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KATALLAGETE

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ORIGINAL CHILD BOMB

points for meditation to be scratched on the walls of a cave

THOMAS MERTON

KATALLAGETE

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Original Child Bomb: points for meditation to be scratched on the walls of a cave. Thomas Merton with Emil Antonucci's drawings on the theme. © 1962 The Abbey of Gethsemane. Permission granted 1981 from Trustees of Merton Legacy Trust.

1: In the year 1945 an Original Child was born. The name Original Child was given to it by the Japanese people, who recognized that it was the first of its kind.

2: On April 12th, 1945, Mr. Harry Truman became the President of the United States, which was then fighting the second world war. Mr. Truman was a vice president who became president by accident when his predecessor died of a cerebral hemorrhage. He did not know as much about the war as the president before him did. He knew a lot less about the war than many people did.

About one hour after Mr. Truman became president, his aides told him about a new bomb which was being developed by atomic scientists. They called it the "atomic bomb." They said scientists had been working on it for six years and that it had so far cost two billion dollars. They added that its power was equal to that of twenty thousand tons of TNT. A single bomb could destroy a city. One of those present added, in a reverent tone, that the new explosive might eventually destroy the whole world.

But Admiral Leahy told the President the bomb would never work.

3: President Truman formed a committee of men to tell him if this bomb would work, and if so, what he should do with it. Some members of this committee felt that the bomb would jeopardize the future of civilization. They were against its use. Others wanted it to be used in demonstration on a forest of cryptomeria trees, but not against a civil or military target. Many atomic scientists warned that the use of atomic power in war would be difficult and even impossible to control. The danger would be very great. Finally, there were others who believed that if the bomb were used just once or twice, on one or two Japanese cities, there would be no more war. They believed the new bomb would produce eternal peace.

4: In June 1945 the Japanese government was taking steps to negotiate for peace. On one hand the Japanese ambassador tried to interest the Russian government in acting as a go-between with the United States. On the other hand, an unofficial approach was made secretly through Mr. Allen Dulles in Switzerland. The Russians said they were not interested and that they would not negotiate. Nothing was done about the other proposal which was not official. The Japanese High Command was not in favor of asking for peace, but wanted to continue the war, even if the Japanese mainland were invaded. The generals believed that the war should continue until everybody was dead. The Japanese generals were professional soldiers.

5: In the same month of June, the President's committee decided that the new bomb should be dropped on a Japanese city. This would be a demonstration of the bomb on a civil and military target. As "demonstration" it would be a kind of a "show." "Civilians" all over the world love a good "show." The "destructive" aspect of the bomb would be "military."

6: The same committee also asked if America's friendly ally, the Soviet Union, should be informed of the atomic bomb. Someone suggested that this information would make the Soviet Union even more friendly than it was already. But all finally agreed that the Soviet Union was now friendly enough.

7: There was discussion about which city should be selected as the first target. Some wanted it to be Kyoto, an ancient capital of Japan and a center of the Buddhist religion. Others said no, this would cause bitterness. As a result of a chance conversation, Mr. Stimson, the Secretary of War, had recently read up on the history and beauties of Kyoto. He insisted that this city should be left untouched. Some wanted Tokyo to be the first target, but others argued that Tokyo had already been practically destroyed by fire raids and

could no longer be considered a "target." So it was decided Hiroshima was the most opportune target, as it had not yet been bombed at all. Lucky Hiroshima! What others had experienced over a period of four years would happen to Hiroshima in a single day! Much time would be saved, and "time is money!"

8: When they bombed Hiroshima they would put the following out of business: The Ube Nitrogen Fertilizer Company; the Ube Soda Company; the Nippon Motor Oil Company; the Sumitoma Chemical Company; the Sumitoma Aluminum Company; and most of the inhabitants.

9: At this time some atomic scientists protested again, warning that the use of the bomb in war would tend to make the United States unpopular. But the President's committee was by now fully convinced that the bomb had to be used. Its use would arouse the attention of the Japanese military class and give them food for thought.

10: Admiral Leahy renewed his declaration that the bomb would not explode.

11: On the 4th of July, when the United States in displays of fireworks celebrates its independence from British rule, the British and Americans agreed together that the bomb ought to be used against Japan.

12: On July 7th the Emperor of Japan pleaded with the Soviet Government to act as mediator for peace between Japan and the Allies. Molotov said the question would be "studied." In order to facilitate this "study" Soviet troops in Siberia prepared to attack the Japanese. The Allies had, in any case, been urging Russia to join the war against Japan. However, now that the atomic bomb was nearly ready, some thought it would be better if the Russians took a rest.

13: The time was coming for the new bomb to be tested, in the New Mexico desert. A name was chosen to designate this secret operation. It was called "Trinity."

14: At 5:30 A.M. on July 16th, 1945 a plutonium bomb was successfully exploded in the desert at Almagordo, New Mexico. It was suspended from a hundred foot steel tower which evaporated. There was a fireball a mile wide. The great flash could be seen for a radius of 250 miles. A blind woman miles away said she perceived light. There was a cloud of smoke 40,000 feet high. It was shaped like a toadstool.

15: Many who saw the experiment expressed their satisfaction in religious terms. A semi-official report even quoted a religious book —The New Testament, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." There was an atmosphere of devotion. It was a great act of faith. They believed the explosion was exceptionally powerful.

16: Admiral Leahy, still a "doubting Thomas," said that the bomb would not explode when dropped from a plane over a city. Others may have had "faith," but he had his own variety of "hope."

17: On July 21st a full written report of the explosion reached President Truman at Potsdam. The report was documented by pictures. President Truman read the report and looked at the pictures before starting out for the conference. When he left his mood was jaunty and his step was light.

18: That afternoon Mr. Stimson called on Mr. Churchill, and laid before him a sheet of paper bearing a code message about the successful test. The message read "Babies satisfactorily born." Mr. Churchill was quick to realize that there was more in this than met the eye. Mr. Stimson satisfied his legitimate curiosity.

19: On this same day sixty atomic scientists who knew of the test signed a petition that the bomb should not be used against Japan without a convincing warning and an opportunity to surrender.

At this time the U.S.S. Indianapolis, which had left San Francisco on the 18th, was sailing toward the Island of Tinian, with some U 235 in a lead bucket. The fissionable material was about the size of a softball, but there was enough for one atomic bomb. Instructions were that if the ship sank, the Uranium was to be saved first, before any life. The mechanism of the bomb was on board the U.S.S. Indianapolis, but it was not yet assembled.

20: On July 26th the Potsdam declaration was issued. An ultimatum was given to Japan: "Surrender unconditionally or be destroyed." Nothing was said about the new bomb. But pamphlets dropped all over Japan threatened "an enormous air bombardment" if the army would not surrender. On July 26th the U.S.S. Indianapolis arrived at Tinian and the bomb was delivered.

21: On July 28th, since the Japanese High Command wished to continue the war, the ultimatum was rejected. A censored version of the ultimatum appeared in the Japanese press with the comment that it was "an attempt to drive a wedge between the military and the Japanese people." But the Emperor continued to hope that the Russians, after "studying" his proposal, would help to negotiate a peace. On July 30th Mr. Stimson revised a draft of the announcement that was to be made after the bomb was dropped on the Japanese target. The statement was much better than the original draft.

22: On August 1st the bomb was assembled in an airconditioned hut on Tinian. Those who handled the bomb referred to it as "Little Boy." Their care for the Original Child was devoted and tender.

23: On August 2nd President Truman was the guest of His Majesty King George VI on board the H.M.S. Renown in Plymouth Harbor. The atomic bomb was praised. Admiral Leahy, who was present, declared that the bomb would not work. His Majesty George VI offered a small wager to the contrary.

24: On August 2nd a special message from the Japanese Foreign Minister was sent to the Japanese Ambassador in Moscow. "It is requested that further efforts be exerted . . . Since the loss of one day may result in a thousand years of regret, it is requested that you immediately have a talk with Molotov." But Molotov did not return from Potsdam until the day the bomb fell.

25: On August 4th the bombing crew on Tinian watched a movie of "Trinity" (the Almagordo Test). August 5th was a Sunday but there was little time for formal worship. They said a quick prayer that the war might end "very soon." On that day, Col. Tibbetts, who was in command of the B-29 that was to drop the bomb, felt that his bomber ought to have a name. He baptized it Enola Gay, after his mother in Iowa. Col. Tibbetts was a well balanced man, and not sentimental. He did not have a nervous breakdown after the bombing, like some of the other members of the crew.

26: On Sunday afternoon "Little Boy" was brought out in procession and devoutly tucked away in the womb of Enola Gay. That evening few were able to sleep. They were as excited as little boys on Christmas Eve.

27: At 1:37 A.M. August 6th the weather scout plane took off. It was named the Straight Flush, in reference to the mechanical action of a water closet. There was a picture of one, to make this evident.

28: At the last minute before taking off Col. Tibbetts changed the secret radio call sign from "Visitor" to "Dimples." The Bombing Mission would be a kind of flying smile.

29: At 2:45 A.M. Enola Gay got off the ground with difficulty. Over Iwo Jima she met her escort, two more B-29s, one of which was called the Great Artiste. Together they proceeded to Japan.

30: At 6:40 they climbed to 31,000 feet, the bombing altitude. The sky was clear. It was a perfect morning.

31: At 3:09 they reached Hiroshima and started the bomb run. The city was full of sun. The fliers could see the green grass in the gardens. No fighters rose up to meet them. There was no flak. No one in the city bothered to take cover.

32: The bomb exploded within 100 feet of the aiming point. The fireball was 18,000 feet across. The temperature at the center of the fireball was 100,000,000 degrees. The people who were near the center became nothing. The whole city was blown to bits and the ruins all caught fire instantly everywhere, burning briskly. 70,000 people were killed right away or died within a few hours. Those who did not die at once suffered great pain. Few of them were soldiers.

33: The men in the plane perceived that the raid had been successful, but they thought of the people in the city and they were not perfectly happy. Some felt they had done wrong. But in any case they had obeyed orders. "It was war."

34: Over the radio went the code message that the bomb had been successful: "Visible effects greater than Trinity... Proceeding to Papacy." Papacy was the code name for Tinian.

35: It took a little while for the rest of Japan to find out what had happened to Hiroshima. Papers were forbidden to publish any news of the new bomb. A four line item said that Hiroshima had been hit by incendiary bombs and added: "It seems that some damage was caused to the city and its vicinity."

36: Then the military governor of the Prefecture of Hiroshima issued a proclamation full of martial spirit. To all the people without hands, without feet, with their faces falling off, with their intestines hanging out, with their whole bodies full of radiation, he declared: "We must not rest a single day in our war effort... We must bear in mind that the annihilation of the stubborn enemy is our road to revenge." He was a professional soldier.

37: On August 8th Molotov finally summoned the Japanese Ambassador. At last neutral Russia would give an answer to the Emperor's inquiry. Molotov said coldly that the Soviet Union was declaring war on Japan.

38: On August 9th another bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, though Hiroshima was still burning. On August 11th the Emperor overruled his high command and accepted the peace terms dictated at Potsdam. Yet for three days discussion continued, until on August 14th the surrender was made public and final.

39: Even then the Soviet troops thought they ought to fight in Manchuria "just a little longer." They felt that even though they could not, at this time, be of help in Japan, it would be worth while if they displayed their good will in Manchuria, or even in Korea.

40: As to the Original Child that was now born, President Truman summed up the philosophy of the situation in a few words. "We found the bomb" he said "and we used it."

41: Since that summer many other bombs have been "found." What is going to happen? At the time of writing, after a season of brisk speculation, men seem to be fatigued by the whole question.

FROM PAUL TO FLANNERY O'CONNOR WITH THE POWER OF GRACE

And Jesus went on with his disciples
to the villages of Caesarea Philippi;
and on the way
he asked his disciples
"Who do people say
that I am?"
And they told him,
"John the Baptist;
and others say Elijah;
and others one of the prophets."
And he asked them
"But you,
who do you say
that I am?"
Peter answered him,
"You are the Christ,
God's Messiah."

In the light of the good news consider a letter written by Martin Buber in 1926. Martin Buber was a truly majestic figure in the twentieth century: German Jewish philosopher, a translator of the Scriptures. In 1926 he wrote a letter to the editor of a German newspaper, in which he addressed the Christian confession with characteristic clarity and precision.

In the perspective of my own faith the word spoken by Peter at Caesarea Philippi was sincere but nevertheless untrue; and its repetition over the centuries has not brought it any closer to the truth. . . . According to my faith it is not the case that the Messiah has appeared in a definite moment of history, but rather his appearance can only mark the end of history. In the perspective of my faith the redemption of the world did not happen nineteen centuries ago. On the contrary, we still live in an unredeemed world. . . .

Is this letter an attack on the Church by a friend and teacher? Hardly! It is a serious challenge. Notice the philosopher's simple and clean line of reasoning: a: we still live in an unredeemed world; b: from this fact it is clear that the Messiah has not yet come; and c: thus, the church's confession of Jesus as the Christ, God's Messiah, however sincere, is, in fact, untrue. One hardly needs to say these words are not idle words. One ponders them. They are not idle words because they are also words not far from the lips of every one of us. We do live in an unredeemed world, and the consequences of that have to be weighed seriously.

For most of us who have been seized by the confession of the Church, abandoning that confession is not a genuine option. The consequence is to realize that the Church has to live, as it has always lived, having on its hands, so to speak, both the magnificent triumphalism of the Hallelujah Chorus, and a world staggering under the loads of poverty and dehumanization. That brings us to the necessary question: What does it mean to have inherited both the triumphant Hallelujah Chorus and the suffering world?

Christian theology is born with that question. Indeed the history of Christian thought is the history of attempts to come to terms with that question.

Over the stretch of twenty centuries two answers have dominated, and each of them has been formulated—in part—by drawing quotations from the Bible, and especially Paul. The first is the answer of *otherworldliness*. One can confess Jesus as the Messiah in the midst of the unredeemed world because it was never God's intention to redeem this world. Thus Colossians 3:1-2

*If then you have been raised with Christ,
seek the things that are above, where
Christ is. . . .
Set your minds on things that are above,
not on things that are on earth.*

The second of the dominant answers is that of *thisworldliness*. To confess Jesus as the Messiah in the midst of the unredeemed world is to pledge oneself to work for the Kingdom of God on Earth—Philippians 2:12

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*. . . work out your own
salvation with fear
and trembling; . . .*

Since both answers are made by invoking passages from Paul's letters, doubts remain that either option taken by itself is Paul's. The doubts send us back to Paul's letters.



We come to Paul as he preaches in Corinth; he takes one of the ancient scrolls, that of Isaiah, and, being a well-educated interpreter, he carefully quotes:

God says, 'At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and on the day of salvation I have helped you' (Is. 49:8).

Then, laying the scroll aside, he gives his interpretation in an arresting voice: "Look! Now is the acceptable time! Look! Now is the day of salvation." (II Cor. 6:2)

Impressive words. Most impressive to the Christians at Corinth. In the light of Buber's challenge, however, we begin our conversation with Paul by lodging a serious protest. "You have used the word 'Look!' Paul; well, 'looking' the real world straight in the eye, from Calcutta to Harlem, to Seoul, Hebron, Buenos Aires, Tehran, Bagdad, Oberammergau, if anything is obvious, it is that now is *not* the day of salvation." In a word, we must begin by charging Paul with poor "reality testing". Buber at our elbow, we give Paul an "F" on his exegesis paper.

The Apostle is disconcertingly unimpressed, and certainly not silenced. We may imagine that he responds by uttering initially a single word—*apocalypse*—and then by filling out at some length his *apocalyptic* perspective. It follows that if we are going to converse with Paul, rather than cite him in support of our own insights, we are going to have to come to terms with the *strange world of Pauline apocalyptic*.

Apocalypse is a Greek word which our English-speaking forebears and we ourselves have traditionally rendered by the term "revelation." It is, I suspect, one of the results of the Vietnam War that the Greek word has been introduced into the popular levels of our language from the Best-Seller lists and into theatre marquees. And that is an interesting development, for one of the major things to be said about apocalyptic, not least in Paul's letters, is that it draws quite essentially on *images of war* (I draw here upon the dissertation by Barbara Hall at Union Theological Seminary, New York).

In Paul's apocalyptic, as in war, there are two opposing sides, the Old Age and the New Age.

Old Age	New Age
orb of evil of sin	space of grace orb of life
sphere under power of Satan, the rulers of this age	sphere under power of God, Christ is Lord
slavery; death (similar in some ways to status quo)	freedom; life "New Creation" (the truly new)

Here, the imagery of apocalyptic war presupposes a *provisional eschatological dualism*.

As in war, so in apocalypse, two sides are dynamically interrelated. It would be a serious mistake to link them simply with heaven and earth, as though the New Age were statically existent *up there*, and the Old Age statically existent *down here*. Apocalyptic is not a matter of metaphysical transcendentalism, or of static polarization. On the apocalyptic landscape there is always *movement*, and for that reason the English word "revelation" is an inadequate translation of the Greek term *apocalypse*.

To be sure, given the etymology of the Greek term *apocalypse* (an uncovering or unveiling) our English word is reasonably selected, being derived from the Latin *revelare*, to unveil (opposite *velare*, to veil). Thus, when we speak of revelation, we think of an image of the drawing back of a curtain, resulting in the exposure of something previously hidden behind the curtain. There are elements of Paul's apocalyptic which can be related to that image (e.g. the picture Paul paints in I Cor. 2:6-16 draws partly on apocalypse as unveiling). On the whole, however, the image of an uncovering or unveiling is woefully inadequate as an attempt to interpret Paul's apocalyptic. Paul's view is focused instead on the image of a dynamic *invasion*. This *invasion* inaugurates the movement on the apocalyptic landscape.

The issue is critical in Paul's letters. What has been made visible is not some *thing* previously enclosed behind curtains, now revealed by pulling the curtains aside. Rather, the *One* who has been on the other side rips the curtain apart, steps through to our side, altering irrevocably our time and space.

It may help to recall Jesus' parable about the binding of the strong man:

No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house.

Mark 3:27

Here Jesus interprets the powers of demon exorcism active in him, and he does so by drawing on the war-like imagery of apocalyptic (note particularly the verb *deo* "to bind;" Rev. 20:2). Those powers are the powers of God's New Age; they are invading the "house" of the Old Age, binding the Satanic Strong Man who is the major power of that Age, freeing human beings from his grasp.

The same image of invasion informs Paul's apocalyptic, as one can see in the ease with which he uses interchangeably the verbs "to be revealed," "to come," and "to be sent" (Gal 3:19-4:7). Paul's thought predicates that the coming of Christ has unleashed a cosmic conflict, indeed *the* cosmic conflict. That happens with the coming of Christ, the *apocalypse* of Christ, the invasion of Christ.

Here we pause: Given his eschatological dualism and war-like invasion, we ask, what is coming next in Paul's apocalyptic? One thinks, for example, that he might speak of the two ages and then call for a *decision*. The two ages could be thought of as two *options*, a variant form of the ancient teaching of "the two ways." "Will you go with the one or with the other?"

Paul does not speak in this way. The language of repentance, for example, is nearly absent in Paul's letters. The notion of the two ages locked in combat because the New Age is invading the Old Age does not cause Paul to issue a general call to repentance.

Nor is that invasion a matter of opening up new *possibilities* for human beings, so that humanity is encouraged, as we say, to "realize their potentials." In the apocalyptic war as Paul sees it, the focus is not on options and possibilities. Rather, as in all wars, the focus is on *power*, and in the first instance the power question is posed because, as we have seen, the coming of Christ, the *apocalypse* of Christ, is the powerful invasion of Christ.

It follows that the basic characteristic of the present time is given in the fact that it is the *juncture* of the ages. To use a spacial image, it is the arena in which there is an *interpenetration of the two ages* in a kind of jungle warfare. The *now* about which Paul speaks as the now of salvation, that now is the redemptive now *because* it is the now of God's apocalyptic war, *not* the now of a retreat from the real world. The *real* cosmos is not a harmony, but the scene of *war*. The area in which we now find ourselves is hotly contested territory; individual battles are sometimes won, and sometimes lost. Whoever forgets this invites repeated experiences of disillusionment.

Finally, however individual battles may go, truly perceived, this apocalyptic war is a war whose outcome is not in question. In Paul's letters there is never a hint that God will lose.

Here we encounter the time-honored linking of apocalyptic with the matter of vision. You can notice this by studying the ways in which Paul uses verbs of perception: to see, to know, to discern. In this linking two issues are at stake: (1) whether one sees this peculiar apocalyptic war at all; (2) whether one sees its ultimate outcome. The first of these is an issue because battles between the two ages are almost never "public events" in the normal meaning of that expression. That is, the "battles" that concern Paul rarely make CBS Evening News. To say it another way, these battles are not fully visible with the naked eye. Why not? Because the invasion is not demonstrable in categories of the Old Age or with the means of perception native to the Old Age. The inbreaking is itself revelation, *apocalypse*. That event brings about an epistemological crisis, a crisis in the way one sees and perceives.

If we are to converse with Paul, we are required to speak of *bi-focal vision*, an expression not found, of course, in Paul's letters, but one which may help us to understand his letters. The dictionary defines "bi-focal," as regards eyeglasses, as a lens having two portions, one for near vision, one for far vision. In order to find a metaphor helpful to our interpretation of Paul, we will have to imagine looking *simultaneously* through both of these lenses. Looking in that manner would cause you to see *everything* in another perspective.

To see bi-focally in Paul's terms is to see both the Old Age and God's invading New Age. It is an understatement to say that a crucial difference lies before us here: the difference between uni-focal vision, in which one sees on a single level, and bi-focal vision, in which one is *given* the grace, the power, to see simultaneously, two levels.

Transport yourself for a moment to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, on an evening in the month of May, 1963. Black people are in the middle of a struggle for one aspect of liberation in Birmingham. They come each evening to the church. On the evening in question, God has been invoked, prayers offered, hymns sung, with the contagious emotions found in the midst of struggle. Now it is time to hear from the visitors who have flown in during the afternoon. One of these is a greatly and justly loved figure from the sports world. He begins his speech by remarking, "You people are doing a great thing here in Birmingham." At this one hears a few feet shuffling back and forth. After three or four sentences he says again, "It is a great thing you people are doing here." Shuffling of the feet, to which is added a few clearings of the throat. Several sentences later he returns to what is now obviously his theme. "The whole world has its eyes fixed on you, because you are doing a great thing here in Birmingham." Now, shuffling of the feet and clearing of the throat will no longer suffice. One of the old deacons interrupts the speaker, politely but firmly, calling out, "We're not doing this! *God* is doing this!!"

What does one make of such a remark? Is the deacon uttering a pious otherworldly platitude? Hardly! He has been on his feet in the struggle all day. We have here one of those moments in which uni-focal vision is met by and corrected by bi-focal vision. The deacon is simply saying that the *real* struggle in Birmingham is a struggle in God's apocalyptic war; that the *full* contours of this struggle can be seen only in the bi-focal vision concentrated on what *God* is doing in the world. However this or that individual battle may go, the ultimate outcome of God's war is not in question.

Similarly, Paul's perspective links *apocalyptic* to *vision* not in order to gaze into heaven in a mystic trance, but to bear witness that *God* has begun the apocalyptic war by striking the *decisive blow* in *Jesus Christ*, thus making certain that the ultimate future of the world is the future of Christ, the corporate One of the New Age.

We must pause to find our bearings. Paul's vision of God's apocalyptic warfare is impressive. But does it reach all the way as an answer to Buber's challenge? I think not. The issue of the unredeemed world is not yet fully addressed. In a word, whoever will preach apocalyptic Good News in an unredeemed world by using the word "*Look!*" will have to do so with his index finger firmly extended, as Grunewald's John the Baptist pointing to the crucified Christ. As Paul preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ, where does he point?

When one follows the line of Paul's index finger, one sees that the *whole* of the apocalyptic theatre takes its bearings from the Cross. The Cross is no timeless symbol; for Paul the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is *itself apocalypse*, revelation.

There are two dimensions to the crucifixion of God's Messiah seen as invading revelation, as *apocalypse*. First, the crucifixion speaks to the question of the *nature* of the world's unredemption. Against the background of apocalyptic war, Paul sees Jesus' death to be *the* death on the battlefield, and that means that it is from Jesus' death that one finds the real battlefield. Consider for a moment the old question, Who crucified Christ? New Testament scholars have given various answers, involving the Roman soldiers, the Temple police, Pilate, and perhaps the Sanhedrin. The answers are various, but they are all thisworldly, all unifocal. Paul passes through the midst of such answers by saying apocalyptically, "The rulers of *this age* . . . crucified the Lord of glory" (I Cor. 2:8). From Paul's thoroughly apocalyptic answer one sees that in the crucifixion God meets on the battlefield not the Jews, not the Sanhedrin, not even the Romans, but rather *Satan* and his hosts, who act, no doubt, *in* and *through* and *on* human beings, but who are scarcely reducible to some discrete human group or individual. When the crucifixion of God's Messiah is seen as *the* event of God's *apocalypse*, the forces of oppression and dehumanization which cause our world to remain unredeemed are not to be explained away as the result of human ill-will.

One is reminded of Emil Brunner, lecturing at Wellesley College not long after World War II, not long after the horrors of the holocaust. In the course of his lecture, he referred several times to the Devil. In the question period a student asked him why he should have mentioned the Devil. Here was a polite question, behind which lay the recognition that we live in "the scientific age." Brunner's response: "I have referred to the Devil for two reasons, first because I find that he plays a very important role in Scripture, and second because I have seen him."

That response brings us back to the matter of bi-focal vision. When the crucifixion of God's Messiah is seen as the center of God's invading revelation, the battlefield is defined in ways that probe the mystery of cosmic evil, rather than in the reductionistic perspective that is focused on the ill will, the misconduct, the immorality, of this or that individual or community.

Moreover, the Cross, God's invading *apocalypse*, speaks to the question of *power*. It is a truism that there is no issue in our time more crucial than this

question of power. For Christians facing the unredeemed world, the question of power becomes again and again the question. Wherein does the power lie for the overcoming of those cosmic forces of evil revealed in the crucifixion?

Christians and others tend to answer the question of power with one or another form of "Law." But learning lessons about "Law" formally, we have changed the content, the vocabulary of "Law." We no longer talk about "Law" as Paul did; everyone today is a "reformer." We talk instead about politics, procedures, programs, materials and methods. We assume that the world's un-redemption is its ill-will and immorality. Our antidote is "effectiveness" in programs and politics, materials and methods and money to redeem the un-redeemed world. Ignoring Paul's accounting of "Law," we have accepted the world's agenda on the human condition and we are trapped by a new legalism.

The crucifixion of God's Called One—the nailing of Jesus to splintery pieces of wood—seen as God's invading apocalypse speaks in an utterly different way to the question of power. We say to Paul, "Look! From Harlem to Westchester to the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates, the oppressed are crying out for change, for liberation, for transformation, and we must find the power by which genuine change, liberation, and transformation can be brought about!" Paul responds: "The people are indeed crying out. I myself cry out: Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?" (II Cor. 11:29) "But look," Paul continues, "God is neither indifferent nor powerless. There is a word, *one* Word, which has the *new* power *genuinely* to change, liberate, transform, and that is the word of the *Cross*."

A strange Word with a stranger power. It is neither a word addressed to the will of the individual, exhorting her or him to do this or that. Nor is it a contingent word, laying down conditions that humans must obey if there is to be a movement toward human betterment. The word that is God's power is the *indicative* word of the Cross as the apocalypse of God's *grace*.

Romans 5:8

It was God who showed his love for us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

Romans 5:10

...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. . . .

A mystery, the crucifixion is God's war in our favor, the event of his powerful invading grace,

uncontingent on the fulfilling of a single presupposition from our side. On the apocalyptic battlefield Christ's death is *for* those who are *under* the power of Sin, and that means for *all* of us. Paul can even say, therefore, that in Christ's death God is the one who rectifies the *ungodly* (Rom. 4:5). Here is the *power* of God's grace: that Christ did not die for the righteous, for the morally acceptable, for the noble of heart. Indeed Paul even sees in the crucifixion that Christ did not die for those who believe. Neither Christian faith nor faith of any sort is a presupposition to God's invading *apocalypse* of love in the crucifixion of the Messiah. On the contrary, the crucifixion is God's revelation of that gift of grace that, not assuming or presupposing faith, calls faith into existence.

But is this event of unconditional grace *the power* in the face of which the forces of evil are in fact deeply vulnerable? God's gift of grace in Jesus Christ often seems passive and weak.

Return in your imagination to Montgomery, Alabama in the winter of 1955-56. You remember the general scene: Mrs. Rosa Parks has said "No!," she has been arrested; the bus boycott is on. You recall the sequence in the Montgomery City Hall and in the Chamber of the City Commissioners. On one side of the table leaders of the black community; on the other side leaders of the white community.

The game played in this room is the *power game*. But what makes the scene fascinating is that across the table from one another, looking one another full in the face, are *two kinds* of power. The power of the "city fathers" is revealed to be the power of the Old Age, the power that is built solidly on the old principle of *quid pro quo*, this for that. The game played by this Old Age power is a game set up for those who think they have the *quid* and who play at the expense of those who do not. Moreover, a major stratagem of this Old-Age power is that of convincing everyone that this is the only kind of power; to combat it successfully you have to beat it *at its own game*.

The scene is fascinating because the power on the other side of the table does not accept this agenda. There is power of a different order. What makes this power truly different and what makes it in the long run invincible is not visible to Old-Age eyes. What makes this a different power is its root and vitality in the graceful, *uncontingent* love of God revealed in the crucifixion of his Son.

In this scene the *weapon of God's grace* comes clear. What is *powerful* against the hosts of evil is not sociological analysis, educational strategy, behavior modification, but the unconditional grace in the Cross of Christ, grace known by Rosa Parks and her sisters and brothers, as they sing into the face of the unredeemed world,

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see!

See that in the literal crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth God invades without a single "if." Not "if" you repent. Not "if" you learn. Not even "if" you believe. The absence of the little word, "if," the *uncontingent*, *prevenient*, invading nature of God's grace shows God to be the power and victorious Advocate of the entire race of human beings. This is *Paul's* grasp of the name Immanuel, *God with us*.

Flannery O'Connor's story "Revelation" reminds us forcefully that she was gifted with a sense of humor far superior to that of Paul. Her admirers seem to enjoy reading her stories an indefinite number of times, claiming new insights with each reading. Yet, for many readers, Flannery's novels and short stories are problematic, even grossly offensive.

They are so, I suppose, on three major counts. They are overpopulated, to say the least, with grotesque characters. We encounter a Bible salesman prowling about, looking for girls with wooden legs! These grotesque characters are responsible for highly bizarre plot developments. And Flannery's stories often seem to have no point *beyond* the grotesque and bizarre. In short, the images seem to be the message; the images are so often unpleasant, one suspects that the message is unpleasant, and that one might do well to repair to Anthony Trollope and the Victorians.

If you have read into the recent collection of O'Connor's letters, *The Habit of Being* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux), you will recall that after the appearance of her early stories, some of her kinfolk wrote to her mother suggesting that she use the motherly office, as it were, to inform Flannery that the real world contains *some* nice people, and why couldn't she write stories about them. Flannery's response to the kinfolks' instructive letters was an air of amusement. Two questions: What is the *real* world? and *How* is that real world to be represented in fiction? Her own answers to these questions explain her use of the grotesque.

Flannery speaks of the writer whose *concern for realism* causes him to lean away from *typical social patterns* toward the grotesque as it may convey mystery and the unexpected. She notes that what *this unrealistic writer* sees on the surface will be of interest to him only as he can go through it into an experience of mystery itself. Thus far we might conclude that we are in touch with the expected: a talented writer's respect for the power of metaphor.

Another of Flannery's remarks hints, however,

that she may intend to point to something more than metaphor. She continues,

the writer of grotesque fiction is looking for one image that will connect or combine or embody two points; one is a point in the concrete, and the other is a point not visible to the naked eye, but believed in by this writer firmly, just as real to him, really, as the one that everybody sees

(*Mystery and Manners*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, page 42)

Bearing in mind the way in which she worked out these images in her stories, you will look a long time before you will find a novelist speaking more clearly of the germ of the apocalyptic perspective. Read the whole of her essay on "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction," and substitute the word "apocalyptic" for "grotesque."

In any case, Flannery O'Connor was no less aware than Paul of the *link* between apocalyptic and bi-focal vision. Grotesque characters, she observes, seem to carry an invisible burden. Or changing the image slightly, she notes that the prophetic vision (which for her is a vision conveyed in the doings of grotesque characters) is a matter of seeing *near things* with their extensions of meanings, and thus of seeing *far things* close up. The *real world* emerges, she believed, in this kind of exaggerated, distorted, but also and fundamentally bi-focal vision.

There is more to support the thesis that what we have here goes *beyond* metaphor. Not only do we find the bi-focal vision of apocalyptic, but also apocalyptic's *dynamism*. There is no static polarization in Flannery O'Connor's stories, but rather always *movement* on the grotesque, apocalyptic landscape. Fundamentally it is the movement of *invasion*. "I have found," she says, "from reading my own writing that the subject of my fiction is the *action of grace in territory held largely by the devil*" (*Mystery and Manners*, page 118). Here again, one can scarcely avoid being reminded of Paul.

Flannery's story, "Revelation" gives evidence for this judgement (pp. 191-218 in *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux). The *word of revelation* comes to Mrs. Turpin in the doctor's waiting room (that setting no accident!), growled at her by a young woman of the region, fat and horribly acned, a student at Wellesley College reading a textbook, *Human Development*. Mrs. Turpin's sweet demeanor, her banalities and moralisms of the "paternal liberal" in the setting of the Deep South, provoke the girl to hurl the textbook at Mrs. Turpin, herself obese, but in her own words of "a good disposition." Mrs. Turpin hears the girl's *word of revelation* "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog," as the girl physically assaults Mrs. Turpin and chaos

follows in the doctor's office. It happens that Mrs. Turpin and her husband Claud raise hogs.

The word of revelation "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog" is not simply a disclosure, an unveiling. On the contrary, it is an event of powerful *invasion*. To use another image, this word of revelation is a cruciform fish-hook which makes its way into Mrs. Turpin's ample flesh, and she cannot shake it off. It is a disclosure *because* it is an invasion which has *power*, the power to transform Mrs. Turpin's world. Where does this power lie? First in the grotesque image, the image of Mrs. Turpin as a wart hog. This image functions on several levels. On one, it points to our unredeemed world, exhibiting it for what it is, a "pig parlor" (the Turpins have on their farm a pen for their hogs called the "pig parlor"). That is, the world *is* a world of hogs. On another level this grotesque image of Mrs. Turpin as a hog—indeed, a wart hog—points to the crucifixion as *an event*: the violent *action* of grace into territory held largely by the devil.

The final scene at the Turpin's pig parlor: they regularly hose down their hogs, "seven long-snouted bristly shoats. . . and an old sow a few weeks off from farrowing. . . lying on her side grunting. . . the shoats. . . running about shaking themselves like idiot children, their little slit pig eyes searching the floor for anything left."

Mrs. Turpin hoses down the hogs. Who is Mrs. Turpin now? She is, of course, the grotesque figure in a bizarre scene, no less ugly than she was in the doctor's waiting room, and in surroundings no less bizarre. *But now* (Romans 3:21: . . . *but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it*) Mrs. Turpin's space, her world, her very self, have been invaded by the terrible, crucifying, fish-hook shaped word of revelation. That word, God's *weapon* of grace, inaugurates the conflict in cosmic terms, portrayed by the ending of Flannery's story. Forces in Mrs. Turpin now *fight* against the invading word of revelation. As this grotesque figure struggles against God's uncontingent grace, wrestling Jacob-like with the word of revelation, Mrs. Turpin poses the question of the bi-focal vision of apocalyptic: shouting at God, she demands to know, "How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?"

The end of the story confirms Flannery's bi-focal vision and the question it poses.

There is first the near vision of the hogs:

Mrs. Turpin stood there. . . all her muscles *rigid*. . . Then like a monumental statue *coming to life*, she bent her head slowly and gazed, as if through the

very heart of the mystery, *down* into the pig parlor at the hogs. They had settled all in one corner around the old sow who was grunting softly. A red glow suffused them. They appeared to pant *with a secret life* (*Everything That Rises Must Converge*, page 217. Italics added).

Secret life in hogs? What is that secret life? Flannery portrays it not only in the *near vision* of the hogs but also in the *far vision* of the vast horde of beings: the *far vision* consummates the cosmic conflict. It brings about the crucifixion of Mrs. Turpin's world:

Until the sun slipped finally behind the tree line, Mrs. Turpin remained there with her gaze bent to them as if she were absorbing some abysmal life-giving knowledge. At last she lifted her head. There was only a purple streak in the sky, cutting through a field of crimson and leading, like an extension of the highway, into the descending dusk. She raised her hands from the side of the pen in a gesture hieratic and profound. A visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away. She lowered her hands and gripped the rail of the hog pen, her eyes small but fixed unblinkingly on what lay ahead. In a moment the vision faded but she remained where she was, immobile.

At length she got down and turned off the faucet and made her slow way on the darkening path to the house. In the woods around her the invisible cricket choruses had struck up, but what she heard were the voices of the souls climbing upward into the starry field and shouting hallelujah (*Everything That Rises Must Converge*, pp. 217-218).

That final vision is loss of cosmos, for in that vision (a vision of tax collectors and prostitutes "preceding you" into the Kingdom of the God who rectifies the ungodly). Mrs. Turpin's carefully ordered world is *attacked* by God's uncontingent grace, *destroyed* by God's grace, and *re-created* by God's grace. But notice that the bi-focal vision, made up of the *near vision* and of the *far vision*, does not cause a hog to be not a hog. The concrete

point is still there. The invading grace of the bi-focal vision causes a hog to be from hell and saved too! And the vision has *power* to do that. The out-working of the crucifixion in that terrible word of revelation uttered to Mrs. Turpin is the uncontingent invasion of God's grace *on God's own terms*. Here the action of God's grace in territory held by the devil takes place in the crucifying word of revelation.

Paul would have said:

It is unthinkable that I should boast in anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ in which the cosmos was crucified to me and I to the cosmos.
(Gal. 6:14)

For Flannery O'Connor, no less than for Paul, the crucifixion is the invading apocalypse of God's unconditional grace which brings us to life in the

midst of death.

So the challenge of Martin Buber, the apocalyptic witness of Paul, and the apocalyptic fiction of Flannery O'Connor flow together to leave us with the question: Where are you in this apocalyptic, cosmic conflict? The form of the question is not where *should* you be, but where *are* you? The answer is as clear as the question: Look! God has placed you in His struggle for redemption, the ultimate outcome of which is not in question. As Karl Barth put it once, "They may rattle the bolt but they will not break down the door." By the invading *power* of his unconditional grace, without a single *if* God has placed you in the front lines of his apocalyptic war of redemption, so that in the power of his unconditional grace you may fight the only *good* fight in the world, the fight of the God who is the Passionate Advocate of each one of us □



THE DILEMMA OF DEADLY FORCE

We have Acton's word for it that power tends to corrupt—a truth not very startling anymore. But behind that axiom lies a harsher truth, harder to grasp, that power tends to enfeeble. Strength weakens.

Take, as parable, the schoolyard bully. His power, if daily exerted, is wasted. One battle just earns him another. His supremacy is never established because it is always in the process of establishment. On the other hand, if his reputation for preeminence allows him to boss others around without actually fighting out each concession, his power tends to atrophy, even as the demonstration of it fades in the minds of his "subjects." While they grow more willing to call his bluff, he becomes less able to back it. Yet this condition must be extended as long as possible. The first law of conservation, so far as power goes, is to achieve the effect of using it without actually using it.

For political leaders that often means, "Don't dispute your mandate." To which critics respond, "If you don't use it, it can hardly be called a mandate at all." President Eisenhower was condemned for not risking his popularity by doing anything beyond being popular. Yet many believe true power is power held in reserve; it must contract itself to preserve itself.

Still, once self-preservation becomes the rule of power, that priority enfeebles its holder, who becomes so afraid of losing it that he ceases to use it. Power contracted is, in the long run, power diminished.

If contraction of power enfeebles, then expansion of power must be its proper use. It must exert itself outside itself to be a power in more than name. But here, too, there is a logic that makes power undo itself. Power expanded becomes, at a certain point, power diffused.

That paradox intrigued Edward Gibbon in his study of the Roman Empire. He came to believe, of the whole imperial effort, what he observed in the career of the Emperor Maximus: that "his success was the immediate cause of his destruction." As

Rome pushed onto the rim of empire, her resources were spread ever thinner while "the increased circle must be involved in a larger sphere of hostility." The empire is challengeable around its wide perimeter, where a small concentration of alien power can break the circle, puncture myth. The entirety is at stake at each isolable point along the rim.

America gave us an example of that quandary at the end of World War II. Having fought a total war to conditional surrender, we hoped to impose total peace on our terms, rectifying our remiss conduct after World War I. (We had demanded total surrender to give us a "clean slate" for remaking Europe.) It was a proud dream, and it seemed realizable. After all, we were the most powerful nation in the history of the world. We had cracked the universe's secret of power, the very structure of matter. Our enemies were crushed. Our allies (including Russia) were crippled, invaded, indebted. Who could defy us?

Yet two years later we were so fearful that President Truman imposed more severe security restrictions than had existed during the war itself. The CIA was created to do secret war where our overt mandate was defied. Someone was "losing" China, as we had lost Eastern Europe—surely by foul play, since no one could resist our power's eminence in a fair contest. A panic set in, and grew steadily through the late '40s and early '50s, to reach its climax in McCarthyism. And the panic had its origin in power.

Our very existence was not challenged in the '40s. We were not going to be invaded, conquered, dictated to. But our will was being defied in distant corners of the globe. Our claim to total ordering of postwar politics was not respected, here and there, on the perimeter of our wide concerns; and any attack was a total attack, where total control was the point. We were hostages to our own broad claims. Our power, in expanding, was evaporating—which gave us a hideous sensation of weakness precisely when we were at the summit of things with a monopoly on atomic weaponry.

If power enfeebles both by contraction and by

expansion, it does so equally in simple or complex forms. Power that simplifies makes itself vulnerable, as we see in a country with a one-crop economy. Failure of that crop, or of its delivery or of its customers, is the failure of everything. But diversification, the apparent cure for that disorder, produces its own vulnerability. It is easy for the complex to break down or to be interfered with. It is a proof of the mind's power to order multiple things that a jumbo jet can lift hundreds of people into the air and fling them halfway around the globe. But the greater that power, the greater disaster occurs when an engine falls off, or a private plane hits the jet, or a hijacker blows it up.

It is a source of peculiarly modern frustration that "conveniences" discommode. A telephone in a distant cabin or in an old person's apartment reduces the dangers of loneliness. One can call for help. But it also makes one prey for threatening or obscene phone calls. Our new power to communicate becomes a weapon of intrusion for those who wish to remain "incommunicado" or at least anonymous. The taking of hostages shows how television can be used to hold an entire society captive to the intrusive demands of those who have learned to use the gadgetry of pleasure as a weapon for annoyance. Those who lament America's decline in power because embassy personnel can be seized before the whole world's watching cameras are describing a weakness that is systemic to power. The children of the rich are kidnapped, precisely because their parents have power to pay. There has been a heavy rate of kidnapping among top executives of multinational corporations. Does that prove the corporations have no power? Quite the opposite. The seizures are a kind of indirect tribute to their power, and to the exposure of executives that derives from convenience of travel to many nations.

There is, then, something slippery in the very nature of power, something that skews from the hands of its user. It is a sword that cuts with its hilt as well as its blade, and wounds its owner. Few wars have accomplished anything good for mankind, or even for the victors. War aims are forgotten in the war's frenzy and disappear from the final accounting.

Take that last of our "good wars," World War II. It did not rescue the imperiled Jews in concentration camps; it accelerated their deaths. After Roosevelt's unilateral proclamation of the unconditional surrender policy at Casablanca in January 1943—a declaration opposed by allied intelligence and military authorities—all hope of internal overthrow of Hitler disappeared, the Armageddon frenzy was given free rein in Germany, the need for scapegoating the Jews was increased, and the day-and-night stoking of the

kilns became feverish. No plotters against Hitler could offer the German people a better deal than absolute humiliation; no one, anymore, had anything to lose. So the mad masters tore down everything in the vengeful last period of resistance.

We had wanted a clean slate, remember—what Roosevelt called the absolute "destruction of the philosophies in those countries." It is hard to kill a philosophy, and his approach to that goal probably killed several million more Jews. It also prolonged the war, and gave Russia the chance to advance deeper into Europe, onto our "clean slate."

Power so easily backfires. We had demonstrated our power to make an extreme demand which did not inhibit but incited madness in our foes (something we should remember whenever we are told that the way to make others capitulate is to get tougher with them). Power more often crazes those it is used on than makes them cringe or cower. Study after study has indicated that the bombing of civilian populations, even to the saturation level, stiffens morale instead of breaking it. That was true of Hitler blitzing London, of the allies blitzing Dresden, and of Nixon blitzing Hanoi. Indiscriminate death rained from above sows a prodigious harvest of hate which rarely makes for quicker or more useful surrender terms.

Ah, but did not our great bombs bring Japan to her knees? Not really. We know now what Truman knew then: that Japan was already on her knees. Her war machine had no fuel to run on after we interdicted the routes carrying Japan the foreign oil she relied (and relies) on. The thin wave of kamikaze flights was thrown at our advancing ships because their tanks could be filled with the thimbles of gasoline that remained.

We wanted to use the bombs, and needed little excuse. We obliterated two cities of living men, women and children—did so with orgasmic suddenness; without warning; without pause, between the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but what was forced on us by delivery logistics. We had the power—it must be good, as we were; we would use it as fast as we could. If we had possessed more than two, we might well have dropped a third or a fourth. It was virtue riding triumphant in the heavens, a crashing coda to our glorious demonstration of power. Power tends to corrupt, all right—only a corrupt nation could drop those two bombs in that way, and applaud a President who boasted he never lost a minute's sleep over that decision.

But power enfeebles as well as corrupts. What did we get for our display of might? I am not talking in moral terms now—whether we proved ourselves morally superior to the kiln-stokers when we

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became the city-erasers. What did we get, even in the cruder sense of practical results?

A quicker end to the war? That is questionable. Truman's daughter argued in her book that we dropped the bomb to keep Russia out of the Asian theater. If so, we failed—and we certainly did not prevent Russian expansionism in Europe by showing off what we possessed.

Did we help our effort to control a total peace? We seemed to hope so; but it was a superstitious hope. Like Philip Marlowe muttering, "When a man has a gun in his hand, Doc, you're supposed to do what he says," we hoped that having the bomb would make everybody do what we said. Part of the American panic came from the shrug the world seemed to be giving to that ultimatum. We had, for a while, the only bombs; for a much longer while, the best bombs, and the most, and the most easily delivered. Yet McCarthy and others said that the communists were taking over the world. How could that be?

That could be because power enfeebles—because the world was not as ready to believe that we proved our love for others at Hiroshima as we thought, for some reason, it might be; because death rained indiscriminately from the heavens rarely endears; because a promise not to use the thing, coming from the only people who *had* used it, made as little sense as did the *deterrent* possession of it ("Obey us so we won't have to use it; not that we mean to use it; but you better act as if we meant to use it; because if you don't, you might force us to use it"). The intricate scholasticism of our academicians of destruction translated most readily to others as, "Hold me so I won't go crazy." Power does not automatically lend a pose of dignity.

Use of the bomb did not really end the war and certainly did not build the peace. Neither has nonuse of the bomb. Yet we staked a great deal on our possession of it and on our improvement of it from atomic to hydrogen staus.

And we thought we could maintain a monopoly of it if we just spied on ourselves assiduously enough. No one else could ever figure the thing out, and our security arrangements would keep them from stealing it at its single source.

Actually our failure could not have been more complete. Some did steal atomic secrets, despite all our precautions; but that did not help the Russians by more than a few months, if at all. The main thing we accomplished was the intensification of suspicion and fear among ourselves.

If keeping our beloved bomb a monopoly was silly, there was only one other course that made sense. We could have said to the world: "This is an instrument no human being should possess or use" (a claim we could not very well make because we *had* used it; power had crippled us). "We hereby

dismantle all our ability to make further bombs. And we invite everyone to join us in opposition—by embargo, nontrading compacts, expulsion from the civilized community—to any nation that attempts or succeeds at construction of a single other bomb."

It is all very well to offer that plan in hindsight, now that we know our monopoly was doomed to be short-lived. But, we are told, the chance for such a stand disappeared forever once we lost that monopoly. Now we must maintain parity (at the least) with Russia's nuclear capacity, reducing our arms (if at all) only *pari passu* as they verifiably reduce theirs.

After all, if they once get nuclear superiority, the world will be at their disposal. The very people who tell us Russia's nuclear superiority would put the world at her disposal were those who said our nuclear monopoly had not prevented Communist "takeovers" in the '40s. The world didn't do what we said when we held the bomb; why should it do so for Russia? Because, we are told, Russia is evil enough to *use* the thing whose use we only threatened. But once again, the unwillingness to use the bomb on moral grounds looks unconvincing when voiced by the only people who have ever dropped it.

To those who say the time has passed for surrendering the bomb, I answer: What if we could magically remove all our nuclear capability overnight—this very night? What would happen tomorrow? Would the Russians blow us up? They could do that now, if they wanted to. But what good would it do them today or tomorrow?

Or would they "take us over" tomorrow? And what does that mean? Send occupying troops? Administer Amtrak?

Sending tanks into Prague is one thing. Occupying America has been a tough enough assignment for Americans. And what would they get for their pains? Would the drain on their manpower and resources be repaid in the reluctant labor and black market and sabotage of America's free enterprise system of gangsterism? Could they control the Mafia, or even New York's street gangs? We can't. And where would their manpower come from?

We neglect the helot problem, the reason Sparta could not fight far from her territory for any length of time: the helots would rebel. Russia has trouble enough holding her present satellites, and has failed to hold some. She is, in fact, the only country in the world surrounded by hostile communist governments: China, Yugoslavia, Romania. Gibbon could tell them much about the point where further expansion becomes evaporation.

Perhaps the immediate threat would not be against *us* (as it was not in the 1940s) but against our allies, or our holdings elsewhere—our oil, perhaps. Russia would not have to take America if, America once neutralized, she could take Europe.

That argument supposes that the *nuclear* deterrent has checked Russia in that endeavor (I said nothing of unilateral disarmament in other than nuclear terms). But nuclear war in Europe makes little sense. The NATO countries do not want to be rescued by instant incineration. Neither does the conqueror want to inherit a "hot" continent. The deterrent in Europe has always been political in the first place, conventionally military in the second. If saturation bombing rarely leads to capitulation or to successful occupation, nuclear bombing is unacceptable *a fortiori*—the real reason we did not use the bomb in Korea or Vietnam, despite frequent consideration of that alternative.

What good has possession of the bomb—at terrific peril to ourselves from accident, theft, sabotage, wreck—done for us?

Some say that the bomb made Krushchev back off in the Cuban missile crisis; and that may be true of the way he backed off, the terms he had to accept—which just shows that the bomb imperils us, that power enfeebles. If removal of the Russian missiles were the main consideration, we could have accomplished that by the quid pro quo of removing our obsolete Turkish missiles in an overt deal. But President Kennedy thought that might mean losing face for America, and he wanted to humiliate the Russians as well as reach an accommodation. So he refused the overt deal, imposed an arbitrary deadline, and forced Krushchev to lose face sufficiently to contribute to his downfall.

What was the lesson America taught by its power, then? That cooperation with Americans is useless, that overtures lead to humiliation, that any Kremlin leader who wants to avoid Krushchev's fate better not back down anywhere. The Russian defiance of President Carter's spasm of concern over troops in Cuba was dictated by the experience of Krushchev. President Kennedy bought an easy "victory" at tremendous risk, and sowed later hatred. The power to issue demands makes the wielder of power feel good at the moment. But in the long run, it undermines power itself.

We have not wielded the bomb; the bomb has immobilized us. We have been chained to it, in a worshipping attitude toward our icon-captor. We thought it would do wondrous things, but it has done nothing useful. It has been an expensive cult object, guarded, hidden, given rich sacrifices of

time and money. We keep fissionable material scattered all over the globe. We build new warheads literally every day. We have a new generation of bright youngsters who can activate any warhead that comes into their possession. We have not prevented proliferation of the bombs into "less responsible" hands. We have tied our own hands in a gesture of captive embrace around the thing that was to be our instrument of power and has become, instead, a drain on our strength, physical as well as moral.

The only way we could have used the bomb fruitfully, when we had it, was to give it away. For the other side of the paradox that power enfeebles is this: yielding empowers. It sounds crazy to say that, though our experience daily confirms this upside-down truth. The parent who exerts his or her power most drastically over children loses all power over them, except the power to twist and hurt and destroy.

The power to destroy—to wound, to sever bridges, to end lives—is easily wielded. We can all smash a TV set, a computer, a transistor, a friendship, a marriage. Few of us can build a workable computer or a rewarding marriage. Any idiot can wreck what only a genius can make.

That power to destroy, easy to come by, also destroys itself. And the instruments of such destructive power are rarely if ever useable for construction. Saturation bombing does not build peace. The person who would influence others constructively cannot achieve that influence by punishment, by threats, by vengeance. The colleague, the leader, the teacher who builds does so by deferring to others, by yielding to their efforts, by encouraging instead of browbeating.

The ultimate expression of this is the freedom of the saints, whose influence is so great because they have given up so much. A Mother Teresa cannot be "got to" through her power over weapons or goods or material advantages, because she has renounced them all. The saints "win" in power plays because they are willing to lose more than others are.

The 1960s were obsessed with power—the power of the system, or of working outside it; the power of insurgency and counterinsurgency. President Kennedy epitomized an ideal of power, and proved the random power of sheer destruction when a lone crazy killed him. (The very denial of the possibility that a lone crazy could blot out so much, so fast, so easily, explains our fascination with conspiracy theories, no matter how farfetched.) Kennedy's power was that of social position, brilliant rhetoric, the Green Berets, the televised showdown, the willingness to risk nuclear war to humiliate a foe.

Another man was also killed in the 1960s, but the lone crazy did not accomplish nearly so much in his case, since Dr. King had already surrendered his

life. He wrought large social changes, constructive, not destructive—he forged new ties of friendship and racial bonds—because he did not try to force change by violence practiced on others. He could not, and did not want to, outlynch the lynchers, outjail the rednecks, outclub Bull Connors' men, outbite their dogs. His only power was the power to suffer, and that is the only invincible power. The man who overcomes himself cannot be overcome; his truth goes marching on. That kind of feebleness empowers.

That is not simply a mystical axiom, making sense, of an obscure and private sort, to the saints. Friends of mine argue that no country has a right to possess instruments of nuclear destruction, even if they help that nation: *Fiat justitia, ruat coelum*. They may be right. But I make a more modest claim here, entirely practical and political: that nuclear weapons harm us, even on the practical scale, instead of helping us; that they are a parasite

feeding on our life and wealth and prospects; that they threaten to bring down the heavens on our head.

Large social "blind spots" bewilder us in past civilizations. How did moral philosophers in ancient Rome condone and defend infanticide? How could our own beloved forefathers practice (and apologize for) slavery? (Some thought slavery evil, but believed America would weaken to foreign enemies by giving up the economic advantage of the slaves' labor—though nothing has weakened America more, in her history, than our two centuries of slaveholding.) Future students will be even more puzzled at the continued possession and extension of dangerous and expensive weapons that menaced all life, promised no security, and undermined the very bases of a rational polity. How, they will say (if we let them exist), could they not see what they were doing? Well, it is a hard thing to see—the mystery that power enfeebles—though we have evidence for that hidden truth lying all around us every day. □



Mobi Vuong

HIDDEN IN A HEALING FAMILY

I have just finished the lunch Hoang's mother saved back for me—a bowl of fragrant seaweed soup, an omelette filled with bean noodles and green onions, the ever familiar rice. I look across our small dining room at the photograph of Hoang's father which sits upon the family ancestral altar, recognizing there the soft, gentle eyes and the boyish, protruding ears that Hoang has inherited. For a moment, I marvel at the events that have made me this man's daughter-in-law. Though we never met (he was dying of throat cancer along the border of Vietnam and Cambodia when Hoang and I met in Singapore in 1977), his presence is never absent from our home. Hoang's mother offers tea, lights incense, bows and murmurs a quiet prayer before the family altar—every morning, every evening. This is the ritual the rest of the family hardly seems to acknowledge but which we sense is the central rhythm that binds and harmonizes our life as a family. I suspect Hoang's father would marvel, as well, at having an American daughter-in-law who speaks Vietnamese. Perhaps he would marvel, too, to know his son and family unconsciously nourish my Christianity and my understanding of what it is to live as a peacemaker. It is from the heart of this family life that I offer the handful of reflections below.

Among prayers I have made, there are a few that mark special turning points in my life and the beginnings of more profound conversion. One such prayer was in 1973 when I prayed to be allowed to give my hands in some way to peace and healing in Vietnam. Afterwards I was led by a series of gifted events and new friendships to live and work as a volunteer with the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation which he led in Paris. When I arrived in France, I had just turned twenty and I remember the gentleness with which Thich Nhat Hanh and Sister Cao Ngoc Phuong assisted my

growth the three years I lived with them. This period gave roots to an abiding interest in Buddhist thought and life. I remember Thich Nhat Hanh once telling a French Catholic nun, "Mobi is using the methods of Buddhism to enter the gates of Christian heaven." Towards the end of my stay there, I translated Nhat Hanh's book *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Beacon Press), a manual describing in simple, poetic language methods and contemplations to make one more awake to the miracle of life. The book was originally written for peace and social service workers in Vietnam. This book has continued to be a guide and a friend, and it has occasioned moments of grace in my life that have lifted me from periods of spiritual standstill.

Another prayer I consider special was one made to Our Lady about two years after my Vietnam prayer. I spoke it before the stained glass window of The Blue Madonna at the Cathedral of Chartres. I prayed for the courage to join the Catholic Church, a secret calling in my heart for several years. Several months later, I was confirmed in an unimaginably beautiful ceremony at Stanbrook Abbey in England. The contemplative artist, Sr. Meinrad Craighead, was my godmother. I remember my four days at Stanbrook with wondrous clarity and joy, coupled with awe at the irreversible commitment to being a Christian I was allowed to make there.

The years with Thich Nhat Hanh and the days with Sr. Meinrad were like a novitiate in which I learned to listen to truths in my heart, when my sense of vocation—to be wedded in some way to the yearnings and sufferings of Southeast Asia as a peacemaker and Christian—was born and given its first vital nourishment. These were hours and days and years of being strengthened, years of being filled with a thousand good blessings. In my mind's eye, I see myself standing in Paris and Stanbrook as blessings flow abundantly into my outstretched arms, without my having to make any effort beyond facing towards those blessings.

I was not simple hearted enough to appreciate that I did not deserve that effortless receiving of gifts. Nor was I poor in spirit enough to know that those blessings were given to me not to enable me to embark on a journey of heroic self-fulfillment,

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but rather a strengthening and preparation for my self-emptying. One year after leaving the community of Thich Nhat Hanh and being confirmed at Sr. Meinrad's side, I lived an experience that forced me to face the sin of pride brewing in my heart and the very stoniness of my heart itself.

In December of 1976 I received a telegram. Thich Nhat Hanh asked me to join him and others in Singapore for an emergency project to search and rescue Vietnamese boat people drowning at sea after being towed away from the shores of Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. One month after arriving in Singapore, I boarded an old and rusting oil tanker borrowed to seek refugees at sea. As a representative of the project, I remained on the ship for nearly three months. The entire experience was filled with more horror and fear and dread than had ever touched me, not because the mission was dangerous or the scenes tragic, but for the first time in my life, I was at the foot of the cross. I stood in the place which everyone despised and hated. Our project was maligned and threatened from all sides—by government officials, marine police, immigration officers, black marketeers trying to make money off the frightened and helpless refugees. Even some established social agencies were hostile to our project for "interfering" with their work. I could not face the humiliation of all that hostility and I became paralyzed with fear, unable to act or to make clear judgements. A cloud covered my heart. I accused Thich Nhat Hanh of conceiving an absurd and ill-fated project. I could not walk away from the ship and the 254 refugees abroad, but in my heart, I walked away from the cross.

Yet even in that dark chaos, there were kernels planted in the hard, cold soil of my heart to soften it and to teach me the reality of forgiveness. Simple moments spent teaching refugee children aboard songs and rhymes, a night spent assisting in the birth of a baby girl, celebrating Vietnamese New Year out at sea with a bowl of whiskey passed around and a few pickled carrots with hot pepper that the ship's cook had somehow managed to prepare—these were all reminders that restoration of the spirit is possible at any moment. The Lord's presence is found as much in our attentiveness to the hidden celebration of daily moments as He is found in dramatic witness. One kernel was planted deeper than the others. I fell in love on the ship with a young man from Cambodia of Chinese and Vietnamese descent. On the anniversary day of my confirmation at Stanbrook, which in 1977 was also the day of Chinese-Vietnamese New Year, Hoang and I vowed to marry.

Our decision to marry was made beneath the shadow of a painful burden. My husband had been married previously—a story with its own failures and agonies. At the beginning of our relationship, it was not possible for Hoang to consider requesting an annulment from the Catholic Church, a concept he found culturally alien and demeaning. I was tormented, for I knew in my heart that though I disagreed with some of the Church's teachings, I could not disown obedience to them. I could have chosen not to marry but I did not. This tormented me, too, for I was trying to adhere to a real response of love and the reality given me—I felt blinded and did not know: to marry Hoang, or not to marry Hoang. So a year after my joyous reception into the Church, I joined the sorrowful community of the excommunicated. Though Catholic friends encouraged me to continue to take communion, there remained a barrier of conscience within me. I have come to believe that, truly, each person in their innermost being is aware of what specific suffering and penance and even dark night is appropriate and necessary to their particular life. This awareness is an acceptance of the confusion and blindness in our lives, and a faith that even such blindness is at times a special gift. There are times when even though others extend the deepest forgiveness and acceptance, one must still wait until the grace of knowing forgiveness is granted. The first years of my marriage contained a dimension of penance needed for my self-emptying, a self-emptying where one begins to face God not only to receive a stream of abundant blessings but to receive also His Silence, His Judgement and most difficult of all to accept, His Forgiveness.

The Lord's forgiveness began to penetrate my life. A first obstacle of pride fell in the dramatic events aboard the rusting tanker. Perhaps more difficult have been the encounters with my pride in marriage and family life—more modest, more mundane encounters to be sure, yet far more powerful by their constant and subtle presence. Family life has altered the rhythms and pattern of my life. The exotic garments of my life as a single woman have given way to a life far more hidden and quiet, a life lived among the members of my extended family. The struggle to allow forgiveness to transform my life in this simpler context has been difficult. I am reminded by the Vietnamese Buddhist saying, "It is difficult to practice the Way in the monastery. It is more difficult to practice in the crowd. It is most difficult to practice in the family."!

Our family life has been nourished deeply, like all families, by the addition of family members—the birth of our daughter Emily Yu-Chen (Precious

Jade) three years ago, and the arrival from an Indonesian refugee camp of the five members of Hoang's family a year ago. These events have offered much growth in love, yet I have tormented myself so often with accusations that I have ceased to participate in any true spiritual life and have abandoned witness for peace and reconciliation in the world. I have regularly found fault with family life for being "too ordinary," unable to accept the ordinary and mundane and little in myself, refusing to be a little one attentive to Christ in the tiny things. That refusal gathers a dark cloud to cover the eyes of compassion in my heart, and I have experienced, again and again, spiritual paralysis. I have learned, though, that self-inflicted paralysis of heart is no barrier to the Lord's action in the center of our being and He continues there, though we are often unaware.

An event last September served as a catalyst, a great healing to affirm my marriage to Hoang and return me to my Church. En route to meet a Vietnamese refugee for a doctor's appointment, I was involved in an automobile accident. A broken ankle and a thirteen inch gash that ripped the skin flap from half of my lower left leg. Three months of immobility followed. Reluctantly, I was forced to relax, to allow myself to be cradled by the angel of healing. I watched the slow drama of the body restoring itself beneath the hands of the surgeon. The skin grafts which initially looked like raw and purulent flesh, stitched themselves day by day into neat dry scars. When a screw was removed from my bone and I could walk again, I limped stiffly. The limp grew smoother, then running to catch my daughter, I realized the limp had melted away. It was impossible not to watch the physical healing of these months and not ask myself, "If God is allowing such healing in my body, what healing is He allowing in my soul?" I began to notice things.

Indeed, the season of my physical healing became a season of spiritual healing. Hoang went before the Marriage Tribunal of the Archdiocese. No longer repulsed, he was anxious to effect a reconciliation between me and the Catholic faith. We learned during Advent that the annulment had been granted. I did not feel ecstatic, but knew a quiet acknowledgement and hidden gratitude, as I felt when I realized my battered leg was being restored. The scars on my leg will never disappear. Scars will remain in my heart. I no longer fear that the scars on my heart will not be as resilient as living flesh. Scars, too, are things of beauty. They are echos of Christ's wounds for us. He can sanctify wounds, if their origin is sacrifice or sin. We face towards Him and ask to be healed. No, we look into our hearts with eyes of His humility and love. The

healing has already been accomplished before we have asked.

Healing is not easy to accept. The initial feelings of joy and gratitude, then the responsibility for little things, a constant stream of common items that the healing not only entitles us to, but weds us irrevocably. Able to walk, I must use legs to carry me to all the places life requires—grocery store, laundromat, church, school, meetings. Braced with a new knowledge of the gift of walking, I approach each place as holy ground. Each step along the way is holy. In accepting limits, I must also learn to trust and believe that the Lord sends others to places I cannot go. My convictions as a Christian (and pacifist) tell me there are places to be visited for the survival of our human family.

The healing accomplished in my soul and in my family has called me to a remembrance of the roots that led me to the place I am now. The grief I felt over the violence in Vietnam woven with my pain for the refugees of Indochina, led me to the places where I was given a marriage and extended family. This connection is not obvious to me; my life so often seems bereft of any real witness to peace. It is hard to believe that the life I have been given is the fruit of my desire for peace in Vietnam. I marvel at this. I stumble over it, too. Rather than becoming greater and larger in my witness, as in my pride I fully expected to, I find that my witness for peace grows steadily inward as the number of people I serve has grown quite small. I am not in the fires of a war zone or on the South China Sea rescuing refugees. I am at the kitchen table teaching my husband's youngest sister English and mathematics. Reflecting on this, it may be the Lord's wisdom! I should be grateful the tasks at present are rather small; at least I have a chance of doing them decently!

What is my present place like, a fruit born of a longing for peace in Indochina? It is the place where a refugee family, having survived war and exodus, begins to build a new life in a strange land. Though my waking hours are burdened with the terrible sense of the world's hovering near the precipice of nuclear holocaust, Hoang's family, along with other Indochinese refugees, neither comprehend nor focus on this threat. They are trying to recover their spirits. They are struggling to comprehend the most basic things they need to know to survive in a new culture. It is not possible for them to contemplate greater violence or horror than that which they and their friends have already witnessed.

Hoang once spoke of his mother's long hair, a sign of her Vietnamese heritage. When Lon Nol's

secret police began murdering Vietnamese at random in 1970, Hoang and his family would awake and look from the tiny boat to see the corpses of Vietnamese neighbors floating in the river, the river they had fished, bathed, and played in all their lives. His mother cropped her hair, terrified of being spotted as a Vietnamese. The family moved to Phnom Penh, away from the waters that had given them life for generations, living upstairs in their uncle's small chinaware shop, seeking asylum from war's insanity. In April 1975, Khmer Rouge cadres entered the shop screaming, the butts of their rifles smashed all the teapots, ricebowls and cups upon the uncle's shelves. Gone in a few minutes of flying, shattering glass was the work of the uncle's lifetime. Hoang's family was ordered to walk and never turn back to look at Phnom Penh. They joined the throngs of people forced from the city, amid the agonized cries of mothers forbidden to return for their children at schools; of fathers forbidden to return home from their workplaces to be with their families; of children suddenly orphaned. Hoang's family walked for a month through the Cambodian jungle until they reached an aunt's home in Chau Doc, a Vietnamese town along the border. Their path had been strewn with the rotting, bloody corpses of murdered villagers.

Hoang's family has walked away from everything they knew or possessed. They seek a basic, human equilibrium torn from them when they lost their river on the day of flying glass. In all the family's uncertain wanderings, my mother-in-law has never a day failed to pay homage and give thanks to the ancestors. Near everything has been lost, but the essential, sacred center of their family life remains intact and with it my mother-in-law's inestimable sense of humor and proportion.

Not long ago my mother-in-law told me something which at the time amused me, but which later I recognized as yet another sign of her faith. There is a Buddhist custom, she explained, similar to Christian baptism, in which a newborn child is presented at the village pagoda for symbolic adoption by the monk. The monk names the child. "Hoang and Muoi," she said, "were adopted by one monk and so they look more alike. They both have long, narrow feet. But Cuong and Thanh were adopted by a different monk and so their feet are short and wide." My sister-in-law looked incredulous, "Mother, you can't believe that!" Hoang's mother was unmoved. To her it was a

truth. I tried not to smile. Later I thought about it. She had had four children before Hoang, all of whom died as babies. Convinced that she lacked the inner qualities to nurture infants, she turned to the monk when Hoang was born and placed her trust in him. I am sure it was a moment of confession of her limits as a mother and an act of faith in something other than herself. The monk became Hoang's true parent, and the relation was so complete that Hoang would develop physical characteristics of the monk. (How many of us would hesitate to baptize our children if we thought our baby might grow up to look like the priest!)

Consumed with the anxiety and horror of the growing possibility of nuclear war, I wonder if my devotion to my family and my attention to the healing of their scars of war is not a cruelly inadequate response to the threat shadowing all our lives. I am groping for a response that comes from the very center of my life. I long to be more visible in my protest to nuclear stockpiles, yet in this longing I recognize a familiar and destructive pride. I have imagined scenarios for myself in which my protest would be total and sacrificial, scenarios that inevitably require the abandonment of many, if not most, of my family's present needs that I meet. Yet I know I cannot turn my back on the healing that is unfolding in my family, anymore than I can despise the little and hidden witness that accompanies it. I believe, because Jesus tells us, that conversion to God's Will results in the division and eruption of some families, yet calls others to irreversible commitment within families. To know and trust God's Mind in my own unique circumstances is my constant prayer. At times I am troubled that in my unworthiness, I have been allowed such unity within a family while others have lost or sacrificed all in their witness for peace and justice. It is so hard for me to trust that the Lord has given limits and needs; in my case a profound need to be a present wife, mother and sister-in-law. The comforts we receive being true to these limits, the Lord expands his Kingdom of Love, so we have the grace to bear fruits that are pleasing to Him.

On occasion the Lord pities me, He allows me a grace in my slow and awkward movement towards faith and trust in His will. I recently met an Iranian woman who had read Thich Nhat Hanh's book *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. She was sending it to others in Iran where she felt the book's teaching would be helpful. She thanked me for translating it. I marvelled that she should be thanking me who had inwardly condemned myself for doing nothing to assist reconciliation with Iran. I walked into a bookstore and was overjoyed at the presence of Nhat Hanh's book. I introduced myself as the translator to the shopkeeper. He had assisted someone smuggle the book into the Soviet Union

and had heard it was being circulated underground there. A book of peace that has meant much in my life. Who knows how many lives are being transformed, how many words and actions for peace are being encouraged and united by this one simple book? It is a good feeling to know oneself part of something that continues to send ripples of awakening across the world. We must remember that every prayer and action done in love sends ripples, whether or not we are allowed to see them.

I have been reflecting on the period I translated *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. That was soon after the liberation forces of Hanoi claimed victory in Vietnam. The Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation received no communication from Vietnam. The little news smuggled out was disheartening—government confiscation of Buddhist social service projects, the imprisonment and torture of monks and young Buddhists who had been active in the peace movement and imprisoned under the Saigon regime. Grateful relief for the fighting's end stretched into months of painful waiting for a sense of the destiny of the vast Buddhist network for social service and the Buddhist understanding of the reconciliation needed in Vietnam. A time of silence, prayer and waiting. There were no piles of letters to respond to, no speaking tours, almost no visitors. Not a time for visible witness or active doing. Then out of my sharing of that period came the translation of a book that is still touching lives. I have learned much about the different dimensions and possibilities of peace work from that period of waiting, translating Thich Nhat Hanh.

There is a Vietnamese Buddhist saying, *cung vui cung phuoc* which means that a person who rejoices over another's good action shares the same good merit. An understanding of that is what I seek—a living, confident faith that the Lord is accomplishing His Peace on Earth through the unique vocations of many: that He is uniting these vocations in a mysterious, incomprehensible, way—the vocations of our contemporary prophets, the Plowshares Eight, the vocations of contemplatives like Thich Nhat Hanh and Sr. Meinrad Craighead, the

vocations of those hidden in the small tasks of family life or other humble services. Oftentimes the boundaries of these vocations overlap. Some are called to living these vocations in special cycles, like seasons, in their lives. One cannot will oneself into these seasons, but if called, one cannot refuse.

We are aware of others' witnesses and through mutual joy and suffering, affirm and nurture each other in the passionate seeking for peace. For some, this witness is to be hidden in the slow, arduous tasks of healing wounds from wars past. This is a vocation to remembering, an affirmation of our past, a crying to the Lord for forgiveness. This is an unconscious vocation. I think of the many persons I met last year, as a social worker with Indochinese refugees in Texas. Most of these sponsors did not think of themselves as peacemakers or even as healers. They saw the misery of the refugees and they responded. That simple. The miracles of peace and healing they fostered in the hearts of refugees and in their own hearts is something witnessed as a grace.

When one is aware of another's witness and can rejoice in that witness, there comes a knowledge of specific ways one can assist that effort, small things; a letter, a kind word, a sharing of time or resources. The world is filled with the poetry of such specific joinings of efforts.

Two of our kitchen drawers are filled with the washed, dried and neatly folded plastic and paper bags that American food so wastefully comes in. Each bag is a precious thing to my mother-in-law. She does not like waste and we do indeed re-use these bags again and again. But there is another significance to her cleaning and saving of these bits and pieces of cellophane and brown paper. She remembers their scarcity in Cambodia and Vietnam and how precious such bags were to the women vendors of bean sprouts and fresh herbs along the market streets. She saved the bags, washed them, and then gave them to the vendors. She can no more assist her old neighbors this way, but she remembers them lovingly with each bag she cleans and stores. I know this simple and caring love reaches across the world to the vendors of bean sprouts in Asia. Following her, I believe each family can respond in the hidden daily actions in their life, a provision of the thousand kinds of support for the courageous witness that others have made.

It is evening now and my mother-in-law lights the incense at the family altar. The thin silver smoke curls past my father-in-law's patient gaze. As my mother-in-law bows, I feel the holy limits of my life in this family embrace me like the blessed fishing net of Jesus. The anxiety and uncertainty that accompanies my searching is not ended so, but I am filled with wonder. This room is holy ground.

Standing here I look in the four directions and see so many friends and strangers doing good things on other spots of holy ground. I rejoice and in that rejoicing see that the threads of the life and place I have chosen and been chosen to stand mingle with others' threads to weave the tapestry of Christ's Kingdom. □



William F. May

ON SLAYING THE DRAGON: THE AMERICAN NATURE MYTH

Like many other teachers of ethics, I answered the call to make a speech on the first "Earth Day" celebration in the early Seventies. The only noteworthy part of the assignment was its location—Gary, Indiana.

I raced north from Bloomington (in the rural, Bavarian part of the state) to make my pitch for Mother Earth. No representatives from U.S. Steel, Bethlehem Steel, or Republic Steel joined me there to tell audiences about company initiatives to sweeten the air, freshen the rivers, and relieve the grass and trees of the industrial grunge that coated them daily. Rather, it fell to one of the host professors to explain, with a shy trace of local patriotism, that Gary, contrary to popular opinion, was not the most polluted city in the state. That distinction belonged to Terre Haute, whose cement factories produced a fine, air-borne dust that matched the ubiquity of God and settled on everything. Popular opinion, notwithstanding, Terre Haute was the Gary of Indiana.

What could anyone say on Earth Day in the industrial underbelly of Chicago—a region that Carl Sandburg once characterized as "stormy, husky, brawling, City of the Big Shoulders." I thought back to a conversation with W.H. Auden on a cold winter evening in New England, 1952, in the course of his year as a guest professor at Smith College. In his offhand, epigrammatic way he said, "In Europe, nature is an animal to be trained; in America, a dragon to be slain." My few notes then on the subject of the ecological crisis and my more developed thoughts now on that topic attempt in part to probe Auden's remark.

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By ecological crisis, I mean four developments chiefly associated with the industrial and agricultural, and increasingly the biological revolutions. First, the pollution of the non-human environment on a scale so massive as to affect the life chain of which human beings are a part and therefore to threaten with baneful consequences human existence itself—if not in this generation then within a biblical three or four. Second, the exhaustion of non-renewable energy sources, chiefly oil, at a pace so rapid as to tempt the nations to turn to energy sources troublesome in their own right, by being exhaustable (coal), and/or polluting (coal and nuclear fission), or energy-expensive to produce (fuel from coal shale). Third, the gradual encroachment upon and destruction of the wilderness and various species of non-human life. Fourth, the threats to the health and safety of both workers and neighbors of manufacturing plants, as well as to the consumers of their industrial goods and bio-chemical artifacts, including, in some cases, risks to their progeny.

Upper middle class Christians tempted to speak out on ecological issues find themselves in a somewhat awkward position for several reasons. First, black Christians have criticized their cause-oriented white colleagues for being somewhat fickle in their allegiances. Liberal whites flitted from civil rights in the early to middle sixties to war-protest in the late sixties, to the ecological crisis in the early seventies. Tidying up the environment became the latest upper middle class cause. White academics and their middle class colleagues in professional circles seemed to have the attention span of fireflies. Today, clearly, blacks are not alone in this criticism. Economists have noted that the environmentalist movement derives its support chiefly from upper middle class whites who have already met most of their economic needs and who have graduated to the point on the economic scale that a clean environment becomes important to their standard of living. Meanwhile the very rich, the modestly fixed, and the poor oppose



the movement. The rich can afford to ignore the problem—they have the resources to accept it. But the working classes and the poor (those in the lower half of the income scale) oppose the movement as a threat to jobs and earning power.

In a similar vein, today, some Third World leaders have challenged the environmentalist movement for its moral preciousness. It reflects a sensibility which only those who have "made it" can afford. This criticism, to be sure, hardly dispels the threats which disruption of the life chain may bring to men and women everywhere. The issue transcends the parochialism and privilege of those who happen to be preoccupied with it. But the criticism reminds us that the threat to the environment, while global, should not produce a single issue politics backed by those who happen to be privileged enough to dwell on it. Covenant with the earth cannot be abstracted from the social covenant. Christian reflection on ecological issues cannot withdraw from the total complex of moral and political problems that force the poor to push this concern to the margins of their consciousness.

Christians face yet another awkwardness in dealing with advocates of the movement. Environmentalists have tended to see Christianity itself as part of the problem. Jewish and Christian scriptures, with their injunctions to subdue the earth and to name and control the beast, seemed to prepare the way for modern-day plunder. Scripture lifts humankind above the rest of creation—in the image of God—and seems to enjoin a restless, disruptive, human agency in the image of an interventionist deity. Christian theologians, in the 1960's, with their masterful sense of timing, were just taking religious credit for the industrialization, urbanization, and secularization of the West, when

historians and others took them at their word and charged Christianity with that foul desecration of nature which accompanied the emergence of the modern industrial and secular city.

I do not propose in this essay to enter into the debate about the particulars of historical influence. Rather, I intend, in the first part, to describe the basic myth that governs much of the American experience of nature. Thereafter I will place this experience within the context of the biblical story—mediated through one of America's own writers. Concluding remarks will touch upon the potential tension between the two during the Reagan presidency.

The Western version of the myth of slaying the dragon appears in Beowulf. The hero kills Grendel, Grendel's dam, and finally, an airborne dragon. The people prosper through his victory, but in the course of the final battle, Beowulf, abandoned by his fellows, is himself slain.

The myth (except for the Christian ingredient—Beowulf's abandonment and death) includes the following elements: confrontation with a hostile and destructive power that exceeds the ordinary measure of man; the emergence of a hero with special resources for combating the enemy (Beowulf wears a special coat of mail and uses a special sword; indeed, giants, themselves rebels against God, have made the sword with which the hard-pressed Beowulf kills Grendel's dam.); the destruction and death of the dragon and the extraction of riches from its slashed belly (or the recovery of stolen goods from its lair); and (by implication) the ugly residue of a vanquished carcass.

I do not want to suggest that the Beowulf myth has "influenced" the American perception of nature through re-telling the story (the Biblical stories from Genesis and Deuteronomy figure much more prominently in the ritual life of the American people as they interpreted their settling of a continent). This myth, however, roughly corresponds to the lived experience of the American struggle with nature.

America was a land of great distances, harsh extremes in climate, and a relatively small population, but a land that betokened extraordinary riches if nature could be conquered. We needed therefore heroes: first pioneers, then second, scientists/technologists/industrialists, who could subdue the environment. We needed central heating to fight the cold; air-conditioning to fight the humidity; trains, cars, and planes to conquer space; bulldozers to carve up the terrain; shafts and tunnels to mine it; test tubes to manipulate materials into prodigal new forms; and reactors to unleash their even more prodigal energies. Once technology subdued the hostile environment, great riches would pour out of the dragon's slashed belly. These riches would create personal fortunes for those who funded the war on nature, and add to the gross product of the nation from which others would more remotely prosper. The battle, to be sure, like human war, would leave a slashed carcass and scorched earth in its path. But the plunder was worth the price and who was to say otherwise? The gain belonged to the getter, the recoverer of what could either be described as unclaimed or stolen goods.

The element of hostility and conflict with nature was part of our heritage. Although American poster art emphasizes nature as pacific—the storied peace and quiet of the country—the pioneer experienced, in fact, a harsh and inclement environment. Weather on the North American continent was far less temperate than Europe's, moderated as the latter is by the Gulf Stream. Americans so accept today the technologically enforced world-within-a-world which central heating and air-conditioning create, that they are inclined to forget the severity of the climate. But others notice it. Not too long ago, the Russian basketball team made a tour of the United States. Its schedule was rigorous; members of the team were homesick. But when they landed at the airport in Iowa, to play the University of Iowa team, a member of the Russian squad felt the Canadian winds howling and surveyed the banks of snow about him; and a broad smile crossed his face, as he said, "Siberia."

The heat can be equally extreme. A visitor in Texas asked a wealthy Houston lawyer to what he attributed the rapid growth of the city. Ship channel and cotton port? Oil and petrochemical industry? Space technology and computer industries? "Yes,"

the lawyer replied. "These developments were all important. But you left off your list the most important factor of all, without which this uninhabitable area would not have become a world class city—central air-conditioning." Ultimately, the struggle against cold was more important than the struggle against the heat in producing an industrial civilization. The energy generated for survival against the cold had its own additional industrial applications.

Space as well as climate inspired a more hostile attitude toward the natural environment in America because the huge American land mass, largely uninhabited (in most instances the Indians counted for less than the Canaanites), created in Americans the conviction that space had to be conquered.

The American's relationship to space, of course, was ambivalent. For those weary of social inequality, poverty, and class differences in Great Britain and Europe, the great empty spaces of the North American continent offered sanctuary and opportunity. A latent hostility to humankind lurked in the trek to the West. To have a neighbor was to have an enemy. The romance of the wilderness included a yearning for a manless and womanless nature, a desire to recover a pre-political, imperial self, a self without competition and limits. (See Quentin Anderson's study of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, *The Imperial Self: An Essay in American Literacy and Cultural History*, New York: Knopf, 1971). The struggle with nature offered partial relief from the social struggle.

At the same time, however, a harsh climate and huge distances meant loneliness. Limitless space offered relief from the tensions but also deprived pioneers of the solace of community; it also severely limited commerce. Long before America developed a technology with which to conquer space, it needed to devise a political instrument to span it; the Constitution of the United States solved this problem of distance brilliantly. The document ingeniously exploited both conflict within nature and the vast distances of the continent to solve the political problem which human nature itself presented. Factional self-interest threatened to tear the country to pieces once the Revolutionary War was won. But two devices promised to keep the negative effects of factionalism under control. First, the inventors of the Constitution believed that a federal system of checks and balances would pit faction against faction, and thus keep the power of any one faction within limits; second, the device of representative government would permit the government to distance itself from the fierce heat of any one local passion. In both cases, the founders of the nation contrived devices that slyly exploited

nature itself. The device of pitting "ambition against ambition" through checks and balances mimicked the natural phenomenon of force and counter-force in nature itself. Second, the device of representative government converted continental scale itself into an ally as it permitted leaders to function at some distance from local passion. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this constitutional system grew organically out of the American's experience of the natural environment. The founders were keenly aware of the political system and its devices as a *conception* and a *contrivance*, a harbinger in politics of the technology to come.

The American experience of a nature that exceeds the ordinary human scale derives not only from the sheer size of the continent but also from its outsized particulars: its coastal plains, mountains, rivers, prairies, skies, deserts, and the great oceans that separate this country from the rest of the world. It is hard to reduce this experience to the image of a tameable animal, drawn up into the orbit of human purposes. Quite the contrary, nature appears to exceed in grandeur and might and destructive fury the petty calculations of men. The best of our novelists in the 19th and 20th centuries had a keen sense for this. Melville devotes a chapter in *Moby Dick* to the size of the white whale but after attempting to convey its magnitude to the reader he concedes that it exceeds all efforts to describe it. In a similar vein Faulkner tells a story about a convict assigned to rescue a woman trapped on a flooded Mississippi River. The river sweeps them both out into the flood and the man finds himself "in a state in which he was a toy and pawn on a vicious and flammable geography." (*The Wild Palms*, New York: Random House, 1939, page 162.) Not even the original river bed is discernible. He does not know "whether the river had become lost in a drowned world or if the world had become drowned in one limitless river." (*The Wild Palms*, page 163.) At one level, the flood appears to be a brief interlude in an otherwise peaceful experience of nature, but, at another level, it ominously recalls the catastrophe from which the country itself derives: "He was now in the channel of a slough, a bayou, in which until today no current had run probably since the old subterranean outrage which had created the country." (*The Wild Palms*, page 144.) The jail to which he eventually returns seems like a refuge and sanctuary after his ordeal in the flood.

Still, the harshness of the North American environment, its disheartening weather and size, should not be exaggerated. It presented a more severe challenge than colonizing a place like Europe, to be sure, or, for that matter, the West Coast of North America. (What would San Diego weather and avocados have done to soften the Puritan spirit? Jonathan Edwards in a hot tub.) But the North American continent hardly presented the colonizers with an environment to match the harshness of Brazil.

Vianna Moog offers a helpful contrast between the two natural settings in his book on the American pioneers and the Portuguese *bandeirantes* (flagbearers) who explored Brazil. (*Bandeirantes and Pioneers*, New York: George Braziller, 1964.) The latter did not have the advantage of excellent coastal plains, the traversable Appalachians, and the broad expanse of the midwestern plains beyond. Instead, the Portuguese faced immediately at ocean's edge steep mountains which were difficult to traverse. The American climate, while harsh, did offer the opportunities of cold weather. In two-thirds of Brazil, there was no spring, fall, or winter, and therefore no inducement to produce heat, "the incentive that constitutes perhaps the first step in all industrial development." (page 22.) Brazil's tropical soils were poor, as compared with the great plains of Europe, Asia, and North America; its river system was not to be compared with the great hydrographic network of the United States which made this country traversable and colonizable. Brazil's rivers were largely unnavigable; and the Amazon could claim to be the greatest river in the world only in the volume of water it transported. Economically, the Amazon is not as good as the Mississippi; and, in Moog's memorable phrase, it is an "unpatriotic river" in that it washes out the soil from Brazil and disgorges it later in the Atlantic where it "is carried along by the Gulf Stream to add new territories to Mexico and the United States, in the alluvial formations of Yucatan and Florida." (page 20.) The river resembles the mythic serpent who steals away treasure not its own.

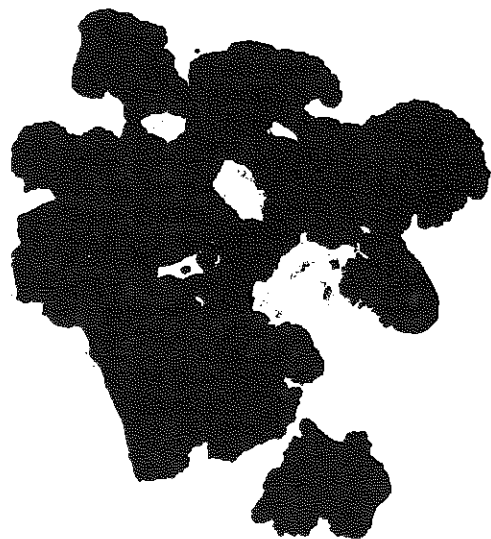
Moog emphasizes the harsh natural environment of Brazil in order to refuse racist explanations as to why "development" was more successful in the United States. Wasps were not racially superior to the Portuguese and the Indians with whom the Portuguese inter-married. They enjoyed a bracing but not overwhelming stimulus from the natural environment. One is reminded of Toynbee's theory of challenge and response. Civilization in its industrial phase requires a major challenge from the environment, but too much discourages. Brazil, at least in part, is proof of that. The *bandeirantes* came looking for treasure on the South American

continent. They wrote enthusiastic letters back to their patrons, but found little gold and took to enslaving and selling Indians (or marrying them) as a way of extracting wealth from the New World. Meanwhile, North American pioneers settled with their own imported families and took to more permanent ways of subdividing and extracting riches from the continent at hand. (Moog, no more than Toynbee, would not want to substitute an environmental for a racial determinism. At least as important as the challenge which the environment presents are those cultural symbols and systems which help to assign to the challenge its special meaning.)

The word "pioneer" should leave no doubt, however, that the Yankees perceived their environment to be strenuous. Like *bandeirantes*, pioneer is a military term (though French in origin): it refers to footsoldiers in advance of a main body of troops, volunteer soldiers at that, because they assume special risks in going beyond the normal reach of human knowledge and safety. Some of the heroic qualities attached to the pioneer gathered later around the American myth of the free-lance entrepreneur and capitalist, who ventured out into the unknown, or, still later, around the scientist, inventor, and technologist who discovered the unknown, invented the wondrous, and applied it with ingenuity. Together, these figures provide the heroic virtues and the magic sword with which to subdue nature and wrest a prodigal life from a new land. The land is theirs by dint of their labors; John Locke taught them that; and Adam Smith reassured them that the people at large would prosper through their own flourishing.

A final important element in the myth is the notion that the dragon has stolen its riches from their rightful owner. The hero liberates and restores unclaimed or ill-gotten gain. This notion of theft appears in varying ways on both sides of the environmentalist debate today. On the one hand, the pioneers (and later developers) expected the government to back their notion that possession and development were nine-tenths of the law. A kind of ecological Arminianism prevailed. God may ultimately own the earth, but He has not done much with it during the period of His tenure. The weeds and wilderness take over without vigorous human work. Thus, by rights, he who works the land owns it. The state exists duly to record and back these claims. This notion required from the State a double police protection: first, from the Indian, whose idleness disqualified him from owning the land he had dwelled in and named; second, from the footloose outlaw who neither settled nor labored on the land. Meanwhile, the very existence of the frontier meant that America broke with English patterns of primogeniture and its related notions of trusteeship—the obligation to care for lands in the name of generations yet unborn. After all, future generations could take care of themselves with room to spare on the frontier. Whatever spoiled could be left behind. Thus, American patterns of ownership conferred upon the possessor absolute rights of development and disposition. Since development was itself a sign of *legitimate* ownership, as distinct from God's and the Indian's, the spiritual basis was set for the maximal technological exploitation of everything that the belly of the earth contained.





The environmentalists and ecologists, on the other hand, from Theodore Roosevelt forward, have worried more about the destructive powers that an industrial/technological civilization creates than about any dragon to be slain. Worries about air and water pollution, the vanishing of the wilderness and treasured species within it, the depletion of non-renewable resources, and the potential impacts of powerful new processes and products on workers and consumers are but symptoms of this uneasiness. Technology replaces nature as the mythic monster, plundering riches from their rightful owners. (Giants, after all, forged the sword that Beowulf used to kill Grendel's mother; he owes his equipment to rebellious, dragonish powers.) Thus one looks for ways to call back the dragons unloosed to fight the dragon.

The Romantics wish to dismember the beast—dismantle the technology—and repair to a nature, worshipful and adoring. But cooler heads like W.H. Auden, E.F. Schumacher, and Rene Dubos are more inclined neither to fear nor to worship nature. They want to reduce the experience of nature to a more comfortable, still disciplined domestic scale. They are also disposed to scale down the instruments with which we discipline nature. They look for "intermediate technology," in Schumacher's words, a "technology with a human face." At a practical political level, most look to the regulatory interventions of the federal government as the only agent powerful enough to protect the wilderness, regulate pollution, limit the depletion of non-renewable resources, and protect producers and users from harmful products.

Meanwhile, the last election has seen a powerful reaction against this federal intervention. The myth of slaying the dragon takes yet another twist. The Reaganites view the government as the destructive power that has separated the bounty of nature from

its rightful owners and developers. They have taken it as their task to get "the government off the backs of the American people." They have argued that there is no energy shortage and no shortfall of non-renewable resources that private enterprise cannot solve if unleashed from government shackles. President Reagan has appointed as his Secretary of the Department of Energy a South Carolina dentist and protege of Strom Thurmond whose main policy hope for the Department, before liquidating it altogether, is to encourage the development of nuclear power as the "cheapest" source of energy. Secretary Edward's language is revealing: "We need to unleash it, to free the private sector." To that end, he says, "It would be my pleasure to try and cut down DOE's size, to dismantle it, to redistribute it." (Quoted in *Time Magazine*, January 5, 1981.)

Whatever remains of a dismembered Energy Department is likely to go at once into the deep freezer at the Interior Department where the new Secretary, James Gaius Watt, has a clear conviction that the government has stolen from the people their own holdings. Hence the populist ring to his statements: "'I'm people oriented. . . If you knock down a hill, because there was coal underneath it, you ought to take the result and use it for people.' Useless land can be improved 'with a flat area for a hospital or a school or a playground or whatever, a housing development or the like. . . If I err, I'm going to err on the people side.'" (Quoted in the *Washington Post*, March 8, 1981.) This latter day Beowulf will tear an arm off Grendel—the United States government—and lift a curse from the land. The people shall prosper.

Faced with the question of an adequate understanding of the non-human world, the

American Christian has at least three options: Franciscan romanticism; European sacramentalism; and American covenantalism. The second part of this essay explores the third of these approaches to the non-human world, and will appear in the next issue of *Katallagete*.

First, *Franciscan Romanticism*. Lynn White, in his much cited essay on the "Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis," rejects the dominant Christian tradition, which he believes has helped produce the current ruthless exploitation of nature; instead, he recommends St. Francis as the patron saint of ecologists. (Pope John Paul II recently made this designation official.) The Jewish and Christian scriptures gave man dominion over every creeping thing and commanded him to fill the earth and subdue it. White sees a straight causal line from this scriptural authorization (abstracted from the biblical notion of covenant) through the technologies of the Catholic Middle Ages to the high arrogance of modern times. He prefers the passive religious tradition of nature, "recessive" in the West, that hailed Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Wind and Sister Water, Brother Fire and Sister Earth, and Sister Bodily Death, in a kind of holy democracy or intimate family of all living things.

Second, *European sacramentalism*. Biblical scholars have taken White to task for abstracting the Genesis passage from the wider context of Scripture. A more inclusive interpretation would see the biblical injunctions in the context of covenant and stewardship. When one recalls the vegetarianism of *Genesis I* and the Noachic protection of the animals, the command to subdue the earth has a different ring to it than it has for the airport advocates of nuclear energy or the hotel room salesmen of plots in Florida.

In addition to noting all these exegetical omissions, Catholic theologians have an additional grievance. White wholly ignores the sacramental traditions of East and West. Sacramentalism provides the second great option for a Christian in response to nature. It emphasizes the goodness of the non-human creation. Far from disdaining natural elements, it takes them up into the orbit of human purposes—bread, wine, water, and oil—and honors them as the bearer of sacral power. Nothing could be farther removed from that enmity toward the material realm that characterized dualistic religion in the ancient Near East. Further, sacramentalism associates the reception of these sacred elements with the great turning points in human life—birth, growth, marriage, sickness, and death—and the prosaic bodily actions of washing, eating, and reproducing. Thus sacramentalism presupposes and celebrates the ties of humankind to the great biological rhythms of the non-human world. In this respect, sacramentalism is far

removed, not only from ancient dualism that viewed the body as *evil*, but also from modern industrial liberalism that reduces the body to the *incidental*. (D.H. Lawrence understood this point very well. *Lady Chatterly's Lover* has but one "sacrament"—sexual love—but Lawrence understood that the greatest modern challenge to that love comes not from the "Puritan" who viewed the body as evil, but from the liberal who reduced the body to the trivial.) Sacramentalism knows only too well the intimate dependence of men and women on the prosaic rhythms and needs of the body.

The liberal illusion of independence from nature had its religious origins in a kind of gnosticism that sought to distance itself—through knowledge—from the body and bodily ties to the world. This aspiration to independence from nature is not entirely, however, an intellectual movement. It has a very prosaic economic base; it depends upon a limitless store of non-renewable resources, chiefly oil. Thus the imminent exhaustion of oil reserves today has traumatized the liberal industrial nations. They are forced to rejoin the planet and to attend once again to the rhythms of renewal, care, and tending.

At the same time, sacramentalism does not indulge in a mystical view of nature that elevates the non-human into the divine. It pronounces the non-human world good (not absolute good) and draws the natural goods up into the orbit of human purposes. It is significant that the central Christian sacrament takes precisely those elements—bread and wine—that have been compounded with human labor and tending, and makes these elements the bearers of sacred power.

This sacramentalism is hospitable to the view of nature which W.H. Auden characterized as the European outlook with which we began. Nature is a largely living, creaturely good, not itself directly divine but a fit bearer of the divine. Further, nature is susceptible to, and better for, the respectful interventions of humankind—like an animal to be trained and reared in the household of human purposes.

American Covenantalism. A third Christian ethic of nature deserves particular attention on the American scene, an ethic associated with the term "covenantal." It does not differ in all points from the sacramental view briefly sketched in the foregoing paragraphs, but in some particulars it provides room for special features of the American experience. The novelist, William Faulkner, offers, in my judgement, the most helpful contemporary restatement of a theological ethic for ecologists on the American scene—a covenantal ethics that embraces one's responsibility to the land and to the community. I shall discuss Faulkner's restatement and some implications of the Reagan presidency for ecology in the next issue of *Katallagete*. □

BIOGRAPHY AS THEOLOGY

*The Lord is my light and my
salvation;*

whom should I fear?

*The Lord is the refuge of my life;
of whom then should I go in
dread?*

Psalm 27:1

Winter is the season when Block Island reverts, most nearly, to its original estate. Its winter ambiance is sparse and austere and there is an impression of purity about it. This is the Island in something resembling its natural condition, unblemished by development, uncluttered by waste, undefiled by crowds. The fixtures and facades of the resort trade are boarded up and abandoned and seem to recede into the landscape. Time is estopped—its domination of existence and activity preempted by weather. The few inhabitants—like the indigenous wildlife—become preoccupied with elementary issues of survival: food, keeping warm, shelter. In the circumstances, though I do not think people love one another any more, they do become more obviously dependent upon each other and are more inclined to help one another in practical ways. In winter, Block Island becomes a basic community.

Paradoxically, winter is often referred to as the "off-season". The contrast is, of course, with the season, the summertime, when the cottage folk come and the boat people appear and the ferry "day-trippers" invade; then the shops reopen, the

restaurants and bars thrive and assorted diversions and entertainments flourish. The discrepancy between the Island's ecology and the environment extemporized to convenience the summer commerce increases each year, or so it seems to me, and that renders emphatic the truth that the winter is more definitively *the season*, while the summer is a distortion of Block Island: an exploitation approaching plunder, an indulgence breaching squander, a hectic intrusion, something like rape.

In the period since Anthony Towne and I had immigrated to Block Island in 1967 (in consequence of the desperate state of my health, about which I have written in *A Second Birthday*) both of us had come to prefer winter rather than summer (the other two seasons, which are pleasant enough on the Island, we considered transitional). We sometimes talked of quitting the Island during the summer, but we never found anyplace to go where summer would not be similarly commercialized and routinized and, more than likely, on a scale and with a concentration much greater than on Block Island. Anyway, we found the silence and the solitude of the Island's wintertime to be congenial to our temperaments and conducive to our vocations. Freed of superfluity or distraction, on the Island in the winter, Anthony would be a poet, and I a theologian, and each of us would write, respectively, poetry and theology, and, in so doing, be who we had been, respectively, called in the word of God to be.

Thus, I had set aside the winter of 1979-80, apart from one or two visits to the mainland to make lectures, to write. There were two manuscripts on my agenda: one was the completion of the last volume of a trilogy in theological ethics, a book about the biblical relationship of the charismatic and the demonic. (The other two books of the trilogy are *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* and *Conscience and Obedience: the Politics of Romans 13 and Revelation 13 in Light of the Second Coming*). The other effort was to contribute a volume to a series commissioned by Abingdon Press, that is to say, what since has become this book.

I had been having troubles with the *trilogy* book, occasioned, I recall remarking to Anthony several times, by persistent disruptions in the work attributable to the demonic powers. "They're determined to suppress this book!" I told him. The comment was only semi-facetious, since I am aware, as was Anthony, that exposure is disabling to the demonic. They are alert to every attempt at identification and apprehensive toward any effort at elucidation. In any event, I had been plagued once again during these months by health problems. The creative, if radical, surgery that had helped to spare my life in 1968 had simultaneously rendered me diabetic and, now, I was suffering some of the complications common to prolonged and advanced diabetes. The circulation in my legs had become so impaired that amputation had become a serious threat, while, at the same time, I was being warned that I would lose my sight gradually within the next few years because of diabetic damage to the blood vessels in my eyes. I was already experiencing intermittent difficulty reading. Meanwhile, I was told, I risked sudden blinding hemorrhage at any time which might be precipitated by casual effort—such as getting out of bed or bending to tie a shoelace. The problem with my legs was being treated chemically and being monitored on a regular basis so that the condition would not, hopefully, become any more dangerous; laser therapy for my eyes had been recommended by three different medical specialists. The latter involves aiming laser beams into the eyes at the ruptured blood vessels in order to cauterize the hemorrhaged regions and arrest the damage. Anthony was very skeptical about this procedure, since the therapy seemed to be at least as perilous as the ailment. I had agreed, with multifarious qualms, to submit to it because I had been informed that there was no alternative to the procedure. Despite (perchance because of) the benefit surgery had theretofore been in my life, I do not share the general popular American overconfidence in medical technology. I regard it, anyway, as the most primitive, rather than the most sophisticated, aspect of medical practice. The premise, so prominent in commercialized medicine, that there exists any merely mechanistic remedy for any health problem is, to me, essentially incoherent, categorically false, and usually, superstitious. So both Anthony and I were disquieted about the prospect of the laser treatments, and about any possibility of amputation, so much as either of us was concerned about the difficulties I had been having with my eyes and with my legs. In the context of our private communication, my remarks attributing these circumstances and interference with my writing to demonic capabilities was, as I say, only semi-facetious.

Still, I persevered. I felt a very strong conviction about the trilogy book and I knew that book already, in spite of disruptions in transposing it from my mind into manuscript. The Abingdon book, on the other hand, at that point, was vague to me. My working scheme was to utilize some lectures I was scheduled to give in Canada, in late January, 1980, to focus upon that assignment. I hoped that there would be enough stimulant in the reception of the lectures to be able to design a book which had substance and integrity. The commission I had received from the publisher was itself indefinite or ambiguous, it seemed to me. I recall the Abingdon correspondence mentioned that several authors were being asked to write about their experience in "revisioning" the faith. I didn't know what that meant. "How can I 'revision' the faith," I asked Anthony one day, as I made some preparations for the Canadian journey, "when I haven't 'visioned' it in the first place?" He never did respond to my query. Then, one week later, Anthony died.

The Canadian trip was aborted. The effort on both books was put aside. The event of Anthony's death overshadowed everything else. At his requiem, celebrated in the dead of winter on Block Island, I understood that I had to face a decision concerning how to spend the remainder of my own life. I decided then to decide nothing suddenly.

Anthony died at 11:28 P.M. on January 28, 1980. By now, as you can read, I have written this book for Abingdon. (The *trilogy* book is in its final throes). Whether or not it represents a "revisioning" of faith, I do not know because I never got around to learning what that phrase may mean. To my mind, however, *this* book represents a sampler of autobiography and biography as theology. More specifically, it tells of my experiences in mourning Anthony's death. It is autobiographical—a book of the same genre as *My People Is the Enemy* and *A Second Birthday*—and, simultaneously, it recounts episodes in the biography of Anthony Towne. Both the autobiographical and biographical aspects become and are the data for the theological reflection and commentary of the book.

I consider the theological treatment of biography—and, more broadly, history—to be biblically appropos; after all, the Old Testament is, to a large extent, Israel's story, just as the gospel accounts tell the story of Jesus and his disciples, while the *Book of Acts* is biography of the Apostles and the other pioneer Christians who became the Apostolic Church. Similar affirmations can be made of the Epistles, and, for that matter, the prisoner's diary which is the *Book of Revelation*.

WILLIAM STRINGFELLOW, attorney and theologian, author of, among other books, *A Public and Private Faith*, *My People Is the Enemy*, *A Second Birthday*, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*, *Conscience and Obedience*, and with Anthony Towne *The Bishop Pike Affair* and *A Suspect Tenderness: The Witness of the Berrigans*. This article is excerpted from *A Simplicity of Faith: My Experience in Mourning* to be published Spring, 1982, by Abingdon Press.

The theological exploration of biography or the theological reconnaissance of history are apt and, even, normative, styles because each is congruent with the definitive New Testament insight and instruction: *the Incarnation*. Biblical faith is distinguished from all religions, all philosophies, all ideologies by its redundant insistence upon the presence and vitality of the Word of God in common history, and Christians particularly confess that the involvement of the Word of God in the life of this world becomes most conscientious, comprehensible, and intentional in the event of Jesus Christ. This historic, incarnate activity of the Word of God signifies the militance of the Word of God both in cosmic dimensions of space and time and also in each and every item of created life including *your* personhood and *your* biography or mine. It is this same basis of the Christian faith which is so often diminished, dismissed, omitted or ignored when theology is rendered in abstract, hypothesized, propositional or academic models. There is, with the latter then, something incongruent about the mode of theological discourse—something inherently inappropriate about the method being employed to present the Gospel. So, I believe, biography (and history) *any* biography and *every* biography is, implicitly theological, in the sense that it contains already—literally by virtue of the Incarnation—the news of the Gospel whether or not anyone discerns that. *We* are each one of us parables.

What I am referring to, here, amounts, of course, to a doctrine of revelation. What I am discussing is how the living Word of God is implicated in the actual life of this world, in all its tumult and excitement, ambiguity and change, in the existence of the nations and principalities, human beings and other creatures, in every happening in every place in every moment. This world is the scene where the Word of God is; fallen creation—in all of its scope, detail and diversity—is the milieu in which the Word of God is revealed; now is the time, this is the era when the Word of God is disclosed and apprehended; Jesus Christ verifies how the Word of God may be beheld by those who have sight and hearing to notice and give heed to the Word of God.

Biography, thus, is rudimentary data for theology and every biography is significant for the knowledge it yields of the Word of God incarnate in common life, whether or not the subject of the biography is aware of that significance of his or her own story. *Vocation* is the name of the awareness of *that* significance of one's own biography. To have a vocation or to be called in Christ means to discern

the coincidence of the Word of God with one's own selfhood, in one's own being, in its most specific, thorough, unique and conscientious sense.

I had confronted the vocational issue earlier in my own biography—in my work in the East Harlem ghetto, in the experience of profound illness, in the immigration, with Anthony, to Block Island. Thence, in the midst of the requiem for Anthony, I realized that Anthony's death raised the matter of my vocation once more, in an abrupt, a radical, awful, perchance final way. That is the topic of this book.

I do not anticipate that either my grief at Anthony's death or my mourning for Anthony's life will be exhausted or concluded by the writing of this book. The fact that I have been able to write it only indicates that both my grieving and my mourning have matured enough—beyond initial traumas—to become continuing features of my daily life. I do not expect the grief to ever be fully dissipated; I do not want the mourning to ever be completed. Furthermore, I think that, in the months that have elapsed since 11:28 P.M. on January 28, 1980, I have grieved and mourned sufficiently so that I now distinguish the one from the other. I mention that here, at the outset of this book, because it informs and affects everything else I have written in this book.

I understand grief to be the total experience of loss, anger, outrage, fear, regret, melancholy, abandonment, temptation, bereftness, helplessness suffered privately, within one's own self, in response to the happening of death. By distinction and contrast, I comprehend mourning as the liturgies of recollection, memorial, affection, honor, gratitude, confession, empathy, intercession, meditation, anticipation for the life of the one who is dead. Empirically, in the reality of someone's death, and in the aftermath of it, grief and mourning are, of course, jumbled. It is, I think, part of the healing of mourning to sort out and identify the one from the other. In any case, of all those I have known and loved and grieved and mourned, Anthony's life was the closest to my own, and the most complimentary, so his death is my most intimate experience in grief and mourning. From that experience—so far—what I have to say is: grieving is about weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth; mourning is about rejoicing—rejoicing in the Lord. From that standpoint, I confess I have found mourning Anthony an exquisite, bittersweet experience. I *enjoy* mourning Anthony.

Such sentiments would not surprise Anthony. Sometimes he accused me of being Stoic. The doctors constantly report that I have a very high tolerance of pain. (I usually tell them that is a matter of their luck, not mine.) I prefer to consider myself as very patient. Whatever the appropriate way to put it, there was a difference between Anthony and me in this respect. He was impatient, intolerant of pain, not given to stoicism. He was quickly outraged by injustice, he complained promptly of suffering—whether his own or others'—he was indignant toward death. He spent much effort prompting and prodding me when I would be tempted to procrastinate or rationalize. (He attributed these temptations to the odd circumstances that I am trained as a lawyer but became a theologian. He considered the poet's art more humanized than either law or theology.)

After the requiem on Block Island, Scott Kennedy, who had come from California, for

himself and on behalf of other friends there, remained with me for some days. There are few other people that I would have been glad to have with me in the household at that time. Scott, who is the brother-in-law of the late Bishop James A. Pike, about whom Anthony and I had written two books, is a good friend and compatriot, and he and I talked in those few days—as one would expect—about Anthony's life and its meaning for each of us. At one point in our dialogue, Scott asked me directly what, above or beyond everything else, Anthony meant to me.

"Anthony is my conscience," I confided in Scott.

It was an instantaneous and spontaneous reply. And the response was no hyperbole, least of all in the circumstances. It is unembellished, and it needs no embellishment.

That is my epithet for Anthony Towne. □

41: Since that summer many other bombs have been "found." What is going to happen? At the time of writing, after a season of brisk speculation, men seem to be fatigued by the whole question.

41

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