political impasse. All the glorified technological achievements of Progress, including the conquest of outer space, do not redeem the 20th century's moral poverty which no one could imagine even as late as in the 19th century.

As humanism in its development became more and more materialistic, it made itself increasingly accessible to speculation and manipulation at first by socialism and then by Communism. So that Karl Marx was able to say in 1844 that "Communism is naturalised humanism."

This statement turned out to be not entirely senseless. One does see the same stones in the foundations of a despiritualised humanism and of any type of socialism: endless materialism; freedom from religion and religious responsibility, which under Communist regimes reach the stage of anti-religious dictatorship; concentration on social structures, with a seemingly scientific approach. (This is typical of the Enlightenment in the 18th century and of Marxism). Not by coincidence all of Communism's meaningless pledges and oaths are about Man, with a capital M, and his earthly happiness. At first glance it seems an ugly parallel: common traits in the thinking and way of life of today's west and today's east? But such is the logic of materialistic development.

more attractive and victorious, because it is more consistent. Humanism without its Christian heritage cannot resist such competition. We watch this process in the past centuries and especially in the past decades, on a world scale as the situation becomes increasingly dramatic. Liberalism was inevitably displaced by radicalism, radicalism had to surrender to socialism and socialism could never resist Communism. The Communist regime in the east could stand and grow due to the enthusiastic support from an enormous number of western intellectuals who felt a kinship and refused to see Communism's crimes. When they no longer could do so, they tried to justify them. In our eastern countries, Communism has suffered a complete ideological defeat; it is zero and less than zero. But western intellectuals still look at it with interest and with empathy, and this is precisely what makes it so immensely difficult for the west to withstand the east.

I am not examining here the case of a world war disaster and the changes which it would produce in society. As long as we wake up every morning under a peaceful sun, we have to lead an everyday life. There is a disaster, however, which has already been under way for quite some time. I am referring to the calamity of a despiritualised and irreligious humanistic consciousness.

The real crisis

To such consciousness, man is the touchstone in judging and evaluating everything on earth. Imperfect man who is never free of pride, self-interest, envy, vanity, and dozens of other defects. We are now experiencing the consequences of mistakes which had not been noticed at the beginning of the journey. On the way from the Renaissance to our days we have enriched our experience, but we have lost the concept of a Supreme Complete Entity which used to restrain our passions and our irresponsibility. We have placed too much hope in political and social reforms, only to find out that we were being deprived of the most precious possession: our spiritual life. In the east, it is destroyed by the dealings and machinations of the ruling party. In the west, commercial interests tend to suffocate it. This is the real crisis. The split in the world is less terrible than the similarity of the disease plaguing in main sections.

If humanism were right in declaring that man is born to be happy, he would not be born to die. Since his body is doomed to die, his task on earth evidently must be of a more spiritual nature. It cannot be unrestrained enjoyment of everyday life. It cannot be the search for the best ways to obtain material goods and then to enjoy them. It has to be the fulfillment of a permanent, earnest duty so that one's life journey may become an experience of moral growth, so that one may leave life a better human being than one started it. It is imperative to review the table of widespread human values. Its present incorrectness is astounding. It is not

performance be reduced to the question of how much money one makes or of unlimited availability of gasoline. Only voluntary inspired self-restraint can raise man above the world stream of materialism.

It would be retrogression to attach oneself today to the ossified formulas of the Enlightenment. Social dogmatism leaves us completely helpless in front of the trials of our times.

Even if we are spared destruction by war, our lives will have to change if we want to save life from self-destruction. We cannot avoid revising the fundamental definitions of human life and human society. Is it true that man is above everything? Is there no Superior Spirit above him? Is it right that man's life and society's activities have to be determined by material expansion in the first place? Is it permissible to promote such expansion to the detriment of our spiritual integrity?

If the world has not come to its end, it has approached a major turn in history, equal in importance to the turn from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. It will exact from us a spiritual upsurge, we shall have to rise to a new height of vision, to a new level of life where our physical nature will not be cursed as in the Middle Ages, but, even more importantly, our spiritual being will not be trampled upon as in the modern era.

This ascension will be similar to climbing onto the next anthropologic stage. No one on earth has any other way left but — upward.

Journal of the Committee of Southern Churchmen

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