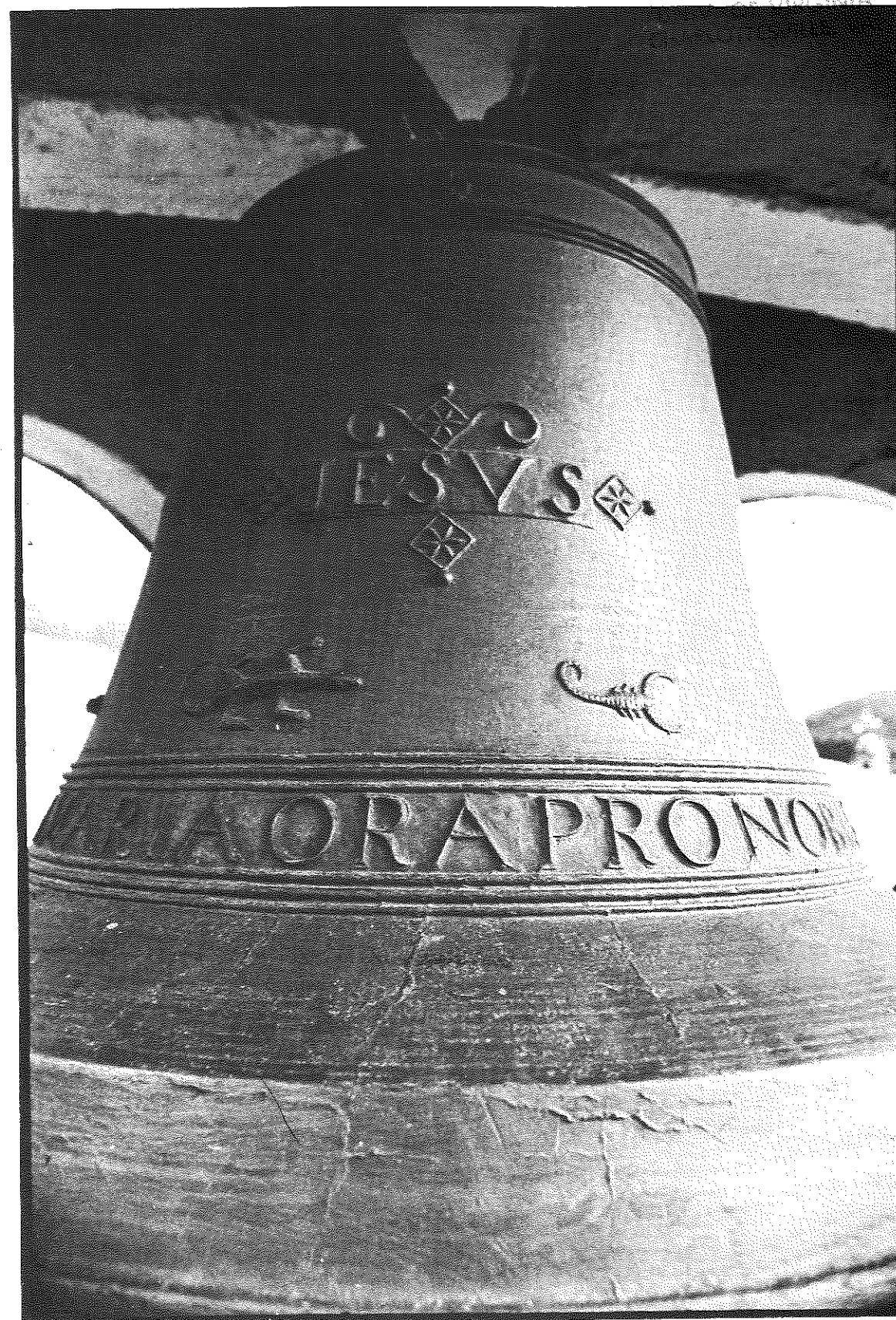
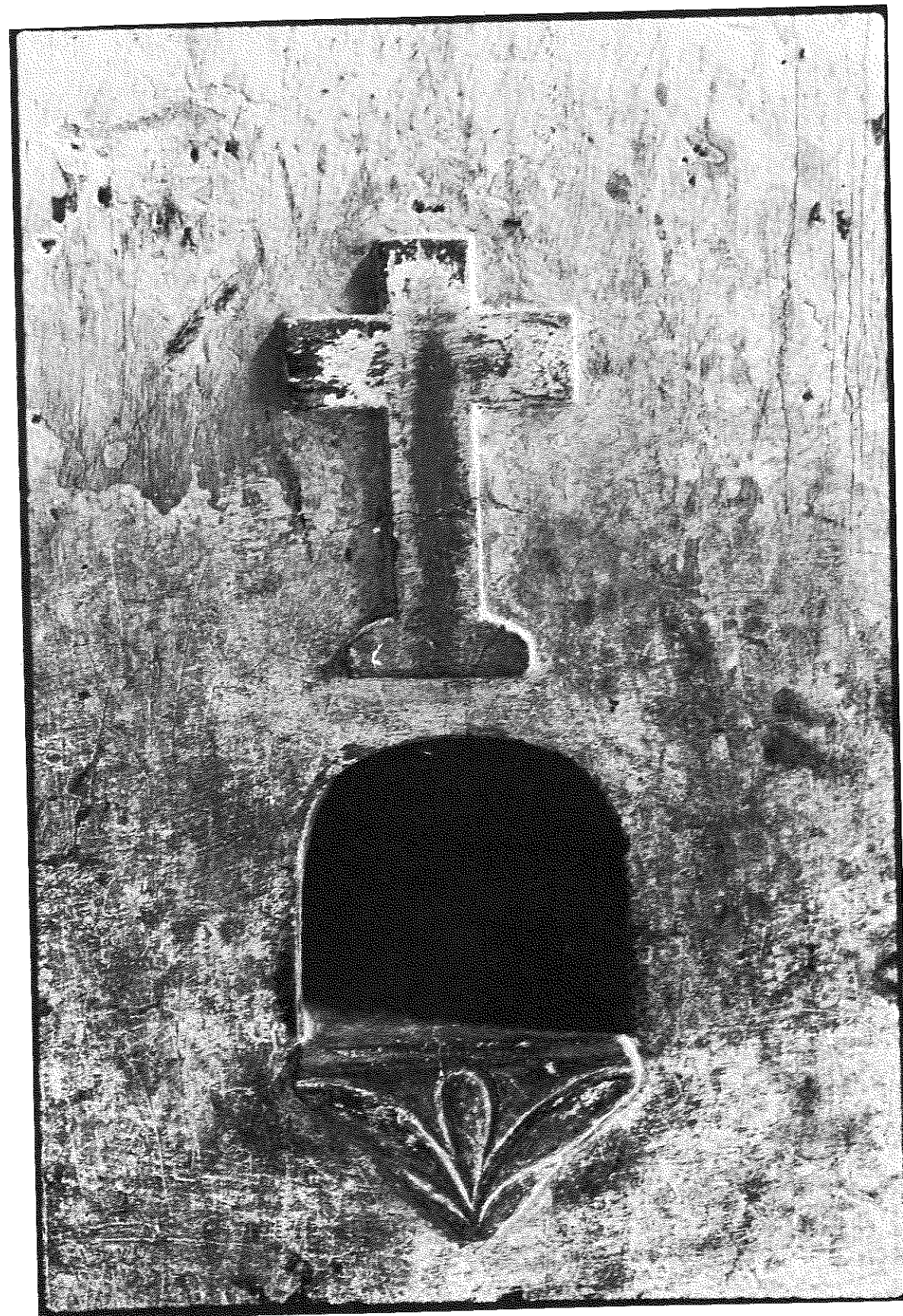






KATALLAGETE

SUMMER, 1982

Volume 8, Number 1

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PUBLISHER
WILL D. CAMPBELL
for the Committee
of Southern Churchmen

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Published by the Committee of Southern Churchmen, Inc. Individuals receiving KATALLAGETE forward a minimum of \$10.00 for four issues to cover the cost of printing and mailing.

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ISSN 0022-9288

"Rooms with a View," by Sally Fitzgerald appeared in a somewhat different version in *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin* (Volume 10, Autumn 1981), Georgia College, Milledgeville, Georgia.

Cover Photographs by Al Clayton.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE...

The New Yorker might say: a friend writes, "... We should by no means conclude that man is mechanized and conditioned, that he is a robot. ... Man is still perfectly capable of choosing, deciding, altering, directing. ... But always within the technological framework and toward the progression of technology. Man can choose. But his choices will always bear upon secondary elements and never on the overall phenomenon. His judgements will always be ultimately defined by the technological criteria. Man can choose, but in a system of options established by the technological process. He can direct, but in terms of the technological given. He can never get out of it at any time, and the intellectual systems he constructs are ultimately expressions or justifications of technology. Of course man is not perfectly integrated in or adjusted to the system. But it suffices to note that it is not the human presence that hinders technology from being established as a system. The human being who acts and thinks today is not situated as an independent subject with respect to a technological object. He is inside the technological system, he is himself modified by the technological factor. The human being who uses technology today is by that very fact the human being who serves it. And conversely, only the human being who serves technology is truly able to use it."

Here is how we understand our friend's argument: to coin a paraphrase: "the world of technology is too much with us." To ignore it, to tut-tut these judgements as too "pessimistic" because we own the consoles of technology, especially the ones for nuclear warfare, courts peril and programs us as "robots" serving the technological system, especially the nuclear system. We are not yet "robots." We choose, decide, alter, direct. That is, we can and must make moral and political and theological distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, oppressed and oppressor, first-strike, no-strike, nuclear-freeze, nuclear-reductions. This is one point. The other, our friend writes that we consider well! Those choices, decisions, alterations and directions, however noble and righteous, are "secondary elements" in a 'world come of age.' "Decisions" by Presidents, First Secretaries, proletariat, bourgeoisie,

Pope and the World Council, oppressed and oppressor, take place within the *primary* determinant, "a system of options established by the technological progress. ... ultimately defined by the technological criteria. ... [man] 'himself is modified by the technological factor.'"

Loose talk decades ago, theological and political tracts announced we are 'a world come of age.' Granting the undercurrent of uneasiness in the West today among the young, most of us hang tough: 'our world come of age' is a world under control, our nature and destiny in our hands, technology our handmaiden. So we invoke jaded, up-to-date so bankrupt slogans of an era that died while we daydreamed and built Edsels and worshipped "education." "Vote for Christ's Sake!" "The Future Belongs to the Youth!" "To Work is To Be Free!" "Every Vote Counts!" "Listen to the Words of the Oppressed!" "Deeds! Not Words!" "Get Christians into Politics!" "Prayer Breakfasts!" "Be Who You Are!" "I'm a Fan of Jesus!" Bumperstickers are cheap. Well-meaning, but meaningless. They ignore what our friend argues is a *world come of age*. Our nature and destiny are not under our control, handmaiden technology; rather 'a world come of age,' our choices within "a system of options established by the technological progress. ... it is not the human presence that hinders technology from being established as a system." The technological progress moves without our intervention. Our decisions, efforts, causes, movements are modified by, indeed, defined by, the technical system.

Justice remains justice, righteousness righteousness, oppression oppression. (Everyone reads the Bible so we know what we know!) What we hear from our friend is that the decisions for justice, righteousness, oppression, etc., etc., are not decisions by individuals and communities who believe themselves more or less autonomous politically, morally, theologically. No more of that social-science decision-making, cheap-talk, else we commit ourselves "robots" in 'a world come of age', serving the technological system with our demands for justice, righteousness, the end-once-and-for-all of sexism, racism, oppression, not to say the nuclear threat.

Of course! The Soviets must be condemned (there is Afghanistan, *Solidarity*, the Gulag). The United States must be condemned (El Salvador, if not the whole of the Latin World in the New World, to say nothing of our own "Gulags" in the metropolitan centers and the rural ghettos.) Indeed, all the governments regularly reported by *Amnesty International* must be denounced. Yes: The Holocaust. If not Tyre and Sidon and Beirut a few weeks ago! We know all that. And more. We hear our friend's argument that these events, singularly and taken together, must be considered "within the technological framework and toward the progression of technology." What happened then and happens now and will happen tomorrow is 'the world come of age.' The Holocaust. The Gulags. Yes. There is Genghis Khan, Ivan the Terrible, Napoleon, not to mention others in our civilization more "liberal" who might have administered their own Final Solution (one thinks of the aborigines the world over) had they possessed the technical resources. They did not. Mercifully, we shall never know. God knows what they might have done had they the technical resources at our command. The Holocaust, Coventry, Dresden, the concentration and expropriation of American-Japanese during the Second World War, the Bombs in August 1945, and on and on and on. ... the reader fill in the spaces of 'a technological world come of age' since 1945 or 1914. Hints are given by Reagan and Watts with the Civil Rights and Ecological movements of the 1960's and 1970's. "Vote for Christ's Sake!"

It is not the human presence that hinders technology from being established as a system. The human being who acts and thinks today is not situated as an independent subject with respect to a technological object. He is inside the technological system, he is himself modified by the technological factor." Thomas Merton wrote of Adolf Eichmann: "a psychiatrist examined him and pronounced him perfectly sane. I do not doubt it at all, and that is precisely why I find it disturbing. ... [Eichmann's] calm, 'well-balanced,' unpreturbed, an official conscientiously going about his desk work, his administrative job which happened to be the supervision of mass murder. He was thoughtful, orderly, unimaginative. He had a profound respect for system, for law and order. He was obedient, loyal, a faithful officer of a great state. He served his government very well. He was not bothered much by guilt. ... Apparently he slept well. He had a good appetite or so it seems. True, when he visited Auschwitz, the Camp Commander. ... tried to tease the big boss and scare him with some of the sights. Eichmann was disturbed, yes. ... but of course what happened at Auschwitz was not an accident: just the routine unpleasantness of the daily task. One must shoulder the

burden of daily monotonous work for the Fatherland. Yes one must suffer discomfort and even nausea from unpleasant sights and sounds. It all comes under the heading of duty, self-sacrifice, and obedience. Eichmann was devoted to duty, and proud of his job. The sanity of Eichmann is disturbing. We equate sanity with a sense of justice, with humaneness, with prudence, with the capacity to love and understand other people. ... No, Eichmann was sane, the generals and fighters on both sides, in World War II, the ones who carried out the total destruction of entire cities, these were the sane ones. Those who have invented and developed atomic bombs, thermonuclear bombs, missiles, who have planned the strategy of the next war; who have evaluated the possibilities of using bacterial and chemical agents: these are not crazy people, they are *sane* people. ... I am beginning to realize that 'sanity' is no longer a value or an end in itself. The 'sanity' of modern man is about as useful to him as the huge bulk muscles of the dinosaur. If he were a little less sane, a little more doubtful, a little more aware of his absurdities and contradictions, perhaps there might be a possibility of his survival. But if he is sane, too sane. ... perhaps we must say that in a society like ours the worst insanity is to be totally without anxiety, totally 'sane.'"

Handwringing and slogans and movements and resolutions have their place. Bumperstickers are nice. Tee-shirts better (they cost more). In 'our world come of age' we ask if these "secondary elements" which serve "the technological framework" make possible the impossible if we fail to heed our friend's warning: our choices are now in 'a world come of age,' "a system of options established by the technological process." The Holocaust. The Gulags of Solzhenitsyn and *Amnesty International*, Schell's *The Fate of the World*. It is not the powerless in a world of power who are "modified by the technological factor," but the Presidents, the First Secretaries, the Prime Ministers, the Movement Leaders—powerful in a world of power who are modified by the system of technique, the nuclear system. Power and the powerless are not yet "robots". But to ignore why we are not yet "robots" makes the powerful and powerless "robots." Our friend writes: "The human being who uses technology today is by that very fact the human being who serves it. And conversely, only the human being who serves technology is truly able to use it."

Pieties and bumperstickers in 'our world come of age' won't do. In 'a world come of age' we need to do our homework. □ JYH

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

Sally Fitzgerald



Thomas Merton and Flannery O'Connor: "Rooms with a view." Gathered spirits, contemporary, Christian, possessed of both remarkable literary gifts and in a clear sense of personal vocation, beautifully accepted, developed, and lived in both instances.

Flannery O'Connor and Thomas Merton never met, and I have so far found no evidence that the two writers even corresponded, although each admired the work being done by the other, as we know from their friends, from her letters, and from the public praise he showered on her in his *Jubilee* article written at the time of her death in 1964. As they were joined in spirit by their respective vocations, they were personally kept apart by the circumstances of their lives, and by the particular nature of their vocations: Thomas Merton's to the cloistered monasticism and Flannery O'Connor's to the restrictions of invalidism. This seems a pity, for it is impossible to think that each would not have delighted in the downrightness, the humor, and the self-mockery, to say nothing of the high intelligence and invincible faith, of the other. They even shared an occasional slambang exuberance of language that marks them both, for all their deep commitment to the most ancient of Christian churches, as incorrigibly youthful and very American. In an article on a hot-tongued sixth-century abbot, St. John Climacus, and his book *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, which Merton describes as probably the most widely read spiritual book in Eastern Christendom,

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this twentieth-century Yankee Trappist monk cannot resist the following insouciance toward the solemn tone: "The Ladder starts at the bottom with renunciation of the world, and works up to mystical union with God. [But] by far the greater part of the book is concerned with vices, passions, temptations and wiles of the devil and, of course, with the proper means of unmasking the enemy and busting him in the teeth." Under the watchful glare of Caroline Gordon, Flannery subdued her impulse to speak with such robust language in her fiction, in which, as Miss Gordon strictly enjoined her, the author's voice may use only Johnsonian English. But Flannery didn't disdain the colloquial in person, or in letters, and certainly not in the dialogue of her stories and novels. In "A Circle in the Fire," Mrs. Cope corrects the threats of her fierce young daughter with a general dictum: "Ladies don't beat the daylights out of people." I don't suppose that this exchange was taken from life, but from my knowledge of the actual mother and child from whom these two characters were drawn, I judge that it might have been. If so, Flannery might have protested that her own lady-like aim was to beat the daylights *into* people. I confess that I take a certain bemused pleasure in imagining conversations that Father Louis and Flannery might have had, if they had been able to meet.

In general, of course, Father Louis and Flannery differed greatly in personality and character and in experience, as well as in the specific subject matter and form of their writings as these grew out of their differing gifts and vocational stations in life. Merton—professed, habited and tonsured—was nevertheless a mercurial and flamboyant personality, and a torrential writer on openly religious subjects. Flannery—living at home, combed and curled like anyone else in Milledgeville, habited in unremarkable clothes, often made by her mother—was a small-town girl, quieter, more withdrawn than most, who distilled her mysterious fiction drop by careful drop, and it was some time before many critics and readers of her stories and novels realized that she was a religious writer at all. For that matter, a few have continued to deny it, on their own authority, no matter what she herself has to say on the subject. But these two young Americans were akin in that they both practiced simultaneously not one but two vocations, each to the enrichment of the other. Both were called by their natural gifts to be writers, and both were called by what has been named the gift of faith to lives of religious contemplation, their natural gifts being turned in both instances to intense and lifelong service of the latter.

Their formative circumstances differed as greatly as their personalities and the kind of writing each would practice; their calls to the religious life came in very different ways, as well: Merton's after headlong participation in the worldly life of his youth, followed by deep conversion and an irresistible inward summons to live as a monk, in answer to which he chose the

cenobitic life of a Cistercian abbey in Kentucky. Flannery O'Connor's own annunciation came after what she called a rather Jansenistic Catholic formation in childhood and extremely limited worldly experience—in the form of a devastating illness that would thereafter dictate the course of her days if she were to survive at all. Like Merton, she was twenty-six years old when she faced the encounter. Willy-nilly, this event would require of her that she live more or less as what we might call an idiorrhythmic nun, not vowed to but practicing, together with her vocation as a writer, a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience, as certainly as any monk. At least, her summons would ask this of her. She didn't choose this life of her own accord, as Merton did, and she still might have willed to live within her circumstantial limitations in a very different way, or at least in a very different state of mind. It was her manner of compliance—what she made of her circumstances—that depended upon herself and her own choices thereafter and comprised her vocation to be. I have said that Merton's summon to monasticism was irresistible. It wasn't, of course. He could perfectly well have said no, however clearly and strongly he heard that summons. And Flannery, although she would in any case have been trapped in her besieged body, might have taken a corrosively resentful view of her fate and the vocation it implied. Such resentment would have affected not only her mode of life but her entire outlook, and concomitantly, the way she used her gifts as an artist. Both, however, assented, and renewed that assent continually throughout the rest of their days. It was their Fiat—their Be it done to me according to Thy word. It was this *practice* of assent, of acceptance—certainly not always managed without intense suffering and impulse to rebellion—that gave rise in each to works that stand as unique among those of their generation of American writers.

It is fair enough, I think, to speculate in a general way, based on what we know of these two personalities, as to what might have happened to them and how their writing gifts might have developed, had they not been called to live as they did.

Without his religious vocation, Thomas Merton would have been most likely a prolific writer, like so many others, and no doubt a wild participant in the bohemian life of his time, with all its free-wheeling manners and attendant confusions and distractions. Or possibly, as one biographer, Monica Furlong, suggests, he might have accomplished little or nothing at all as a writer before he altogether defeated himself. As she says, "He needed structure of a fairly rigorous kind, quite simply to prevent his own vigorous appetites and questing mind from destroying him." Even after his first conversion, which occurred in 1938 and curbed him somewhat in his

self-destructive impulses, he was far from finding the soil and climate in which his gifts could grow. When his first novel, concerning a young man and his struggles with the world, was sent around to publishers, it was refused everywhere, not because the editors didn't like it, but because, as Robert Giroux said, "It lacked resolution." Like the writer himself. He had begun to write poetry, too, from the time of his baptism on, but his voice was rough, unpracticed and careless, like the young man himself. It was not until the idea came to him—from nowhere he could name—that he should go into a monastery and become a priest, that, as he himself tells us, he felt the clarity and peace of mind to sustain him through many false starts and disappointments until he could begin the new life in which he would become so fruitful. The voice of the idea had been unmistakably authentic. The monastic life gave him, too, the sense of being "chosen" and loved, and an irremovable home and "family," all of which he needed badly. His mind and spirit deepened, strengthened, enlightened and disciplined by its practice, he became not only a monk, living the hard daily Cistercian life of work and prayer, and, as Master of Students, guiding other young men into its ways, but also the author of more than forty illuminating books on a wide range of subjects—autobiography, poetry, scholarship, religious history, mysticism, theology and philosophy, public affairs and mores, war and peace: one of the most influential and admired religious writers of his time and unlikely to sink into obscurity in the future. His cell window in the Abbey close had opened into wide vistas of natural beauty, human experience, and divine reality, all of which he would convey to us vividly in his books.

Had Flannery O'Connor been able to continue in her planned self-exile from the South and permanently join her literary colleagues in the North, she still might have left her mark on contemporary literature by reason of sheer talent, but probably in a less interesting and lasting way. The result of extended expatriation might well have been a watered-down religious sensibility and almost certainly a dulled ear. The struggle to learn thoroughly enough any other region and language than those ingrained in her, which she used so effectively in giving incarnate life to her characters, would have consumed her energies, I think, with considerably less convincing results. She once advised her friend, Cecil Dawkins, to return to the South of her origins, lest she "lose her ear." This advice was not taken, and, as Cecil Dawkins has told me, she did indeed eventually lose her ear for the Southern language she had handled so superbly in the early stories Flannery admired. Flannery might have suffered the same loss, as she herself came to realize. Without her religious vocation—to relative isolation on a Georgia farm and a life lived in the ever-present shadow of death—it is unlikely that Flannery O'Connor would have peered so deeply into the implications of the faith that, as she said, she could not abandon, even if

she wanted to. She would have remained a Catholic Christian, I believe, but perhaps not have become as profoundly or as broadly so.

It may be that Flannery would have come to understand this, living in the North amid agnostic friends in a largely, if not purely, secular world. She might have retreated under her own power to a setting more conducive to the production of the kind of work she did so well, but the possibility certainly exists that her time and limited physical strength—for she was none too strong, and very slow, in the best of times—would have been frittered away in conversation, in teaching, in distracting emotional attachments, had she clung to what was for her an artificial environment. She might not have recognized what she really needed until it was too late. She herself perceived this possibility, in retrospect, and spoke of it in her letters, writing, again to Cecil Dawkins: "I stayed away from [the South] from the time I was twenty to twenty-five with the notion that the life of my writing depended on it. I would certainly have persisted in that delusion had I not got very ill and had to come home. The best of my writing has been done here."



It seems clear that what both Father Louis and Flannery needed, for very different reasons, were fixed lives and solitude. Such lives were bound to entail some natural frustration and loneliness, and both suffered those; yet, in the end, that must have seemed a small price to pay for what their solitude brought them, both personally and as writers.

Thomas Merton had needed as a guide the unexpected call to monasticism that struck him so forcefully, for he had been until then a prisoner of his own gregariousness, which he seemed unable to control or



even to recognize as a danger. Although Flannery needed the even stronger impulsion of chronic illness to place her permanently in the most favorable place for her work to be done, she had always been able to create a certain degree of solitude in any situation in which she found herself. As a child she enjoyed freedom from the hurly-burly of life among siblings—and she was frank to acknowledge that she had never minded being an only child. Even the somewhat oppressively energetic care and social supervision of her mother—the dressing-up imposed on the child who had no interest whatever in party-dresses and whose interest in parties was limited to the ice cream; the piano lessons inflicted on the altogether unmusical ear; the loathed dancing lessons forced on what she called a tin leg—in short, the general preparation of an accomplished Georgia belle, could not keep her from her long, narrow room in the cavernous old family house on Greene Street, where she wrote her early poems and stories and laboriously cut the linoleum blocks for her satirical cartoons (as usual doing things in the way that requires the most doing). In graduate school at Iowa, she was popular and admired by her fellow-workers in the Workshop, as she was to be later at Yaddo, but she always knew enough to withdraw from their company and their communal frolics to the solitude of her room where she wrestled alone with the problems her writing posed for her and where she did the kind of reading in literature she had not had access to, or known about, while she was living in Milledgeville, even in college there. Soon after, in Ridgefield, Connecticut, where a series of entirely unforeseen circumstances brought her to live with me and my family, she was the best of company at mealtimes

and in the course of our long evenings of conversation around the table and later over the dishpan. Still, even that was a relatively isolated life. There were just the three of us grown-ups—and much of the time, only two, she and I—and a handful of very small children there in the woods half a mile from the nearest neighbor. Guests were infrequent, especially in winter. She never seemed to miss the livelier life another twenty-four-year-old would have regarded as her divine right. By day, even there, she kept to her room above the garage, continuing her struggle to control her material and bring order to the words and form to the novel she was writing.

Her room in the family house in Milledgeville had commanded a view of the handsome gardens of the antebellum Georgia Governors' Mansion, by then housing the president of the women's college. But her gaze from the window of this bedroom-study, even then, had gone far beyond the hedges and trees and flowers of the mansion gardens to a vision of the life she meant to lead and the writing she meant to do when she was able to escape from what no doubt seemed the stifling future planned for her by her numerous and attentive relatives. It is easy to imagine how attractive to a young writer of genius was the prospect of devoting her energies to netting the town banker and joining him in a life of acquisition and local prominence. When she elected to go to Iowa State University, it was confidently predicted by the family chorus of uncles and aunts that she would be back home within three weeks. "Humph!" she commented to her journal, noting this wishful prediction. In Iowa City, which she described as looking "tubercular," whatever else she saw from her

boardinghouse window there, she still kept her eyes on the same distant view of the future literary life that she had imagined as a student in Milledgeville and for which she was laboriously preparing herself. She was well on her way to her goal, her Taulkinham, by the time she reached the literary haven of Yaddo; the grounds around the rambling old house she lived in at Yaddo can have seemed to her no more than a park in the City to which she had finally come and in which she had only to establish a place for herself as an author. She looked and listened and learned much there, but her closest attention was absorbed by Hazel Motes and what he saw, or thought he saw, from those "pecan eyes." At Yaddo she had her first encounter with some of the dangers to be found in the ambience she had chosen. She certainly would not have been shocked into reversing herself or her intentions by her immersion in the events that closed down that establishment temporarily and brought her to our door and into our lives, but she didn't seem to mind leaving that ambience or to mind the relatively unglamorous life we could offer her in our hidden field on the Redding Ridge. Life was simple there, but the master of the house was a poet and teacher, and the atmosphere was literary, in a mild way. Best of all, she could be herself. Her room in our house, windowed on three sides, looked out into an encircling forest of oak and maple and pine, beyond a boulder-strewn clearing around the house. But that was not what she looked at, either. Closeted in that small room, she continued to occupy herself in peering at the world and the universe as seen by Hazel Motes, who was still wandering perversely through page after page, most of them to be discarded, while Flannery herself tried to find the path his own nature and character would follow on his way to the place toward which he was unwittingly moving. That place of course turned out to be a darkened room in Mrs. Flood's roominghouse, where he would see his vision clarified in blindness. Flannery imagined him with a religious imagination formed by the teachings of her faith, seeing him as one of the countless men whom God had found worth dying for and who would be offered the personal grace and choice of redemption. It was the first strong evidence in her work of the vision that was to inform all her fiction in the future. Beyond—and around—Hazel and his outlandish companions lay her vision of the infinite, to be reflected in his face when the defeated rebel looks out, as she wrote, "across the clearing and beyond, the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth, into space" (*Wise Blood*).

This passage, like the entire puzzling book, was first read by many critics as affirming a nihilistic point of view. This was an entirely mistaken reading, perhaps the result of her wish not to seem too obvious. I think, rather, that the apparent emptiness described was meant to suggest a temporary blinding, reminiscent of that of

Paul (whom Hazel, knocked off his Essex on his own road to Damascus, resembles). In any case, her own real point of view is plainly expressed in a prophetic passage that appears earlier in the book. In this passage, she describes the brooding universe over Taulkinham, the city to which Hazel has come to find his freedom. He stalks the streets, like the shoppers around him, absorbed in his own thoughts as they are absorbed in the tawdry goods on display in the stores. Neither they nor he is looking up to where, as she wrote, "The black sky was underpinned with long silver streaks that looked like scaffolding and depth on depth behind it were thousands of stars that all seemed to be moving very slowly as if they were about some vast construction work that involved the whole order of the universe and would take all time to complete."

What Hazel later sees, by day, on the roadside after the car in which he has put his faith has been destroyed, is only the beginning of true vision for him. That blank gray sky is pregnant with meaning as yet unperceived. His deeper insight, which is mystically illuminated, he will reach in self-inflicted blindness, in his meagre room in Mrs. Flood's house, where he will finally sit down and say to his uneasy soul, in Eliot's words: "Be still, and let the dark come upon you, which shall be the darkness of God." In this dark night, it is suggested by the earlier nocturnal passage, he can at last see the stars and comprehend their movement, while he quietly awaits the end of his short earthly life, his inner eyes fixed, it is further implied, upon the star that had arisen over Bethlehem, a light with which he himself eventually becomes associated in the mind of his mystified landlady.

It is interesting, and perhaps important, to note that the passage about the sky over Taulkinham was written after the novel had been sent in to the publisher, in response to Caroline Gordon's criticism of the manuscript as lacking physical detail of scene or setting. Flannery tended, Caroline told her, to spotlight her characters and the lack of concrete sensuous description in the settings gave these people the aspect of actors moving about with lighted faces on a more or less totally dark stage. Similarly, a discernible philosophical background or context was somehow missing in the original manuscript. In the nocturnal Taulkinham passage, written after she had received Caroline's criticism and recognized its validity—and, incidentally,

also after her first savage attack of lupus, the beginning of her own dark night of the soul—Flannery managed to come up with something that was not only physical, but metaphysically very powerful, as well. I can never read this passage—and much else of Flannery's work—without remembering George Meredith's rather hair-raising poem "Lucifer in Starlight."

I render the whole of this short poem; it is impossible to excerpt any part and still retain the sense of the whole:

*On a starr'd night Prince Lucifer uprose.
Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend
Above the rolling ball in cloud part screen'd,
Where sinners hugg'd their spectre of repose.
Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those.
And now upon his western wing he lean'd,
Now his huge bulk o'er Africs sands careen'd.
Now the black planet shadow'd Arctic snows.
Soaring through wider zones that prick'd his scars
With memory of the old revolt from Awe.
He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
Which are the brain of heaven, he look'd, and sank.
Around the ancient track march'd, rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law.*

Nothing is said about a pause over Middle Georgia in this flight, but Flannery O'Connor always held that he loomed, and looked down there, too, searching for his "poor prey." And she recounted in her fiction instance after instance of his defeat through the "schemes yet deeper than his own" of the power that moved the stars. For Meredith, these stars had suggested the army of unalterable law. For Flannery, they called to mind a "great work of construction"—the City of God—to which the vast, slow, overriding scheme of universal redemption may be likened, and to which she was perhaps referring when she wrote the passage.

Hazel Motes's rebellion and defeat, although these resembled the events of her own life in no obvious way, seemed in retrospect to Flannery to have been somehow prophetic of her personal history. Why did she think this? I would propose that Hazel's revolt against a constraining background may have seemed to her to figure her own effort to leave her region and family in following her own idea of a career as a writer

somewhere far away from the demands of Milledgeville. His defeat at the hands of the benign but angelically inexorable officer who destroys his means of mobility and escape she may have seen as a prophetic metaphor for the illness that struck her, with terrible suddenness, soon after she had brought the novel to its denouement in a first draft, for that event brought to an end all thought of escape and independence for Flannery. At any rate, she later described the novel to a correspondent as "autobiographical," and, as we know that the narrative describes none of her own actual experiences and that Hazel's attitudes and ideas in no way correspond to her own, it can only be surmised that this is what she meant by this statement.

Hazel's surrender, figured in the novel by his quietly self-inflicted blindness, and the enlightenment that follows on that surrender certainly prefigure her own consent to the passive diminishment of a restricted life, in which, after closing her eyes on any prospect of a normal existence, she came to realize that what she had been given thereby was not just a miserable remnant of life left over from disaster, but a new life engendered and increased by the grace of her acceptance of it as a kind of religious vocation. In this reconstructed life, as she noted afterward, her best work had been done. So, we might say, while the view from her window had been drastically changed by destiny, at first darkening and narrowing sharply, it had opened again, revealing brighter, wider and deeper expanses than ever, among which she found her previously most cherished vision—that of not just "being a writer," but of doing some fine and enduring work as a true artist.

In her journal, written when she was in college, at about seventeen, two years after the death of her father, Flannery reflected: "The reality of death has come upon us and a consciousness of the power of God has broken our complacency like a bullet in the side. A sense of the dramatic, of the tragic, of the infinite, has descended upon us, filling us with grief, but even above grief, wonder. Our plans were so beautifully laid out, ready to be carried to action, but with magnificent certainty God laid them aside and said, 'You have forgotten—mine?'"

Flannery's father had died when she was fifteen. While the above entry is, I believe, a meditation on the loss of her father, it applies as well to herself, to the personal losses her illness would entail when it occurred, some ten years later, reminding her again of the Planner

who occasionally brought about abrupt and painful changes in careful human projects. In her faith, she could believe these changes to be somehow salutary, wise and loving, however hard they were to take. Believing this, she could accept the alteration of her own plans, as we know she did, and thereby found her second vocation and an immense enrichment of the first.

In much the same way, the new life Merton had accepted, to all appearances so much narrower and more constrictive than the old, opened to him a view that would eventually encompass all the world and time both past and future. It called him to a cell and a window from which he would begin to see life, human and divine, in dimensions he could never have envisioned, immersed as he would have been in the immediacy of the exhausting present, had he remained in the world as a confused actor, rather than left it to become a contemplative. He never ceased to be a writer, for he was born to be that, and his writing was equally a vocation to him, though he regarded it as secondary. But he became a writer with an inexhaustible subject.

Among the entries contained in Father Louis's last notebooks, compiled on his journey to the Far East where he met his death in 1968, he quotes the French poet, Pierre Emmanuel, on the subject of vocation: "What is a vocation? A call and a response. This definition does not say everything: to conceive of the call of God as an expressed order to carry out a task certainly is not always false, but it is only true after a long interior struggle in which it becomes obvious that no such constraint is apparent. It also happens that the order comes to maturity along with the one who must carry it out and that it becomes in some way this very being, who has now arrived at full maturity."

A biographer remarks this notation from *The Asian Journals* but paraphrases it in such a way as to reduce it somewhat to more readily understandable psychological terms, when she says that Emmanuel's statement is "to the effect that those who believed themselves to have a vocation, a call, needed to reach a stage in their development when they knew that the constraint had not been quite of the kind they originally thought, but rather an inevitable outcome of their temperament, upbringing, and the particular problems they had."

This paraphrase is to my mind inadequate. It echoes a bit too much the reductive analytical approach of George Rayber, in O'Connor's novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*. Rayber writes for what his uncle, Mason Tarwater, calls a "schoolteacher magazine" a study of that uncle, who is a confident prophet, concluding that "His fixation of being called by the Lord had its origin in insecurity. He needed the assurance of a call, and so he called himself." Old Tarwater is outraged. And Flannery is outraged on his behalf, we should note. Her sympathies lie entirely with him. For her, he is a prophet—a seer of distances and truths. Neither she nor Father Louis would agree, I think, that they, either, had "called themselves," under the stress of internal psychological pressures, although both had plenty of these to contend with. Rather, the call, if real, had to be responded to, and adhered to, by free choice, not by compulsion—and in both these instances, it was.

With reference to Flannery and Father Louis, it is more instructive, I think, to read in its entirety the passage copied out by Father Louis in his journal. In that passage, Emmanuel goes on to say: "Finally the process of maturing can be a mysterious way of dying, provided that with death the task begins. . . there has to be a dizzying choice, a definitive dehiscence (rupture) by which the certitude he has gained of being called is torn assunder. That which—as one says, and the word is rightly used here—*consecrates* a vocation and raises it to the height of the sacrifice which it becomes is a breaking with the apparent order of being, with its formal full development or its visible efficacy."

Both Father Louis and Flannery would, I think, agree that the order to live and write as each did came to them along with maturity, that in fulfilling that order they attained full maturity, and that their respective double vocations matured fully along with them. They would have agreed, as well, I believe, that the process of maturing can be a mysterious way of dying—for both were required to "die to the world," in a very real sense—and that with this metaphorical death, the task for each of them, had begun.

The task for both, in their writings and their lives, did indeed entail a breaking with the apparent order of

being, with its formal full development or its visible efficacy. Father Louis's writings are not hard to understand, but it isn't easy for most people to understand why a talented twentieth-century man should undertake the rigors of a harsh monastic life and vow himself to a lifetime of silence, hardship, and a child-like obedience to an antiquated Rule of life and a Superior who might have little or no understanding of, or much sympathy with, him. Surely, some must think, he could have learned to behave himself without *that*. Why couldn't he go on—as plain Thomas Merton. . . to live a "good, normal life" and exercise his generous gifts as a writer, even as a religious writer? Probably he could have, eventually. But he chose not to; he chose to stay the course.

It is plain that Flannery O'Connor's circumstance of invalidism demanded of her that she live the restricted life she did, but it is less easy for many people to understand why she persisted in writing the troubling and difficult Christ-centered fiction she labored over and left for us to try to fathom. She has been criticized for what has seemed to some an obsessive concern with evil in mankind, with violence and hatred among her unhappy characters. Why no human love, or even obvious religious comfort in her stories? "Don't you think," her mother once asked her, "that you ought to use your God-given talents to write a book that people, I mean a lot of people, will like?" She might have. She might have used her gifts of observation to write books that would have brought her a wide audience as a brilliantly comic, satirical writer, with nothing much on her mind except the rewards she would enjoy from such popularity. But she didn't. She stayed with her thorny subject—which she described as the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil—and she stayed with her uncompromising treatment of it. She had her enthusiasts and great critical respect, as well as hostility; but, her general audience was small, and the persistent misreading of her work, even among critics, was a lifelong trial to her. But she could, she said, wait a hundred years for readers. As for the material rewards she forewent by not writing to please, I can only cite one royalty statement I have seen, according to which she received, for the preceding six months, \$1.50 from the sales of *Wise Blood*. It wasn't always that bad, of course, but her returns for her work never of themselves reached subsistence level in her lifetime.

When Flannery O'Connor and Father Louis continued to live and practice their vocations as they alone could recognize them, they made the dizzying

choice. Their sense of being chosen was no doubt torn assunder as they developed in these vocations, but this was only to open that innate sense to their further understanding, not to destroy it. Both, in Emmanuel's word, *consecrated* their double vocations, by breaking with formal full development and apparent efficacy. But in that break, something else was won. Flannery O'Connor, because she persisted in writing as she did, kept her imagination and her vision free and left a body of work that continues to grow in interest and significance, far beyond that of most of her contemporaries, while her audience has increased, rather than decreased, since her death. With the publication of her personal letters, which Richard Gilman has called "dispatches from her life," the impact of that theretofore unknown life itself, her way of living it, has been felt by many others, as I know from the simple human response I have received in countless letters from readers who came to know her through those dispatches.

Father Louis reached as many, or more, readers in his productive lifetime, in which he was a highly visible figure. But the visible efficacy of those writings, however considerable, both within his own Order and with the reading public, probably falls far short of reaching the invisible efficacy of the life of sacrifice which he followed to its end, against a clamor of predictions that he would not. That he did so constitutes his affirmation of the reality he found in his cell and in the broad vision granted him from that little window on the world.

Flannery O'Connor defined the prophet as one whose function is not to foresee the future but to see into the depths of finite reality, of men and manners, to the spirit that enlivens them, and to bear witness to that insight, whether in utterance or in the life he leads. Father Louis, the monk who wrote so richly, and she, the consummate artist who also lived a life of witness, are both prophetic figures, by this definition.

The poet Marianne Moore defined the function of the artist similarly when she wrote that art ". . . must be lit with piercing glances into the life of things/it must acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it." And Igor Stravinsky, one of the freest, most innovative of modern musicians, once said of art that "the more it is controlled, limited, worked over, the more it is free." May we not ask ourselves if perhaps these statements are true of the making of a life, as well, when we think of these two people and what they made of theirs? □

THE CULTURAL CIVIL WAR

AND THE CRISIS OF FAITH

Christopher Lasch

From the beginning capitalism is identical with dynamic economic growth. In the United States, the absence of a feudal past, a huge continent into which to expand, and the construction of an over-seas empire after the limits of continental expansion had been reached combined to create a uniquely favorable setting for capitalist expansion. Expansion in turn helped to spare American society some of the turmoil and class conflict capitalist development brought to Europe. The assumption that the next generation would live better than the present one mitigated the hardships of working class life, and the assumption that the wealth of society would increase drew some of the bitterness out of conflicts over its distribution. Quarrels over an expanding sum of goods are bound to be conducted with more restraint than quarrels over a pool of goods no longer expanding.

The assumption of unlimited growth is untenable today. The long cycle of capitalist growth has reached its end. This consideration makes more urgent than ever an understanding of the role of social class in American

life—a subject we could ignore in better times. In an economy no longer expanding, struggles over the distribution of wealth and resources will become more bitter. Class conflict will intensify. Fear that this conflict will get out of hand, threatening the rule of the corporations and the corporate rich, will encourage demands for charismatic presidential leadership, even for some form of dictatorial control.

Accepted ways of thinking about "class" hardly promote clear understanding of the subject.

According to a well-established social myth, the United States has become an overwhelmingly middle-class society. Those who hold this opinion argue that the number of blue-collar jobs has shrunk in relation to the number of white-collar jobs. They claim further that workers increasingly enjoy a middle-class standard of living, that skilled workers often make more money than college professors, and that the working class as a whole thinks of itself as a middle class and shares middle-class values. In fact, however, the expansion of the white-collar working force reflects for the most part increases in the number of clerical and sales workers, who usually receive even lower pay than most blue-collar workers. The two occupational

categories growing most rapidly are the categories described by the *Bureau of the Census* as operatives and clerical workers: The clerical category consists largely of working-class women. "The existence of two giant categories of labor—operatives and clerical workers—as the two largest major occupational classifications and the composition by sex of each of these categories leads to the supposition that the most common occupational combination within the family is one in which the husband is an operative and the wife a clerk." This supposition in turn suggests not only that blue-collar and white-collar jobs are becoming for many purposes indistinguishable, but also that working-class families find it more and more difficult to get along on one income alone. So much for the myth of working-class affluence.

If we classify as indisputably working-class occupations craftsmen, operatives, clerical workers, sales workers, service workers and non-farm laborers, and exclude salesmen of advertising, insurance and real estate and salesmen employed in wholesale trade, we would have to estimate, according to Harry Braverman (*Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p. 397), that the most reliable figures indicate that the percentage of workers compared to the total labor force has actually risen during the course of the twentieth century—from about fifty percent in 1900 to seventy percent in 1970. And if we examine income levels instead of occupational categories, we find that sixty percent of American families in 1970 lived on less than \$10,000, in other words lived below the "intermediate" level as defined by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. (Andrew Levinson, *The Working-Class Majority*, p. 32). "The average worker [I think he really means the average family] earned \$9,500 in 1970, much closer to poverty than to affluence." (*Ibid*, 33) Like Braverman, Levinson notes that "more than anything else, it is working wives who have made possible even the modest standard of living workers enjoy" (34). As for the notion that affluent workers often make more than professionals, the so-called affluent workers make up only fifteen percent of the working class, and in any case the average salary of an assistant professor in 1970 exceeded the earnings of a skilled worker by more than \$1000 and included a three-month vacation. "The popular concept of workers as grossly overpaid craftsmen with their speedboats is about as valid as the image of all blacks as welfare cheaters with Cadillacs. For all the clichés and myths, workers and the middle class are divided by a real and profound inequality" (*Ibid*, p. 37).

It is unlikely that many working-class people think of themselves as members of the middle class. Without savings, they are far more vulnerable to catastrophe—to unemployment or disabling illness—than are members of the middle class. They work at jobs that are often boring, disagreeable, dirty, and physically dangerous.

As consumers, they are so heavily in debt that a working man's pay check is already spent before he gets his hands on it. Although workers' children go to college in growing numbers, many of them attend two-year community colleges, and higher education by no means assures mobility into the upper ranks of society. Indeed the income structure of the United States has remained remarkably stable since the 1920s, with a third of the nation living at the poverty level and the upper one percent of the population controlling over twenty-five percent of the nation's wealth. (Richard Parker, *The Myth of the Middle Class*, pp. 79-81). In view of the persistence of such glaring inequalities, over many decades, it is not surprising that most workers remain cynical about the myth of equal opportunity. They are convinced that the "people who got the money," as one steelworker puts it, run the country (Levinson, 152). Even the skilled construction workers interviewed by E. E. LeMasters in a Wisconsin tavern—men who enjoy their jobs and hardly contemplate an overthrow of the established order—believe that men like themselves have nothing to say about the way the country is governed. "I find myself somewhat surprised," LeMasters writes, "at the depth and extent of the suspicion and distrust the blue-collar workers have of the white-collar middle and upper classes. [They] feel isolated and forgotten. Almost all of the television programs feature white-collar people (unless you consider Archie Bunker blue-collar); the movies feature white-collar men and women; mass magazines deal largely with the middle class; and advertisements are overwhelmingly white-collar. Thus the blue collar worker seldom seems himself portrayed [in the national media]." (LeMasters, *Blue Collar Aristocrats*, p. 199).

Far from assimilating middle-class values, the working class feels increasingly alienated from the dominant culture. This alienation has expressed itself, in recent years, in working-class support for George Wallace; in large-scale working-class defections from the Democratic party in 1972, (when the McGovern campaign identified itself with feminism and other varieties of middle-class cultural liberation); in failure or refusal to take part in elections (otherwise known as "voter apathy"); in the growing number of wildcat strikes; and in the growing number of union contracts voted down by the rank-and-file. Working-class people are convinced that their leaders have sold them out, and that neither politicians nor union officials can be

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counted on to represent working-class interests. They believe "nobody speaks for us." The disaffection of "middle America" translates into public opinion polls which show that growing numbers of people think politicians are crooked, that government can't be trusted, that it doesn't matter who gets elected to office, that government can do very little to reduce crime or bring down inflation to acceptable levels or control unemployment or lower the tax burden, and neither the country's prospects or their own personal prospects are likely to undergo significant improvement.

The dominant values in American society have little appeal to workers. A permissive, therapeutic morality that demands sympathy and understanding for criminals, sex offenders, and juvenile delinquents offends working-class ideas of justice, according to which people should accept the consequences of their actions. The campaign for legalized abortion calls up some of the same feelings. Women's liberation impressed working-class women as a movement dominated by professional women and indifferent to the harsher conditions experienced by the masses. "They are talking about women's rights, but which women? They're not talking about the masses of people." The speaker, a black woman from Atlanta who had organized a union of domestic servants, has no illusions about men or any temptation to put them "on no pedestal either." But the brutal conditions of the ghetto make her see the relations between men and women in a different light from the way they appear to middle-class women, who can dispense with the protection of males insofar as they have come to enjoy the protection of the state. "I've been a free woman all my life," says Mrs. Bolden. ". . . But a man is your protection" (Nancy Seifer, *Nobody Speaks for Me!*, pp. 170-72). Another working-class woman, also a labor organizer, captures some of the same feelings when she doubts whether Gloria Steinem "had to go through what we've had to go through. . . . I feel like maybe we've had to deal with life more realistically, having problems presented to us that maybe were never presented to her" (*Ibid.*, pp. 247-48).

Middle-class intellectuals and radicals should submit to the useful experiment of looking at their own way of life through the eyes of their servants—for example, through the eyes of a white Catholic woman from Somerville, Massachusetts, who works for an affluent professional family in Cambridge, and who thinks the woman she works for is "crazy" to enter the job market when she doesn't need the money. She reports that her employers spend much of the day weighing themselves,

worrying about being "depressed," and trying on new clothes and "looking in one mirror and then another mirror." When the wife has arguments with her husband, she cries or withholds her sexual favors. "I'd never do that!" the maid says indignantly. "I'd rather scream and shout and throw dishes than hold out on my husband that way. It's being sneaky and dishonest."

The house is full of talk [she goes on] even early in the morning. He's read something that's bothered her, and she's read something that's bothered her. They're both ready to phone their friends. The kids hear all that and they start complaining about what's bothering them—about school, usually. They're all so critical. I tell my kids to obey the teacher and listen to the priest; and their father gives them a whack if they cross him. But it's different when I come to fancy Cambridge. In that house, the kids speak back to their parents, act as fresh and snotty as can be. I want to scream sometimes when I hear those brats talking as if they know everything.

(Robert Coles, "The Maid and the Missus," *Radcliffe Quarterly*, June 1978, pp. 78-80).

The construction workers studied by LeMasters take an unsentimental view of marriage and family life. Many of them are "disenchanted" with their own marriages. Nevertheless they recognize that family life represents a stabilizing influence, a source of personal discipline, in a world where personal disintegration remains always an imminent danger. "I've seen what happens to some of these guys when they leave their wife and kids; most of them start to drink too much, begin chasing women, and the first thing you know they're in trouble. I've seen that happen to quite a few men in the past twenty years" (LeMasters, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 48). The well-publicized campaign against the nuclear family, conducted not only by feminists but by middle-class radicals, the helping professions, and other spokesmen for progressive points of view has little appeal for the working class, which does not subscribe to the dogma that personal liberation lies in emancipation from family ties. Nor do these people have much sympathy with child-centered approaches to education and child-rearing. They believe that children need the guidance and discipline of adults, and for this reason their child-rearing practices are often stigmatized as hopelessly "authoritarian" by enlightened middle-class observers.

Upper middle-class culture, a culture of secular humanitarianism and therapeutic enlightenment—the culture of narcissism I have discussed elsewhere—stresses the values of creativity, self-expression, and self-actualization. Its style of social control and socialization is manipulative rather than authoritative. It prefers to avoid confrontations that might release angry emotions. It seeks to avoid moral recrimination and guilt. When things go wrong it blames bad social conditions, not human selfishness or stubbornness. This culture has lost the sense of sin. Indeed, it regards sin a kind of sickness, curable by psychiatric intervention or by social programs designed to prevent the spread of mental illness and social pathology. It believes that the penal system should concern itself not with punishment or retribution but with rehabilitation. It believes that young people represent all that is best in society, and it ritually defers to youthful "idealism" in discussions of pedagogy, discipline, or politics. Upper middle-class parents self-consciously try to make children feel loved and wanted, even though they no longer know very clearly how to take care of them. Upper middle-class culture sides sentimentally with the underdog. It is easily moved by appeals to white liberal guilt—moved, if not to action, at least to tears and to rhetorical self-castigation. It believes in moral relativism and the paramount value of tolerance, which in practice works out to doing your own thing. Since it upholds no moral standard except the endless variety of moral standards, it hesitates even to enforce the minimal prudential consensus of the community, for instance by putting a murderer to death. It believes in the sanctity of human life, but what this really has come to mean in our society is that life must be carefully hoarded and preserved, protected from danger and risk, and prolonged as long as possible.

I have exaggerated the unattractive features of the prevailing therapeutic morality in order to make two points. First, the obvious, that these therapeutic values are profoundly repugnant to people whose simpler and more direct, and I would argue more realistic, moral perceptions, reflect the harsh material conditions under which they live. Second, the not so obvious point that working-class culture, working-class authoritarianism as it is labeled with little understanding, cannot be explained simply as a backlash to the civil rights movement, the student movement of the sixties, the woman's movement, and other campaigns to liberalize American society. This is the usual explanation of the "cultural civil war" that is emerging more and more

clearly as the background of American politics. My judgement is that this "cultural civil war" represents the cultural dimension of class conflict, and that in the last analysis it grows out of the economic disparities that have characterized American society for a long time and are bound to widen as our economic resources shrink. But this is not the interpretation accepted by most observers of the contemporary scene. A few years ago, Michael Miles, in a book on the student movement (*The Radical Probe*) wrote that "student revolt has generated counter-revolt and a cultural civil war within American society. This 'cultural civil war,' . . . fundamentally, . . . is a simple political reaction, whose point is to suppress a radical movement which by its nature poses a threat to the *status quo* distribution of power and wealth" [cf, Lipset, Bell, and other neoconservatives]. Thus Miles neatly identifies cultural conservatism (if that is even the right term) with political reaction, as if the "white ethnic minorities" who lead the cultural counter-revolt, had a class interest in the existing distribution of power and wealth. This idea that the "cultural civil war" represents a "simple political reaction" rests, then, on the familiar assumption that America is a middle-class society, and that since workers are already middle-class in their outlook, they can be expected to oppose any movement for change.

A corollary of the middle-class myth of American society—the concept of status politics—serves Miles, as it serves many neoconservatives, as an additional argument with which to condemn working-class culture as politically backward and reactionary. Because working-class consciousness, according to Miles, "has never transcended the parameters of American capitalism," class consciousness in the United States is "manifested only as class resentment." The working class and lower class "resent the youth culture both because it is an upper-class phenomenon and because it offends their petit-bourgeois sensibilities" (*Ibid.*, p. 56). In other words, people of working-class origin, recently promoted to middle-class status, feel threatened by the counterculture, resent the advantages enjoyed as their birthright by middle-class children (for which they have had to struggle and save), and take out their anger in an ill-tempered "politics of morality." "They have learned property values from the suburban life," and their individualism is "further reinforced by a heritage of fundamentalist Anglo-Saxon Protestantism" (*Ibid.*, pp. 51-2). Although "their social integration is ensured for the immediate future by economic growth and general prosperity," they are culturally so "insecure" that they embrace the right-wing politics of moralistic authoritarianism in order to vent their envy of their betters.

This interpretation of working-class politics, besides resting on the assumption of "economic growth and general prosperity," which the events of the 'seventies have called into question, is objectionable also because it incorporates so many of the prejudices of upper middle-class ideology. This interpretation attempts to disguise snobbery as sociology—the typical reaction of middle-class intellectuals faced with a working class culture they do not understand and find morally repugnant. In fact, the so-called cultural civil war goes much deeper than Michael Miles imagines. Working class people do not reject middle-class values because of status anxiety or resentment—the maid interviewed by Coles says in so many words, "I don't envy the rich women I see over in that Cambridge house!" Rather, they regard that culture, with its talk of universal tolerance and understanding, as a sentimental lie. The permissive morality of self-actualization does not offend the "petit bourgeois sensibilities" of working-class men and women, it offends their sense of reality. They distrust the ideology of personal and social uplift because it too often conceals class exploitation and class contempt beneath a veneer of good intentions. They distrust politicians, not because they suffer from cultural "insecurity," but because politicians have too often lied to them.

The so-called crisis of confidence in our society arises not from some indefinable "malaise" or from "narcissistic" self-indulgence but from the realistic perception, on the part of working people, that things are getting worse instead of better and that political and cultural elites are cynically indifferent to popular needs. The crisis of confidence, in short, reflects a failure of every kind of leadership: a failure not merely of our political and cultural leaders themselves but of the institutions through which leadership is exercised, including not only the state but the school, the family, the political party, and (by no means the least important) the church. If "these men don't trust politicians," as LeMasters writes, and if their "attitude of cynicism is generalized to include business leaders and trade union officials" and all the "'big wheels' in our society," these facts argue not merely for a failure of moral and political leadership but for a pervasive crisis of legitimacy.

Religion. The recent growth of "non-traditional religions"—of cults adhering to fundamentalist

interpretations of religious truth and going in for faith-healing, snake-handling, shouting, and other forms of frenzy—has occasioned much alarm in liberal circles. As we should expect, enlightened opinion scorns such bizarre expressions of religiosity as further proof of the backwardness of the proletarian mind. The struggle against religious fundamentalism, after all, has been one of the formative experiences of American progressivism. Ever since the 'twenties, liberals have associated fundamentalism with rural reaction and have done their best to stamp it out. The discovery that they have failed, and that fundamentalism, far from being confined to benighted rural parts of the country, is spreading to the cities (and even making inroads among middle-class youth) comes as a rude surprise.

But surely the explanation of this development lies not in popular ignorance and superstition but in the failure of the mainline churches, Protestant and Catholic alike, which have capitulated so completely to the spirit of secularism that people turn to fundamentalism by default, as the only spiritual alternative to the industrial, bureaucratic, capitalist order. I do not mean that popular religions are explicitly hostile to capitalism or that they aim at its destruction. Most of them are completely apolitical. But they do speak to needs that capitalist societies have ignored. They are expressions, sometimes highly perverted and reactionary expressions, of the need for community, stability, and authoritative moral leadership; the need to find meaning and order in life; the need to submit to a rigorous and demanding spiritual discipline, and to give oneself to a cause higher than the self. A culture of hedonistic self-indulgence cannot provide moral satisfactions of this kind, and neither can religious organizations that equate piety with psychic health and self-awareness (and political relevance.)

The failure of the mainline churches does not lie in their political conservatism. The point is not that they are slavishly subservient to the political status quo but that they oppose to it a bankrupt vision of social change, one that culminates in a cult of politics and the state, a vision that confuses political change with spiritual salvation. Reinhold Niebuhr's critique of the social gospel remains compelling today, and it has implications that reach beyond the failure of the American intelligentsia. The social gospel, in the beginning at least, represented an attempt to recover some of the original meaning of Christianity and to identify religion with the interests of the common people. But the preachers of the social gospel, according to Niebuhr, in their effort to make the church socially

relevant ended by absorbing the secularized culture of progressivism and giving it a religious veneer. They not only became social reformers, socialists, and even revolutionaries—which was perhaps a step in the right direction—they identified socialism itself with the Kingdom of God. Some of them became apologists for Stalinism on the grounds that communism represented the highest form of moral perfection. The exponents of the social gospel, according to Niebuhr, forgot that the aim of political action is not moral perfection or brotherly love or any other kind of salvation, but justice. Niebuhr's concerns are found in the pages of this journal, this citation a decade ago: social gospel preachers went out into the world but took little of the church with them. "We have turned to the more scientific and neutral documentation for such preaching as we have done on the subject [of social justice and racism]. [Having rejected fundamentalism,] we turned away from seeking answers in the Scriptures. Our flocks have rejected social analysis and political meddling as none of the preachers' business—as they should have done (though their reasons were wrong)—so that our congregations have been left to flounder in the mire of religion. . ." (*Up to Our Steeples in Politics*, pp. 42-43, *passim*).

I don't know of a better explanation of the collapse of the civil rights movement, at least in its cultural dimension. The genius of Martin Luther King, Jr., lay in his ability to politicize religion without giving up the idiom of unsophisticated popular religiosity. Most of his allies however, most poignantly in the case of his white allies in the South, were uncomfortable with this idiom and sought to justify political action against racism with arguments drawn from modern sociology and from the scientific refutation of racial prejudice. In doing so, they ceased to offer their congregations anything Christian, anything that could not just as easily be found in institutions of higher learning or studies of the race problem sponsored by foundations or the reports of governmental agencies. Since their congregations were looking for religious guidance, not sociological expertise, they turned away from these "pathetic efforts to inject morality and high-mindedness into politics"—"to bring moral dimensions to the great issues"—and embraced fringe churches that are fundamentalist, apolitical if not downright reactionary, and often militantly anti-intellectual as well.

Gary Wills (*Bare Ruined Choirs*, pp. 89-90; 98-9; 135; 250) makes the same point about Catholicism. Its recent

history, he argues, shows a "basic failure in authoritative standards." The presidency of John F. Kennedy, which coincided with the papacy of John XXIII, seemed to herald a Catholic revival, just as the civil rights movement in the same period seemed to represent the cutting edge of social change. The hopes of the early sixties—the ruins of which we live in today—seemed to be embodied in those heroes of the modern church, Martin King and Pope John, but also in John Kennedy's New Frontier. Instead of stamping its imprint on the modern world, according to Wills, the Church capitulated to it. Catholic liberals took Harvey Cox's celebration of consumerism and the secular city as the last word on modernism. Cox in turn acknowledged the influence of Teilhard de Chardin, whose works enjoyed a posthumous vogue in the sixties because they managed to equate spiritual progress with technological progress. Another admirer of Teilhard, Sister Jacqueline Grennan (later Mrs. Wechsler), president of Webster College and then of Hunter, spoke of him as the "one who had the most profound influence on my own thinking." Mrs. Wechsler's eagerness to identify herself with the cause of progress, her efforts to "laicize" Catholic education and to get rid of the "medieval habits" worn by nuns, her boundless admiration for Kennedy and his New Frontier, her ceaseless travels to attend high-level meetings and to introduce the fresh Catholic point of view into high-level discussions of world problems, in short her "hopefulness toward any new situation," as Wills puts it, exemplified the church's surrender to the dogma of progress. In view of all this, it is not surprising that a real Catholic radical like Daniel Berrigan moved away from his early infatuation with Teilhard to an understanding of our "obscene Olympianism based on technology"—even as he moved toward a "Gospel conservatism," thereby retracing (in a different form and in a Catholic context) Niebuhr's spiritual and political journey forty years earlier.

Much serious religion tends, today, to be politically radical and theological conservative" (Wills). The point can be stated in broader form: political radicalism increasingly has to identify itself with values usually identified with cultural conservation. Political conservatives have too long monopolized the values of family, law and order, patriotism, and continuity, and it is time for radicals (if indeed it is not already too late) to reclaim the ground that they have ceded to their political opponents. The problem is not merely one of political tactics. The culture of scientific enlightenment, therapeutic morality, and personal hedonism has developed by turning its back on the world of experience, which includes not only practical know-how

but the collective traditions of humanity—"those divine reservoirs of collective experience, religion, science, art, philosophy, the self-subordinating service of which is almost the measure of human happiness" (Van Wyck Brooks). The gap between knowledge based on experience and knowledge based on scientific analysis expresses itself politically in the ascendancy of the expert, the ascendancy of a professional and managerial elite which monopolizes esoteric information inaccessible to laymen. Culturally it takes the form of the so-called crisis of the humanities.

The study of history, religion, and philosophy now model themselves on science or, what's worse, confine themselves to "values clarification," which in practice usually boils down to putting the best possible face on

the actions taken by the powerful. Because sophisticated knowledge has given up the task of refining and criticizing experience, because it no longer addresses common problems or uses common speech, common people are turning to superstitions and "floundering in the mire" of faith-healing and spiritual quackery fostered by the media and what is worse, politics.

However unattractive these manifestations of the spirit may strike sophisticated observers, the needs that produce them can no longer be ignored or stigmatized as culturally backward. On the contrary, it is in many ways the culture of modern scientific and humanistic enlightenment that is backward. Their failures become more obvious, and more appalling and dangerous in their consequences, with the passage of time. □



BREAD AND ROSES

Rachelle Linner

The work I have done for money has always been peripheral to my real concerns. My jobs have been mainly clerical in nature: a telephone operator, a clerk in a store, a typesetter, and most recently a medical transcriptionist. Though never boring, tedious or dangerous, the lack of any real challenge in these jobs has been a burden at times. Working part time to allow for work and activities that are meaningful to me, I am spared from having my total public image linked to a low-level job. I am more fortunate than most people, whose labor holds little dignity; or worse, are unemployed and unable to find work.

In spite of, or perhaps because of that, I harbor negative attitudes toward work, having a genetic tendency toward the Puritan work ethic. I felt the need to create a vision of work that was influenced by spirituality, work habits that would be integral to the rest of my life, rather than on the edge of it. I wanted to free work from the bondage I had encased it in.

Two years ago I read an interview with an English Benedictine, Thomas Cullinan, and have lived with a remark of his since then: "Monastic life is baptizing the ordinary. . . Monasticism is very low key. We are just common people who try to show by our lives that

holiness is natural and not very difficult." In their simplicity, Br. Thomas' words express the aspiration of my life: to baptize my ordinary days, to imbue my tasks and responsibilities with a sense of the sacred, to see my life as a whole, rather than parts that rarely connect.

In May, 1981, I began an experiment with work by taking a cut in pay, at first twenty, and then forty cents an hour. My boss was astonished at my request, and I was rather surprised, though it was a decision I had thought about for several months. Re-reading St. Benedict's *Rule*, I was struck by his advice in Chapter 57, "On the Craftsmen of the Monastery". Admonishing those skilled in a craft to practice it with humility, he advises that if the crafts are sold to provide income, "let not the sin of avarice creep in, but let the goods always be sold a little cheaper than they can be sold by people in the world, 'that in all things God may be glorified.'"

I am probably guilty of harboring overly sentimental notions of St. Benedict, but his advice seemed so logical: why not sell my goods (my typing skills, my labor), for less than the price of the world. I still do not know if my action served to glorify God, or if I was indulging in the sin of pride and attempting spiritual heroics. I do know that this fast from money has helped to change my perception of work. For that reason I suspect the experiment may have some validity.

One of the most attractive qualities of St. Benedict's *Rule* is his concern for all aspects of life, from the most mundane to the sacred. The cellarer, for example, is told to "regard all of the utensils of the monastery and its whole property as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar."

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It would be foolish for me to take St. Benedict's *Rule* as my own, for I am not called to the vowed monastic life. Those who seek God, in solitude, in community with others, under the spiritual direction of an abbot. Still, I like to think of myself as a monk in the world, try to be in the world, but not of it. In exploring what that means I have been aided by the sons and daughters of St. Benedict I have been privileged to know. Among the gifts I receive from monasticism is that in their living removed from cultural assumptions, they question, by the witness of their lives, those values most of us accept uncritically.

I enjoy my job and have genuine affection for my employer, an excellent physician hereafter referred to as Sawbones. It has not always been so. When I first started working for him, four years ago, I hated my job. The pay was barely above minimum wage. I had no benefits or paid vacation, and with a very meager budget, lived with the anxiety of missing even one day's work. I felt humiliated at being regarded as "just a typist". The subjective situation was equally burdensome: doctors are noted for their well-developed, stubborn egos (my own pride was noteworthy as well), and the staff of five was skilled at soap-opera quality office politics.

The anger I felt at my job seeped into, and poisoned, the other hours of my days. I perceived my low salary as a negative judgement, and by accepting its verdict I was devalued in my own eyes; my arrogance was a compensation for the pain I felt.

In his second letter to the Christians at Corinth, St. Paul writes that "worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimation of any person. . . . The old order has passed away; now all is new!" (II Corinthians 5:16, 17). I have often decried the "worldly standard" that judges an individual by their financial situation, nothing more than external signs of success or failure. Despite my assumption that I lived beyond worldly standards, the humiliating anger I felt at being an economically exploited wage slave was proof that I was firmly mired in the world.

Learning to free myself from worldly standards, I came to realize how seductive they are. When I assume I am free of them I have learned to look more closely.

I spent two years angry and arrogant, and am amazed now at my immaturity. I think of those years as a time of Advent, and I sadly realize that I waited badly. I have grown enough in humility to recognize the goodness and generosity of those I work with and for. I have learned to laugh, at myself and at sacred cows of medicine.

Most importantly, I have gotten periodic, substantial increases in salary, as well as paid vacations and health insurance.

I am grateful I did not quit in anger; when Advent was over, the lessons I have learned have made these years as blessed as a still, quiet Christmas morning. I could not have been opened to those lessons until I realized that this was not "just a job"—but like all else in my life, a place I was meant to be, a place where God would communicate certain things to me. I could be closed to His word (as my anger closed me off) but I am learning to wait, learning patience.

In friendships with some of Sawbones's patients, I have touched once removed the mystery of physical suffering, and am continually humbled by the graceful way some people live with chronic, debilitating illness. I have learned about patience, fortitude, and gratitude, and have had to examine my attitude toward sickness (which is in part a fear of dependency), and hopefully, when it is my time to be sick, I will perceive illness not as a curse, but as an opportunity for growth.

Even when we barely spoke civilly, Sawbones was good about teaching medicine. Unlike many doctors, he does not see himself as a breed apart because his head is stuffed with medical knowledge, inaccessible to the rest of us who are unworthy to approach such mysteries. His explanations were always lucid, never condescending, and I have learned much to enrich my meditations. I always forget "facts," but am awed by the mystery of the human body, the miraculous interconnections of nerves, hormones, muscles, blood, oxygen, electrical impulses, bones, and tendons. The body has a "wisdom," can heal itself, or compensate if one part or another does not function well. Doctors should be the most humble of people, for they are partners to that mysterious process; they see it daily. It is sad that knowledge and skill can be blinders, as physicians are trained to think of the human body, and the person who lives in it, as parts to be "fixed", manipulated by chemicals, and sometimes invaded and maintained by machines.

I took my health for granted so many years, but no longer do. I think of the sheer complexity that allows me to sit at this typewriter and have my mind and eyes and hands think and act together, so that words from thoughts become visible on a page. My freedom from pain, the sheer fact of my existence, is a miracle to me, utterly out of my control. My job has taught me a deeper sense of dependence on God: I know that each breath, each heart beat, each exchange of nutrients to my cells, all necessary for life, are gifts. I sometimes think of each heart beat as a prayer, seventy times a minute, a prayer of gratitude for the gift of life.

I have learned that the day I am living is the only one vouchsafed me. Debility and death come quickly, often when least expected. Knowing this with my heart and not my mind, I am learning to live what days I do have more fully than I used to.



A gift, my life is also mysterious to me, especially when I reflect on the people and events God sends me, to help continue the ongoing conversion that is the essence of the spiritual life. Among the important God-sent influences has been the Catholic Worker movement. I lived eight years in a community similar to the Worker, and though my life is more solitary now I am still a part of the Worker family.

As with any family, even birth ones, I did not realize the depth of my ties until that November Saturday in 1980 when I heard of Dorothy Day's death. In phone calls, letters, prayers and thoughts, I experienced a deeper sense of sadness and loss than I had expected. I had met her on only three occasions, yet like so many others, my life has been deeply effected by her faithful witness and integrity. That my vocation is different from hers matters little. Dorothy asked not for followers—rather, that others live with the same quality of faithful obedience.

In the months since her death I see and fear signs that indicate a potential cult movement around Dorothy Day. Her death may unleash a (profitable) publishing explosion that would create a legend about her life. In more cynical moments I see a potential market for Dorothy Day Cookbooks: one for vegetarians, one for meat-eaters, one for health food addicts. The American propensity for hero worship has fertile ground to work in and may lead to a romanticization of the Catholic Worker that would over-simplify the theological complexity in which it is grounded. (It is similar to my uneasiness about the possibility that a "Merton cult" is underway. Some friends of mine who knew Merton are similarly troubled. "It's not what Tom would have wanted," they say. "He had a robust sense of humor about this sort of thing.")

Aside from being a propagandist for the Catholic Worker Dorothy perceived a part of her vocation as passing on the vision of Peter Maurin, the co-founder of the movement. Raised in a French peasant community, Peter was born into a family that could trace ownership of their land for 1500 years. The roots that peasant life bestowed upon him allowed him to see the pain of those who lived in fractured, industrial societies.

Dorothy and Peter met in 1933, several years after she became a Catholic. A journalist who had been active in cultural and political radicalism, Dorothy had drifted away from some of her former involvements because of their avowed atheism. Dorothy's radicalism flowed not from intellectual abstractions, but from a genuine love for the "masses" of people, individually: laborers, immigrants, the unemployed. In a 1977 edition of *Easy Essays* (Franciscan Herald Press) Dorothy recounts their meeting:

The night I met Peter I had come from an assignment for The Commonweal, covering the Communist-inspired "hunger march" of the unemployed to Washington. I had prayed at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, that I might find something to do in the social order besides reporting conditions. I wanted to change them, not just report them, but I had lost faith in revolution. I wanted to love my enemy, whether capitalist or Communist.

Peter's vision of "cult, culture and cultivation" would not have materialized were it not for Dorothy. He was a teacher, and he shared with her his deep knowledge of the Church, the teachings of the Fathers and the Popes,

the lives of the saints, the witness of monasticism, and the insight of contemporary thinkers (notably among others, Kropotkin, Gill, Mounier, Maritain and Berdyaev). From his vast historical knowledge, Peter isolated the example of medieval culture as one time which offered a wholistic response to the demands of life.

Central to Worker philosophy is St. Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the common good. In the May, 1981 issue of the *Catholic Worker* they explain that doctrine: "...the freedom and dignity of the person are fostered and the good of each is bound to the good of the whole in the service of God. A person's primary responsibility is to this common good and not to a political entity."

While not glorifying medieval life by nostalgia, Peter saw in their synthesis of "cult, culture and cultivation" (faith, intellectual thought, and manual labor, a return to the land), an antidote to the fragmentation of industrial societies.

The living of this vision, with varying degrees of competence, has been the task of the Catholic Worker movement for 48 years. It is a spiritual experiment that has touched thousands of people, and influenced thousands more, yet the Worker remains marginal, refusing to become institutionalized (its posture of anarchy toward the state extends to its internal life as well). The Worker refuses to abandon its spiritual principles ("these beliefs which transcend time") to gain worldly acclaim ("We must be prepared and ready to face seeming failure.")

The Catholic Worker advocates a decentralized society "in direct contrast to the present bigness of the state, mass production in industry, in education, in health-care and agriculture". When so many become overwhelmed into passivity by the enormity of injustice, the Worker's personalism fosters hope that small, individual, often unnoticed acts of justice and charity are not "wasted", but contribute to building a new society while the old still exists.

Many have been puzzled by the paradox of Dorothy's political radicalism and theological conservatism, yet within the Church the impact of the Worker has been significant. Its pacifism and adherence to nonviolence, and the "spiritual weapons" of prayer and fasting have had, among its fruits, the result of moving the official hierarchy to embrace those positions, as has happened these recent years.

Equally significant, the Worker is a lay movement. Long before Vatican II affirmed the vocation of the laity, the Catholic Worker was a lived example of its potential. ("He was a layman always," Dorothy wrote of Peter. "I mean that he never preached, he taught.")

The Worker has always attracted "unusual" (in the euphemistic sense of the word) adherents; it's influence due to Divine rather than human wisdom. (Which is to say nothing other than that God often uses the weak and confused and dogmatic among us to speak to the world, that fools for Christ are usually perceived as merely fools.)

Drawing on the insights of the English artisan Eric Gill, Peter taught that labor was a gift rather than a commodity. Dorothy was a strong supporter of union efforts, but Peter often said "Strikes don't strike me". Though affirming the dignity of labor, and the rights of workers to associate in guilds and cooperatives of their choice, Peter saw strikes as a further deterioration of the common good: to see the world as classes was to create enmity rather than reconciliation. To perceive one's labor as a commodity, something to sell to the highest bidder, enhanced the alienation and depersonalization of the workplace. Peter quoted Gill in one of his *Easy Essays*:

*"The notion of work
has been separated
from the notion of art.
The notion of the useful
has been separated
from the notion of the beautiful.
The artist,
that is to say,
the responsible workman,
has been separated
from all other workmen.
The factory hand
has no responsibility
for what he produces.
He has been reduced
to a sub-human condition
of intellectual irresponsibility.
Industrialism
has released the artist
from the necessity
of making anything useful.
Industrialism
has also released the workman
from making anything amusing."
(Back to Christ—Back to the Land!)*

Gill saw all workers, regardless of what they did, as craftsmen: creating something, their work was a valuable contribution to society, rather than time given to enrich others.

The strength of the Worker lies, paradoxically, not in its wealth but in its extreme poverty ("we cast our lot in solidarity with those whose destitution is not a choice but a condition of their oppression") that is understood, spiritually, as a gift. Voluntary poverty is always voluntary, and different from the crippling despair of imposed poverty. To willingly embrace it is to enter the realm of Gospel contradiction: to give up is to gain. Maurin talked about this in his *Easy Essay*, "Tradition or Catholic Action":

*The central act of devotional life
in the Catholic Church
is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.
The Sacrifice of the Mass
is the unbloody repetition
of the Sacrifice of the Cross.
On the Cross of Calvary
Christ gave His life to redeem the world.
The life of Christ was a life of sacrifice.
The life of a Christian must be
a life of sacrifice.
We cannot imitate the sacrifice of Christ
on Calvary
by trying to get all we can.
We can only imitate the sacrifice of Christ
on Calvary
by trying to give all we can.*

Sharing completely the living conditions of the homeless poor who crowd into soup kitchens and houses of hospitality, there is an echo of early Franciscan poverty in many Worker communities. The harshness of this poverty has led to the false assumption that only a special few are called to the vocation of the Worker. It's message is exactly the opposite: each of us, regardless of our situations, can do the works of mercy, can offer hospitality, food, or clothing. It can and should be done at every level, not only because the need exists but because something mysterious and holy and good happens when people share a loaf of bread. God's messengers in the Bible were often disguised as beggars and travelers, testing His servants before their messages were revealed. The Worker's faith allows them to see Christ in the other, the least of these: the psychotic, the violent, abusive alcoholic, the homeless and dirty. Maurin's *Easy Essay* "At A Personal Sacrifice" urged individuals to again assume the responsibility for the corporal works of mercy.

*In the first centuries
of Christianity
the hungry were fed*

*at a personal sacrifice,
the naked were clothed
at a personal sacrifice,
the homeless were sheltered
at a personal sacrifice.
And because the poor
were fed, clothed and sheltered
at a personal sacrifice,
the pagans used to say
about the Christians
"See how they love each other."
In our own day
the poor are no longer
fed, clothed and sheltered
at a personal sacrifice,
but at the expense
of the taxpayers.
And because the poor
are no longer
fed, clothed and sheltered
the pagans say about the Christians
"See how they pass the buck."*

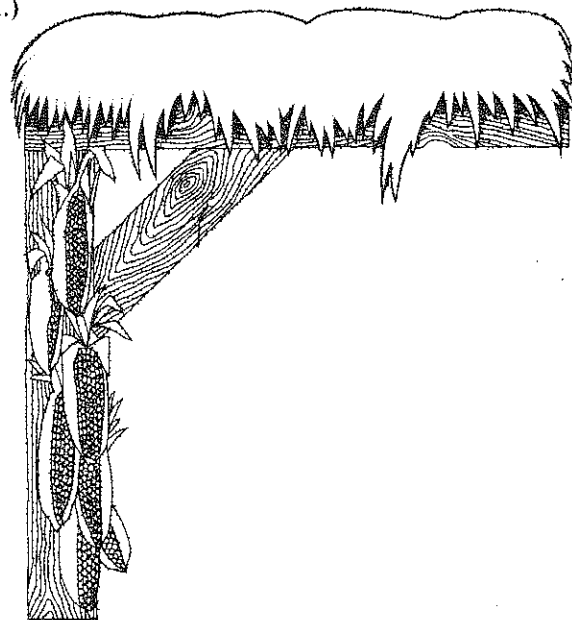
I am learning to stop anxiously examining my checkbook and trust that I, who am of more value than the sparrows, will be clothed and fed and sheltered and provided with what I need. I am learning the difference between what I need and what I want. I am not immune to the creation of artificial needs, assuring I will be an obedient consumer. Nor am I ascetical; my indulgences are relatively small, but I think of them as needed diversions: long distance telephone calls, books, fine teas, handpainted needlepoint canvases, real butter instead of margarine. I cannot live on a budget so rigid that it allows only for necessities, for I imagine that to be one of the most painful aspects of true, rather than voluntary, poverty.

I need diversions, but need to be disciplined about them, for when I am I feel a ready gratitude for the things I do have.

Taking a voluntary cut in pay was a way of "glorifying God", an affirmation of my trust in the promise of the lilies of the field. It was a way of saying, to Sawbones and myself, that God will continue to provide my daily bread. (When I moved to Berea in 1978, with little money and no promise of a job, I spent

four despairing weeks searching for work. It was the first time I had to pray for my daily bread; the experience, brief as it was, showed me how miniscule my faith was, far smaller than a mustard seed.)

I need diversions, but also need beauty, and I often find that in possessions. "Things" can be beautiful, and can teach lessons by their perfection. One Christmas, Sawbones and his wife gave me a handwoven couch throw. I had seen them in shops and admired them, but knew I would never have the means to buy one. I have one now, beautifully woven of soft, fine wool, in rich browns and beige. I sometimes wear it like a shawl on cold winter nights, and in some mysterious way I have been changed by my couch throw. I feel communication with the unknown person who had the skill to create it; I am awed by the long, patient work necessary to learn that skill and perfect it. My couch throw is elegant, and I find myself wanting to imitate its quality: wearing it, I cannot be cheap, wanting in charity, or speak maliciously of another (perhaps I should wear it more often). I could not live in a home-full of "beautiful" things, for I am not an elegant or beautiful person. My couch throw is enough: not only is it beautiful, but it was the means by which I understood for the first time why people desire to possess "things". (The thought crossed my mind that Sawbones was trying to turn me into a consumer, but I dismissed that as foolish, realizing I could not be a good consumer on the salary he paid.)



Voluntary poverty is not simple living; the latter can be extremely complicated, especially when it attains the status of idolatry (in some communities it is a mortal sin to admit to buying a new article of clothing, or enjoying a hamburger, or seeing a movie). Voluntary poverty is a recognition that we can never "own" things, that we cannot hoard when others go without. (The mystery of our interconnection is this: if some are in need, they offer an opportunity for others to exercise charity.)

Voluntary poverty of possessions is only one aspect of this discipline. There is also poverty of time—this is what Sawbones experiences, being "on call" seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. This is what friends of mine experience, young people with three children under the age of five. Living alone I experience a "wealth" of time, and must be careful not to abuse or hoard it.

Risking security, being willing to let go of cherished notions, can lead to far greater rewards. If we learn that, each "giving up" that we are asked to do becomes easier, as we enter more fully that mystery of the seed falling into the earth, and dying, and bringing forth new life. My experiment in voluntary poverty, though limited, is an effort to forgo the income level I had been led to expect would be mine, due to my education, skills, and experiences. Instead, I am learning to trust in the promise of the lilies of the field: if I seek the Kingdom of God, all the rest will be given to me.

If labor is a gift rather than a commodity, the thirty hours a week I spend in Sawbones' office are not, as I once thought of them, "wasted" time. One of my tasks is to achieve a level of awareness about work so that it, like prayer, becomes a means of glorifying God.

Mother Ann Lee, the foundress of the Shakers, exhorted her followers to "Lift your hearts to God and your hands to work". Work was not alienating to the Shakers, but was an integral part of their spiritual experiment.

There are different ways of being a monk in the world. I have learned from the Catholic Worker but have also learned from the Shakers. They teach me that the way one works can be a sign.

A hundred years ago the Shaker community in Pleasant Hill, Kentucky was a vital spiritual and social experiment. Now it is restored, a museum to Shaker life, and it is difficult to discern, among the "facts" presented, the faith that led hundreds of people to embrace such a stark celibacy and separation from the world. The Shakers are a gift I marvel at: had I not moved to Kentucky, they would have remained a colorful chapter forgotten from college classes.

There is much of significance about the Shakers: their crafts, weaving, furniture, kitchen and agricultural innovations; their organization and importance as a Utopian experiment; the music, dance, and spirit

drawings that was the mode of their worship. (The reliable study of the Shakers remains Edward Deming Andrews' *The People Called Shakers* (Dover, 1963.) Andrews devoted his life to exploring all aspects of their corporate experiment and history. There are numerous other works focusing on Shaker crafts and furniture, some unfortunately written with a glow of romanticism.)

The formal, correct name of the community is the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming. Their rhythmic dancing gave them the originally mocking name, "Shaking Quakers", or Shakers, a name they themselves adopted. Born in England in the late 1760's and 1770's, during a period of Quaker revivalism, they were eventually persecuted because their beliefs diverged from mainline Quakerism. In 1774, a small band of eight led by Ann Lee fled to the United States and settled in upper New York State. There were once, in pre-Civil War decades, nineteen Shaker communities, ranging in size from one to five hundred members. Originally clustered in New England, the revival movements of the 1800's led to settlements in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana.

The Shakers believed in a personal rather than universal Judgment Day. "When any man confessed his sins, then he was personally saved and resurrected; when he entered into the life of the spirit, then for him the 'world' was at an end." (Andrews) In that spiritual realm, human greed, pride, self-sufficiency, sexuality and selfishness were abolished. Their discipline dramatically illustrated the conviction that for them the old had died, and they were living the new.

They believed the world would soon be brought to its end. They took as a sign of this the coming of Mother Ann Lee—they believed her to be God's spiritual daughter, as Christ was His spiritual, not physical, son. Their communal lives were patterned after the Pentecostal Church. Their willingness to share property was an affirmation of human community and religious communism. Greed over "private" ownership was unknown—as was, to a remarkable degree, racism and sexism, a fact that would be noteworthy in 1981, let alone 1781. They believed Christ's Second Coming was imminent, a conviction that cast their "ethos" close to the communities described in the New Testament.

Separation from the world was not an early Shaker doctrine, but experience taught them it was impossible to live their "regenerated life" in the world. Like the Desert Fathers, their communities of work and worship spoke a word against the culture they found themselves in. Separatist by choice, they had to contend with widespread hostility, especially when first entering into a new region in North America. Their remarkable survival was predicated on strong, internal organization; the self-sufficiency (and later, wealth) of Shaker

communities flowed from their attitude toward work.

The Shakers saw labor as a sacred commitment. From the youngest child to the most esteemed elder, each Shaker knew at least one, and usually more, skills and tasks. They understood that if done with a proper attitude, the type of work one did was not important. They did not shun manual labor; for the Shakers, as for St. Benedict, physical labor done in moderation was proper labor. (In Chapter 48 of the *Rule*, St. Benedict writes: "And if the circumstances of the place or their poverty should require that they themselves do the work of gathering the harvest, let them not be discontented; for then they are truly monks when they live by the labor of their hands, as did our Fathers and the Apostles.")

The need for self-sufficiency required that a variety of tasks be mastered: this diversity relieved boredom. No rigid quotas were set: competition and compulsion were felt to be worldly rather than their ways of work. "Do all your work as though you had a thousand years to live, as if you would die tomorrow" was their frequent counsel.

Though they worked in moderation, time and talents were not wasted. "If you improve in one talent, God will give you more." The numerous innovations credited to the Shakers (of which only five were patented), resulted from their attitude toward work; their experiments reduced tedious labor. Their improvements were for useful and essential articles, as their laws forbid the superfluous and extravagant. Elder Frederick Evans explained: "The divine man has no right to waste money about what you would call beauty, in his house or in his daily life, while there are people living in misery." "Beauty" was the superfluous—Shaker communities, from their fields to their tools, were beautiful, with a grace and simplicity that are calming and ennobling to view.

Shaker life was orderly, unified, and harmonious. The spiritual principles they lived for were reflected in all aspects of their daily living. Nothing was irrelevant to them: "Clean your room well, for good spirits do not live where there is dirt. There is no dirt in heaven." Contemporaries who visited their communities wrote of the peacefulness, harmony, and gentleness they saw.

In an essay on Pleasant Hill in *Mystics and Zen Masters*, Thomas Merton wrote that Shakers "worked well because their work was a worship offered to God in the sight of his angels—a Biblical phrase which sets the tone for the life of the monks according to the Benedictine Rule." Shaker life, Merton writes, consisted "fundamentally in a devotion to truth."

A thing or a person is perfect insofar as it is what it is meant to be. Absolute flawlessness is impossible, and the Shakers had no unrealistic dreams about utter perfection. But they were very realistic in striving to make things as they ought to be made so that they served their purpose well. They strove in all things for truth, and made a point of simply being themselves. "Do be natural," one of these maxims tells us, "a poor diamond is better than an imitation." "Do not be troubled because you have no great virtues. God made a million spears of grass where He made one tree."

God made a million spears of grass where He made one tree." The Shakers have taught me about labor, but equally important have given me comfort about being a spear of grass and not a tree.

One danger of the Catholic Worker that I was too spiritually immature to avoid is a tendency toward spiritual heroics, and with that, pride in being theologically and politically "correct", of wallowing in the applause given out for doing "good deeds". (Some of the best spiritual advice I ever received came to me early in my soup kitchen postulancy, from an intoxicated, brutally honest guest. I had half-jokingly complained about the lack of noticable gratitude for the soup I had so lovingly prepared. His response was as stark as the slap of a Zen Master: "Doing good's a hustle too".)

When I moved to Kentucky, away from the public life of soup kitchens and medical clinics and civil disobedience and "great events," I wondered if I could be anonymous, ordinary and quiet. Part of the initial anger I felt toward Sawbones came from his refusal to applaud my political and spiritual radicalism. Worse than that, he laughed, he with his archaic political and theological beliefs, in the midst of his valiant fight against the New Book of Common Prayer. (I am still awed by the vitriolic comments he heaps upon certain Episcopal Bishops, the stern righteousness of his anger.)

In my desperation for meaningful friendships in the loneliness of my first years in Kentucky, I diminished those people who "just happened" to be in my life, people I knew casually but in a surface-like way. In May of 1980 I met a woman who would end the poor waiting of my Advent. Oda was a patient of Sawbones, an eighty year old woman who died six weeks after I met her, a woman with such radiance of lived faith that she was able to love while suffering physically. Her husband said that she was a "good Christian woman"; she was good because she manifested love. She knew she was loved by God, saw her task as loving others with the same love she knew. For six weeks my prayer was daily pilgrimages to the hospital room of a dying woman I felt graced to meet.

My love for Oda was a miracle to me, for I had not expected it. We had nothing in common except that we were both women. She was a "coal miner's daughter and coal miner's wife"; we were different in age, religion, interests, and life experiences. One day she remarked on our closeness, despite the differences between us, stating her belief that "if God means for two people to meet, He makes differences of no account". Her words were a revelation to me. I had made differences count for everything, and rarely perceived another as fully themselves, for I categorized them in my mind.

I did not, of course, "just happen" to meet Oda. I believe she was sent to me, in a powerful act of grace, a moment of *kairos*. Oda taught me that everyone around me was a purposeful part of God's design, of His plans for my life. I thought of those I had come to know: "ordinary" people who did not hustle goodness, but lived as anonymously as spears of grass. Where once I had seen drabness, now I saw lives that were touched by holiness. These were not people who went to jail for strong convictions. Few have politically correct views. They are unremarkable in the eyes of the world.

They simply live. They are loving people, and they express that love, not in great or magnificent or dramatic deeds, but in the ordinary tasks of life: raising children, cooking meals, cleaning homes, working in factories, raising food, milking cows, feeding pigs, stripping tobacco (especially that), waiting tables in restaurants and hospital cafeterias, teaching, fixing shoes, cleaning clothes. My eyes had been so blinded by the pride of reaching for spiritual heights I could never attain that I neglected the holiness of ordinary life. Monastic life is baptizing the ordinary.

As if to confirm this knowledge, a friend sent me a quote from Dorothy Day:

This exaltation of the articulate obscures the fact that there are millions of people in this world who feel and in some ways carry on courageously even though they cannot talk or reason brilliantly. This very talk may obscure everything that we know nothing of now, and who knows but that silence may lead us to it.

Sawbones argued against my taking a cut in pay, urging instead that I add \$25 a month to my tithes so that, in his words, I can "really help someone else concretely". (I was very moved, some months later, to receive a letter from the nuns at St. Rose's, a home for terminal cancer patients in New York, thanking me for my donation. Without my knowledge, Sawbones had figured out my pay differential, and sent the money—which he maintains is mine—to St. Rose's. I had often spoken of their work to him, and was touched by the "rightness" of this gesture. He could as easily have sent it to his favorite charity, the Society for the Preservation of the Book of Common Prayer, without me knowing anything of it.)

Rather than using my money to "help someone else" I want to identify with the pain of economic insecurity that millions of ordinary people experience now. I cannot live with the poorest of the poor as my friends at the Catholic Worker do. With no one dependent on my income for support, I could easily become selfish with money. My upbringing and attitudes are middle class, those who now face economic insecurity, rising interest rates and inflation and feel frustration, anger and disappointment, and do not know who to blame. I want to experience some of this deprivation, not as self-punishment or penance, but because I see it as a way to grow in compassion.

As a self-proclaimed activist, I used to have contempt for ordinary, middle-class people; I saw their lives, not as holy, but as sheltered, selfish, and "easy". I know differently now. I want my voluntary economic insecurity to explain, to me at least, that while "worldly standards" teach security and planned futures and investments and savings the paradox of the Gospels can make economic vulnerability a gift.



There is another community of monks in the world who hint at this truth, the Little Sisters of Jesus, a community founded in 1939, part of the family of Charles de Foucauld, who believed vocation should be to "shout the gospel from the rooftops not in words, but with your life."

The Little Sisters seek to imitate "the hidden life of Jesus at Bethlehem and Nazareth". Their foundress, Little Sister Magdeline, explains that that means: "...we avoid all forms of organized apostolic work, precisely because of our desire to imitate Jesus, the working man of Nazareth and to share in a tangible way the daily drudgery and social status of poor people who do manual labor."

The Little Sisters live in small "fraternities" (usually three or four women in each home) with the most marginal and forgotten of people: with nomads and gypsies, in prison with prisoners, with circus performers, in migrant camps and inner city housing projects. They support themselves by manual labor, not by donations. They do the simplest, most menial labor. They are not ascetics; their Constitution requires eight hours of sleep a night, and recommends periodic retreats and times of recollection, for they can only maintain their public lives if nourished by deep prayer. They live simply, with few material comforts (one Little Sister remarked that their vocation, among much else, is to prove that one can be happy "even without an armchair"! I think of her remark at times when I indulge in self-pity about my lack of furniture: I have not only an armchair, but a couch as well.)

The Little Sisters do not *do* anything. They live anonymously, but just by being they transform the places where they are. Their lives testify to the fact that there is no place, person or situation where God is not present. They are contemplatives who seek the spiritual childhood that Little Sister Magdaline explains:

In an age when pride, jealousy and the spirit of domination and wealth are given free reign, causing massacres and wars, in an age when the world is plunged into an atmosphere of sadness, hatred, vengeance and mistrust, the message of the Crib will bring to the world the gentleness, peace and joy which it lacks. In face of the hatred and anger of the world we must bring the meekness and the smile of the infant Jesus at Bethlehem; in face of the world's pride, the littleness and powerlessness of the tiny new-born Child in the crib.

To be a smile on the world, to be able to live in the world keeping the heart and soul of a child, regarding all things, even evil, with simplicity and clarity, crossing the most difficult frontiers without running the risk of being noticed any more than a child is noticed by adults, because they fear neither his influence nor his arguments nor his harsh judgments. A child himself is so small that he cannot believe in his own importance.

The Little Sisters are transparent: the people they are with are children of God, and the Sisters seek to communicate the God that is love within them to the God that is within the other. To be with them is to understand why perfect love casts out fear: there can be no fear when the other is perceived, not as potential enemy, but as a reflection of God, and so loved.

I think of these women and know they are part of the reason why the world has not been consumed by evil and hate, violence and despair. Theirs is that rare goodness that is not a hustle. In the midst of suffering and poverty they are joyful women, their features transformed into beauty by the radiance of their lived faith. I know they are holy because they laugh well.

I risk sentimentalizing the Little Sisters, but there is nothing superficial about them. More than anyone I have met, they "baptize the ordinary" and their lives communicate that holiness.

I sometimes wish I had their vocation, but know I do not. Their way, though, *can* become mine; it is a little way, well suited for ordinary people. I may not live in the kind of physical poverty they do, but I can imitate that "hidden life" wherever I am. To immerse myself, as a spear of grass, lost among all the other spears of grass, but witnessing with God's help, to something beyond this world; not by arguing or desiring to convert, but by making a statement with my life, a statement of hope.

The best known Shaker hymn is "Simple Gifts", the music popularized in Aaron Copeland's *Appalachian Spring*. The hymn is not about simple living, but about interior simplicity, abandonment to God, a willingness to "bow and to bend, we will not be ashamed. To turn, to turn, will be our delight, till by turning, turning, we come round right."

I am not always simple, I see too often with my own limited vision, but sometimes God speaks so powerfully that the shroud is torn from my eyes, the hardness of my heart is melted, and I glimpse the promise, if only for a moment, of the empty tomb.

How diverse they are, my gifts on this journey. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin—the wisdom they pass on to me, the lived, corporate witness of the Catholic Worker. The Shakers—now silent, yet perhaps more eloquent, they who lifted their hearts to God in the midst of these same gentle Kentucky knobs that now grace my view. The Little Sisters—I have been with them on two occasions, both sad times of partings; they were the gift of transformation, of mourning turned to joy. Oda—a humble woman who graced my life at the time of her dying. And Sawbones—he taught me about the mysterious ways that God has of working; once I harbored the illusion that I was sent to convert him, only to find that he has converted me.

I am the recipient of these gifts, and I take them up, along with the many other threads that form the fabric of my days, and hopefully when I die the life I have fashioned will be as beautiful as my much-loved couch throw. Perhaps it will not be beautiful; perhaps I will merely be one spear of grass, lost among millions of others. Either way it will not matter; if I attempt to be faithful, God will do the rest. □



ON SLAYING THE DRAGON PART TWO

William F. May

Part I of this essay which appeared in the previous issue of *Katallagete* argues that the dominant myth that shapes the American attitude toward nature is the slaying of the dragon as found in Beowulf. The poet W.H. Auden once contrasted America with Europe, explaining that in Europe nature is an animal to be trained; in America it is a dragon to be slain. A nice contrast. As a young nation, confronted by huge distances and harsh extremes of heat and cold, Americans tended to think of nature as a hostile power to be subdued. The myth promises that, once conquered, the dragon will yield untold riches from its slashed belly—coal, grains, oil, plastics, miracle drugs, wonder products. Ecologists repudiate the myth as exploitative; supply-side conservatives have recently restored it to a dominant position in American politics.

I try as a theologian to work with alternative ways of understanding nature. The American way of "Slaying the Dragon" has led in many ways to the despoiling of nature. There are other approaches. One I associate with Franciscan romanticism, which suggests that instead of plundering one develops a sympathetic rapport with

nature. Indeed, one begins almost to divinize nature, that is, elevate it to the divine so that we become part of a holy family with the wolves and the sheep and the trees. Here, one does not tamper with nature, try to manipulate it, mold it, reshape it. Insofar as Christianity is concerned there is another option, sacramentalism, associated especially with the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic tradition. Nature is not to be despised or fought but taken into the orbit of human purposes, and transfigured into the orbit of divine purpose. One is reminded of the Christian liturgy of bread and wine, set apart, so made holy in the Lord's Supper and sacrifice of the Eucharist, and so brought up into the orbit of human and divine purpose. A third option I associate with covenant, the theme of the second part of this essay.

II

A third Christian ethic of nature deserves particular attention on the American scene, an ethic associated with the term "covenantal." It overlaps in many ways with the sacramental view sketched in the preceding article. But in two particulars it provides room for special features of the American experience.

A theology of nature in the American context should deal with two kinds of antagonism. First, the conflict between humanity and an outsized nature, not readily tamed. Second, the experience of conflict within the

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human community itself, which has often provoked Americans to flee from their fellows to a harsh nature. An interpretation of nature that neglects the *adversarialism* in our relationship to the non-human environment (nature) is a theology for a continent other than ours; and a theology that prescribes fidelity to nature but neglects the *social* covenant only intensifies antagonism within the human community. Environmentalism of the latter sort deteriorates into the political sport of the rich who respect nature but neglect the needs of the poor for jobs.

William Faulkner offers, in my judgment, a contemporary restatement of a theological ethic for ecologists on the American scene—a covenantal ethic that embraces one's responsibility to the land *and* to the community. Significantly he develops that ethic in the context of an essentially adversarial activity—the hunt. That setting and activity offers a fitting contrast to the first half of Auden's epigram, "In Europe, nature is an animal to be trained." As a domestic animal, nature can be brought up into the orbit of human purposes. The image of the hunt, however, suggests a wild animal, a nature that can never be absorbed into a world that bears a human face. At the same time, the hunt entails the shedding of blood. Not dragon's blood (the blood of the tyrant oppressor), but the blood of a worthy adversary in the wilderness to whom the hunter in killing becomes *bound*: "...perhaps only a country-bred one could comprehend loving the life he spills." (William Faulkner, "Old People," in *Go Down Moses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 181.)

At the heart of Faulkner's vision is a covenantal ethic reminiscent of Israel's covenant with YHWH, begun in the wilderness and sealed in blood. A word, then, about the biblical concept of covenant that frames Faulkner's work. For our purpose, four elements in the biblical covenant deserve attention: *first*, an original exchange of gifts, labor, or services; *second*, a promise between the two partners based on this exchange; *third*, the shaping of future life for both partners in the light of the promissory event; and *fourth*, the provision of ritual and other means to renew the partnership as it undergoes subsequent strains.

Such covenants abound between people in the scriptures of ancient Israel, but a singular, comprehensive covenant between God and Israel defines, judges, and embraces all others. This covenant with God includes these four elements: first, a gift (the deliverance of the people from Egypt); second, an exchange of promises (at Mt. Sinai); and third, the

shaping of all subsequent life by the promissory event. God "marks the forehead" of Israel forever, as they accept an inclusive set of commandments by which they must live. These commands are both specific and earthy (e.g., the dietary laws), yet summary enough (e.g., the injection to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...) so as to require a fidelity that exceeds any specification. Fourth, the biblical narrative marks ritual means whereby Israel returns regularly to those foundational events that shape her life (the Sabbath and the holy days).

The overarching covenant of Israel with God includes promises for the care and tending of the land. Specifically, God promises to provide Israel a land flowing with milk and honey. Its possession, to be sure, is tragically shadowed: the Canaanites will suffer the ignominy of defeat at the hands of the Israelites. But the covenant does not relieve Israel of duties both to the land and its occupants (the Sabbath and Jubilee years). These duties cover the care of land and people and correspond with the Genesis accounts of the creation and fall and with Noah's covenant following the flood.

Genesis hardly provides license for exploiting nature. In "Solidarity in Conflict," Gerhard Leidke argues that the *Genesis* mandate for Adam to subdue the earth does not condone plundering. (In *Faith and Science in an Unjust World*, Report of the World Council of Churches Conference on Faith, Science, and the Future, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, Vol. 1) It commands Adam to engage in the pacific acts of cultivating and tending grains and fruit trees. Adam was a vegetarian! The situation changes after the Fall, when the earth is "filled with violence." The animals now know "fear and dread" as they fall into human hands. Man receives permission to eat the flesh of animals after the flood. Conflict now marks the relation of man to the non-human world and man to his fellows; the Fall shadows all life. But even the Noachian covenant sets a limit to this conflict. The dietary restrictions against eating both the blood and flesh of animals and the requirement that the blood (in which life resides) be poured back into the earth from which it comes points men and women toward the preservation and renewal of life in the midst of death, toward the protection of the partner in the conflict. The covenant sets similar limits upon conflict on the human scene.

The basic ingredients and ramifications of a covenantal theology reappear in the mythical vision of William Faulkner. *Go Down Moses* is a collection of stories about the McCaslin family in all its reaches. The stories extend backward toward the earliest settlers, their hunting in the wilderness, the complex issue of slavery,

and forward toward the development and eventual defilement of the land. Through it all, the lives and bloodlines of reds, whites, and blacks touch and intermix. Several chapters—the "Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn"—often appear in separate anthologies, but Faulkner insisted, rightly, that *Go Down Moses* should be read, not as a collection, but as a novel. The theme of covenant dominates and unifies the whole.

Ritual return. The very title, "Delta Autumn," marks the time and place of an annual ritual in which old Isaac McCaslin returns to the decisive moment in his life when, as a boy, he learned to hunt and killed his first stag in the Delta wilderness. Just as the marked Israelite, the errant, harrassed, and estranged Israelite recovers through ritual the covenant of Exodus/Mt. Sinai, Isaac returns to the Mississippi Delta every autumn to renew the hunt and to suffer his own renewal there despite the alienation and pain and compromise and defeat which he has known across a lifetime. A kind of *anamnesis*, a recollection, occurs in the ritual return, the making-present of the past. In "Old People," Faulkner describes this re-presentation through the ritual event of storytelling.

...gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy's present, not only as if they happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted. ("Old People," p. 171.)

In "Delta Autumn," Isaac, now an old man, journeys back to the Delta, makes his camp and, at the end of day, lies down in that state of watchfulness that marks the religiously *observant* man.

And then, he knew now he would not sleep tonight anyway; he no longer needed to tell himself that perhaps he would. But it was all right now. The day was ended now and night faced him, but alarmless, empty of fret. *Maybe I came for this, he thought: Not to hunt, but for this. I would come anyway, even if only to go back tomorrow.* ("Delta Autumn," in *Go Down Moses*, p. 349).

The consummation of that annual trek into the wilderness is to make present the covenant event that occurred almost seven decades earlier, what Faulkner calls elsewhere, "the binding instant."

The promise. The boy Isaac McCaslin comes of age in the course of the hunt. Sam Fathers, the old Indian of mixed blood, part black and white, his own blood through his mother a "battleground," (Sam Fathers' mother bequeathed to him "not only the blood of slaves but even a little of the very blood which had enslaved it." "Old People," p. 168.) tutored the boy into the hunt. They tracked the deer until the buck was there, "looking not like a ghost, but as if all light were condensed in him, and he were the source of it." ("Old People," p. 163.)

And Sam Fathers urged the boy to:

"Shoot quick and shoot slow:" and the gun levelled rapidly without haste and crashed and he walked to the buck lying still intact and still in the shape of that magnificent speed and bled it with Sam's knife and Sam dipped his hands into the hot blood and marked his face forever. ("Delta Autumn," pp. 350-351.)

In modern idiom, Faulkner retells, in effect, the story of Exodus/Mt. Sinai, the event in and through which God marked the foreheads of the Israelites forever. Young McCaslin binds the whole of his future in the instant.

I slew you; my bearing must not shame your quitting life. My conduct forever onward must become your death. ("Delta Autumn," p. 351.)

The episode is central to Faulkner's vision. His characters take their bearing from a promissory event. Faulkner always wrote about ties—the bonds of marriage, family, and the land. In this respect, he differs from his contemporary, Ernest Hemingway, who wrote about lovers, but rarely about marriage and the family. Both novelists write about man's encounter with nature in theological terms, but Faulkner writes in the mode of historical rather than natural theology. The boy is not born with a respect for nature; he acquires it through the *covenantal* event. Faulkner is locked on *election* rather than birth, *destiny* rather than fate, *gift* rather than possession.

He seemed to see the two of them—himself and the wilderness—as coevals, his own span as a hunter, a woodsman not contemporary with his first breath but transmitted to him, assumed by him gladly, humbly, with joy and pride, from that old Major de Spain and that old Sam Fathers who had taught him to hunt. ("Delta Autumn," p. 354.)

The gift. This passage gets it right. A covenantal ethic includes a *promise* but does not *begin* with the promise. It begins with what has been received and assumed, gladly and humbly, as a *gift*. In this case, the boy receives the gift of the wilderness and its game, but also the gift of mentors, who have taught him how to respect the wilderness and to hunt. In the logic of Scripture: Exodus precedes Mt. Sinai. A covenantal ethic takes root in giving and receiving, a transaction that precedes and provides the basis for avowing. The Israelites bind themselves to YHWH at Mt. Sinai as those who have received an astonishing gift, the deliverance from Egypt.

The responsive character of a covenantal ethic distinguishes it from the modern ideal of philanthropy. The modern philanthropist—whether the rich man, the Lady Bountiful, the self-assured professional, the church, or the powerful nation—pretends the giver is self-sufficient. He is giver alone; others relate to him or her as recipients of gifts. But a covenantal ethic positions the giver in the context of a primordial act of *receiving*, a gift not of his deserving, which can only be assumed gracefully, humbly. God tells the Israelites: when you harvest your crops, do not pick them too clean. Leave some for the sojourner. For you were once sojourners in Egypt. The giver is receiver.

A covenantal ethic differs not only from the ideal of philanthropy but also from the ethics of the marketplace. A covenantal ethic demands a new reading of the history of "ownership" and of marketplace transactions. The marketplace offers the illusion that life at its most absorbing and binding level is a matter of buying and selling, not giving and receiving. It gives the illusion of "ownership" rather than the duties of tenancy and stewardship, that is the obligations that obtain between a host and guest. Faulkner insisted on the primacy of *gift* in understanding the human bond to the wilderness and one's fellows.

...although it had been his grandfather's and then his father's and uncle's and was now his cousin's and someday would be his own land which he and Sam hunted over, their hold upon it actually was as trivial and without reality as the now faded and archaic script in the chancery book in Jefferson which allocated it to them and that it was he, the boy, who was the guest here and Sam Father's voice the mouthpiece of the host. ("Old People," p. 171.)

Faulkner records in fine detail the transmission of the land from buyer to seller, from father to son, from generation to generation but concedes that in an ultimate sense "not even a fragment of it had been his to

relinquish or sell." ("The Bear," in *Go Down Moses*, p. 255.) This was true for Isaac himself, his ancestors and the Chickasaw chief from whom it had originally been purchased "for money or rum or whatever." ("The Bear," p. 255.)

With a wave of the hand and that word "*whatever*," Faulkner undercuts the capitalist theory of entitlement, the notion that sacred records of buying and selling hold the last word on the question of justice, on the rightful disposition of people and land. From an ultimate perspective, before the "Throne Itself" of the primordial host, the county court-house history of buying and selling records are no more than "the brown thin ink" of injustice "and a little at least of its amelioration and restitution," "but all of it together before the All knowledgeable fades back forever into the anonymous communal original dust. . ." ("The Bear," p. 261.)

The Bear offers the finest account I know of *creation as gift*. Even though ownership of the land changes hands, the land as primordial gift transcends and spans through covenant the marketplace transactions that we know.

"I cannot repudiate it. It was never mine to repudiate. It was never Father's and Uncle Buddy's to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never Grandfather's to bequeath them to bequeath to me to repudiate because it was never old Ikkematubbe's to sell to Grandfather for bequeathment and repudiation. . .because on the instant when Ikkematubbe discovered, realized, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his forever, father to father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing!

"Bought nothing?" and he

"Bought nothing. Because He told in the book how He created the earth, made it and looked at it and said it was all right, and then He made man. He made the earth first and peopled it with dumb creatures and then He created man to be His overseer on the earth and to hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in His name, not to hold for himself and his descendents inviolable title forever, generation after generation to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood, and all the fee He asked was pity and humility and sufferance and endurance and the sweat of his face for bread." ("The Bear," pp. 256-257.)



The passage distinguishes sharply and eloquently between concepts of contract and covenant. The distinction must be made since, formally considered, contracts and covenants resemble one another. Both include an agreement between parties and an exchange; they look to reciprocal future action. In spirit, they differ. Contracts involve buying and selling. Covenants include further ingredients of giving and receiving. Contracts are external, covenants internal to the parties involved. Contracts are signed expediently to be discharged; covenants have a gratuitous, growing element which nourishes rather than limits and terminates relationships. Contracts imply a price on everything, goods are extractable, convertible, exchangeable, whereas covenants point to the indefectable. Contracts can be filed away, but a covenant becomes a part of one's history and shapes, in unexpected ways, self-perception and even destiny.

Faulkner states the differences between a contract and a covenant in two stories—one tragic and the other comic. Toward the end of "Delta Autumn," a black woman appears at the camp with a child she has conceived by one of Ike's nephews. Roth Edmonds, who does not want the woman or his child, anticipates her arrival and leaves an envelope full of money and instructs Ike to give her the money and "to tell her, No." Ike follows instructions, and the woman declines the payoff. Thereupon, he offers her Edmond's hunting horn as a gift from Ike, a token of her child's origin, identity, and unrealized patrimony.

At the outset of another Faulkner novel, *Intruder in the Dust*, a white lad falls into a creek on a cold winter's day while hunting with a young black friend. After the boy clambers out of the river, Lucas Beauchamp, a proud, commanding black man, brings Isaac shivering to his house where Beauchamp's wife takes charge. She removes his wet clothes and wraps him in "Negro blankets," feeds him "Negro food," and warms him by the fire.

When his clothes dry, the boy dresses to go, but, uneasy about his debt to them, reaches into his pocket for coins and offers seventy cents as compensation for the Beauchamps' help. Lucas rejects the money and commands the two boys to pick up the coins from the floor, where the white lad has dropped them.

Later, uneasy about his indebtedness, the white lad purchases a few yards of cloth for Lucas' wife and gets his black friend to deliver them. He immediately feels better. A few days later, however, he goes to his own back-door stoop only to find a jug of molasses from Lucas Beauchamp. So he is back where he started again—indebted to the black.

Months later, the lad passes Lucas on the street and scans his face closely, wondering if the black man remembers the incidents between them. He can't be sure. Four years pass. The authorities accuse Beauchamp of murdering a white man and prepare to take him amidst great excitement to the jail. The lad wonders again whether Lucas remembers their past encounters. As Lucas enters the jail, he wheels and points his long arm in the direction of the lad and says, "Boy, I want to see you." He obeys and visits Lucas in the jail house, and eventually, he and his aunt are instrumental in proving Lucas' innocence. It is one of Faulkner's few stories with a happy ending.

More than that, the story is a parable for the relation of whites to blacks in the South. The black man has labored in the white man's fields, built and cared for his houses, fed, clothed, and nurtured his children. In accepting these labors, whites have received their own life and substance from blacks over and over and over again. But the white lad resists this involvement and tries to pay off the black with a few coins. The white pretends that their relationship is transient, external and commercial, to be managed at arm's length.

For better or for worse, blacks and whites in this country are bound to a common life and destiny. The problem between them will not be resolved until they accept the covenant which the original acceptance of labor entails.

A donative element nourishes and upbuilds covenants—whether the covenant with the land or the covenants of marriage, friendship, or professional relationship, or the fiduciary ties of a great institution to the neighborhood, city, state, or country of which it is a part. Tit for tat characterizes a commercial transaction, but the terms of a contract do not fully specify that deeper process of serving and drawing upon the reserves and lives of others, a relationship in which partners have a chance of becoming better together than they were apart.

Obligation. A covenantal ethic details duties that give a specific shape to the future while it enjoins a comprehensive fidelity that extends to unforeseen and unspecifiable contingencies. The hunter's specific duties include learning how to use a rifle to bring down game and a knife to kill; the use of a shotgun is prohibited.

"Are you going to shoot that shotgun today?"
"You just told me last night you want meat," Edmonds said. "There will be a—"
"Since when did you start having trouble getting meat with your rifle?" ("Delta Autumn," p. 355.)

The covenant requires protection of the species upon which the hunt itself depends and that entails special protection for the doe.

"We don't kill does because if we did kill does in a few years there wouldn't be any bucks left to kill, Uncle Ike." ("Delta Autumn," p. 347.)

The covenant specifies protection not only of the species but also of the non-human environment of which the species is a part—a duty honored more in the breach than in the keeping.

The woods and fields he ravishes and the game he devastates will be the consequence and signature of his crime and guilt, and his punishment. ("Delta Autumn," p. 349.)

The particular duties of the hunt widen to cover the whole human relation to land and place.

This Delta, he thought: this Delta. *This land which man has deswamped and denuded and delivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis.* . . . no wonder the ruined woods I used to know don't cry for retribution! he thought: The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge. ("Delta Autumn," p. 364.)

This obligation to *place* cannot be abstracted from the social covenant, one's obligations to our fellows. "Delta Autumn" juxtaposes the obligations to the non-human and the human world through the metaphor of the doe. Edmond's abandonment of the black woman and his child is part and parcel of the faithless hunt.

"If it was just a buck he was coming all this distance for. But he's got a doe in here. Of course, an old man like Uncle Ike can't be interested in no doe, not one that walks on two legs—when she's standing up, that is. Pretty light-colored too." ("Delta Autumn," p. 337.)

Roth Edmonds rationalizes infidelity on the grounds that it makes no difference; the supply of does is prodigal.

"According to Roth yonder, that's one thing we won't never have to worry about," the old man said. "He said on the way here this morning that does and fawns—I believe he said women and children—are two things this world ain't never lacked." ("Delta Autumn," pp. 347-348.)

Delta Autumn ends with the old man recomposed by this ritual journey back to the sources of his life, but also on a mournful note, prophetic for the decades in which we live. Will Legate comes into camp looking for Roth's knife and says to Ike,

"We got a deer on the ground."
"Who killed it?" McCaslin said, "Was it Roth?"
"Just a deer, Uncle Ike," he said impatiently.
"Nothing extra." . . . McCaslin lay down, the blanket once more drawn to his chin, his crossed hands once more weightless on his breast in the empty tent.
"It was a doe," he said. ("Delta Autumn," pp. 365-366.)

A specification of duties, even duties of protection to the weak, fails to exhaust the meaning of fidelity. A contractualist ethic and a covenantal ethic resemble one another. Both specify duties, but a covenantal ethic includes further the unspecifiable, contingent needs of others than cannot be wholly anticipated. Clearly, the helping professions must respect this feature of covenantal ethics; they must stand ready to help in crises that cannot be wholly anticipated at an original point of agreement. Likewise the good farmer evinces this kind of care for his land and stock; his duties to the land exceed specification. This inclusive covenantal fidelity differs in spirit from the minimalist expectations of contractualism.

By the same token, a covenantal ethic differs from the minimalist tendencies of the law. No one can doubt the need for state regulations protecting the natural environment. The Calvinist tradition out of which Faulkner writes is sufficiently pessimistic about humanity to concede legally enforced sanctions. The ruined woods may accomplish their own revenge, but that prospect is no argument for indulging violations. Still, the regulatory apparatus of the state—abstracted from the covenantal bond—hardly suffices. Regulations are inevitably minimalist; and they are difficult to enforce, particularly in the care of the environment. It is impossible to employ sufficient watchers and enforcers to guarantee proper behavior if that behavior depends upon enforcement alone.

The legal solution to environmental problems, without a covenantal context, can encourage a kind of antinomianism. In a litigious, adversarial society, people orient to the law not as a minimal guideline pointing to a higher righteousness beyond itself; they let it function as a collaborator in unrighteousness; the law lets them know what they can maximally get away with. Edmonds, who is expert in violating the moral law, takes for granted this latent antinomianism.

"Meaning that it's only because folk happen to be watching him that a man behaves at all," he said, "is that it?"

"Yes," Edmonds said. "A man in a blue coat, with a badge on it, watching him. Maybe just the badge." ("Delta Autumn," p. 346.)

The next few years under an Administration that would remove most legal restraints on our manipulation of natural resources will tell us much about what happens when the badge is off in the wilderness.

The Reagan Presidency announced from the very beginning its intentions, in the name of economic growth, to remove government restraints on the development of natural resources. Some corporations responded with alacrity. On March 23, 1981, *Time* headlined its story on economy and business: "Big Oil Moves into Minerals." Standard Oil of Ohio had just bought the Kennekott Corporation. It marked the third time within a month that a company "flush with oil profits" had tried to use those profits to buy mineral and mining firms. Further concentration in the control of America's natural resources has continued unabated under the new administration. On the same page, *Time* reported that President Reagan had sent a budget to Congress that would slash by 83% the allocations for the division of the Energy Department charged with monitoring and prosecuting oil companies for past violations of price control regulations. Over \$11 billion in overcharges were at issue; 33 out of 35 companies had refused to settle with the government. Democratic Congressman John Dingell of Michigan observed acerbically: "This adds up to amnesty for the oil companies and the public be damned." Reagan's early budget cut for this monitoring agency could not be written off as part of a general budgetary retrenchment policy. It was a smart bomb aimed at the regulatory system. The administration wants to eliminate those mechanisms that restrain the use of natural resources.

A year later, the Reagan Administration has shown a firm commitment to the same policies. The Secretary of the Interior has had strong allies in the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Anne Gorsuch, and the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, John Crowell. Singly or together, they have sought to reverse policies that spanned both Democratic and Republican

Administrations. They have sought to open wilderness areas to mining and other development, to triple the sale of timber from national forests, and to accelerate the leasing of coal, oil shale, and offshore lands far in excess of industry's current "ability to explore and develop these resources." They have effectively stopped the listing of endangered wildlife species.

While justifying many of these measures as people-oriented, they have simultaneously loosened or delayed rules on hazardous waste dumping, sought to lift or eliminate lead pollution standards, and to provide marketplace relief for manufacturers who want to exceed general standards on air pollution (under-polluters will be allowed to sell privileges to over-polluters). The Administration has met strong opposition on many of these matters but has left no doubt about its readiness to press the battle.

The ascendancy of the Reaganites to power reminds us again that the business community, for better or worse, constitutes the most powerful interest group in our society. Corporate power has concentrated rapidly in the last decade and bids fair to increase mightily under the Reagan mandate to eliminate federal restraints and to increase productivity.

This essay on covenantal ethics closes therefore with comments on its implications for corporate responsibility during the Reagan Presidency. (Not that a covenantal ethic has no criticisms to make of political movements other than the one currently in power. At the least, it would take to task interest-group liberalism, for its neglect of our duties to nature, and ecological pietism, for its similar neglect of our duties to human beings.) But thoughtful people need to address the ethical justifications which the business community offers both itself and the nation when it defends its views of corporate responsibility and government regulation.

The business community's justification—if put in the language of currently popular philosophy—is partly libertarian and partly utilitarian in ethics and economics.

The libertarian operates on the basis of an *entitlement* theory of justice. Liberty means largely negative liberty, freedom from interference at the hands of others, the State included. Justice means chiefly the protection of

my right to do whatever I want with whatever I have so long as I do not interfere with the similar freedom of others. That is, those who own and control natural resources have no independent obligations to the natural environment or to their fellows—above and beyond the determinations of private preferences and prudent self-interest in marketplace exchange. Clearly they need not handle or dispose of their holdings in ways that conform to the notions that others might have of fair behavior; liberty itself is the sole side constraint; justice coincides with the notion of entitlement, through inheritance, gift, and marketplace exchange.

But the Reagan Administration has added a special supply-side twist to the conventional libertarian theory of justice. Its supply-side economics claims that if one frees the rich from the fetters of taxation and the restraints of environmentalism, more than liberty will be respected. Investment capital will accumulate and concentrate in those industries which will expand resources and enlarge the Gross National Product. General social benefits will abound: the country will recover from stagflation and jobs will multiply. The middle class and the poor will be better off than they were before. Tax breaks for the rich will produce jobs for the poor. Thus, appearances to the contrary, the Reagan tax cuts are even-handed. The rich get money and the poor get a theory.

Milton Friedman combined the two arguments in essays on corporate responsibility. He appealed to the basic libertarian justification for corporate capitalism when he argued that the sole and sufficient duty of corporate management is to maximize profits. Otherwise, management exceeds its authority which it derives from stockholders. Whatever decisions it makes about resources, location, wages, technological development, capital improvements, marketing, and sales should be guided by the entitlements of those who are stockholders. Friedman, to be sure, was not an absolute libertarian anarchist. He accepted the side constraints of both ethical custom and the law in his essay on maximizing profits. But he held to a highly individualistic conception of ethical custom—no lying, theft, or murder—and a minimalist understanding of the law. He hardly meant social ethics, he wanted from the law much more than those protections that will permit owners to maximize profits.

To this entitlement theory of justice, Friedman added the further claim that this system is best for all. A multiplicity of goods will best be attained through the allocative wizardry of the free market. Far from subordinating self-interest to some notion of the common good, business institutions, in this libertarian view, can make no greater contribution to society than to pursue, without a wandering eye, the maximization of

profits. Otherwise, they exceed their authority (derived from stockholders), their competence (economic decision-making rather than environmental tending or social engineering), and their power (as they paternalistically impose on others their notions of natural and cultural good).

Friedman's view about the proper goal of the modern corporation gets repeated everyday whenever someone invokes the "bottom line." It stands as the single most powerful pressure for extracting riches from the earth and for distributing them unequally as the luck of the market and the wit of the aggressive would have it. I close, therefore, with a criticism, on covenantal grounds, of Friedman's views.

First, it must be stated that a covenantal ethic differs from a crude, consequentialist appeal to long-range self-interest. The ethics of enlightened self-interest assumes a morally tidy world. Corporations will be better off if they behave themselves. The argument resembles the point Will Legate makes in "Delta Autumn:"

"We don't kill does because if we did kill does in a few years there wouldn't even be any bucks left to kill. . ."

Just so, great institutions, in the pursuit of a reasonable profit on investment cannot afford to neglect their workers, their neighbors, and their environment. Corporations will eventually suffer if they compete as economic giants in their field but pretend in the interim that they are social and political nonentities and let the cities around them fall to pieces. In a few years, there may be no bucks left to make.

This low-grade consequentialist reason for behaving responsibly (what Faulkner on the subject of "killing does" calls the "mind's reason") falters before the remoteness of the danger to self-interest. Distant perils fade and short-run pressures to maximize profits take over. Sheer size tends to bestow on the corporation some sheen of immortality. Why not let the future take care of itself? Money, after all, is portable—from Northern cities to the South, and from Southern cities to overseas investments. And even if the chief executive officer befools the environment, he will have long since retired before the trouble shows up. In the meantime, he is under pressure to show a maximum return on investment. Let someone else, much later on, in the shifting world of the marketplace, create a profit opportunity by specializing in clean-ups.

Appeals to long-range peril will not be decisive unless accompanied by a different order of argument. The prior ethical issue is whether the corporation in the first instance has duties to more than its stockholders. If it does not, then all efforts to expand the notion of corporate responsibility beyond profits will seem at best, peripheral, and problematical, and, at worst, illegitimate, unauthorized, and immoral. The ideal of corporate responsibility but squanders stockholders' resources for the protection and benefit of those who have no rightful claim to these holdings.

Others wish to expand corporate responsibility beyond Friedman's narrow limits by distinguishing between stockholders and stakeholders. Stockholders are important stakeholders in a company, but by no means the only ones. Workers, customers, neighbors, the public, the integrity of the life chain itself, have in varying ways a stake in corporate behavior, sometimes indeed a deeper stake than stockholders, who may dart in and out of their investments more readily than others can withdraw from a company and its impacts and fortunes.

This argument, however, rests on little more than the consonance of the two words—"stock" and "stake"—unless one can show why obligation extends beyond stockholders in an enterprise. Some help is at hand in the notion of covenant which expands obligation beyond the limits of commercial contract (the stockholder's purchase) and takes corporate responsibility a notch deeper than token expressions of corporate philanthropy (contributions to the local Community Chest drive or cosmetic landscaping around the plant). A covenantal ethic concentrates on obligations arising in relationships between several parties that are responsive and reciprocal. It acknowledges giving and receiving in extended exchanges between parties, from which permanent obligations arise that shape the future. This growing sense of responsibility between parties defines the notion of a stakeholder. Much has happened between us that gives me a stake in what you do, and you, in what I do. We are covenanted together.

In contrast, the ideal of philanthropy presupposes a one-way street from giver to receiver. The philanthropist pretends to be pure giver alone; others relate to him as receiver. When the philanthropist loses interest, he moves on. That is why corporate responsibility reduced to philanthropy trivializes corporate ethics. It obscures the depth of corporate obligation. The corporation does not give as pure benefactor alone. It has already received much from the community and its environment—not only from the investments of stockholders, but also the labor of workers, the potential of the terrain and its

resources, the ambiance and services of the community in which it is located, the privilege of incorporation by the State, and all the protection due "a person" it enjoys under the due process clause of the Constitution. Its indebtedness is great.

Not all this indebtedness can be toted up in commercial terms. The corporation, to be sure, pays its workers and its taxes but these transactions build up a life between people and institutions, rather than terminate a connection. That is why the word *covenant* is to be preferred to *contract* in defining the ethical obligations of the corporation. The decision-making of a corporation is massively contractual. But that decision-making rests upon a covenantal base that charters its life, grants it protection, and endows its enterprises with a public significance and responsibility.

Friedman's further argument—that corporations are incompetent to make judgments about matters other than profit-making—exaggerates. Further, it topples with the collapse of the first argument. In some areas of corporate responsibility (for example, product safety and negative impacts of manufacturing processes on workers, neighbors, and the environment), management usually has more knowledge and competence than most other groups in the society. In other areas, the corporation may not be competent. But ethical responsibility in life can hardly be limited solely to those areas in which persons and institutions have an advance competence. Competent, even virtuoso lovers may find themselves—willy-nilly—in the somewhat nervous

position of being inexperienced, not-yet-competent parents, but, morally obliged, by virtue of their new circumstance, to acquire that competence. Economists have conveniently excluded many issues from the manager's responsibility for competence by writing them off as "externalities." But the externalities of water and air pollution, traffic congestion, neighborhood crime, unemployment, and the quality of education and culture in a host city have a way of obtruding on the moral and political agenda of citizens and their institutions and require them to develop some measure of wisdom and even expertise.

A covenantal vision of things, with its notion of primordial gift and duties, hardly converts into casuistical principles for resolving all dilemmas or into a particular social program or environmental policy. It eliminates neither the world of the marketplace nor the need for governmental regulation. But it places the fallen world of buying and selling, regulating and reforming, within a wider horizon. It lets us see the world for what it is and lets it become a little different from what it was. It places the familiar world that we know at the distance of insight and corrective vision.

... he would not sleep tonight but would lie instead wakeful and peaceful on the cot amid the tent-filling snoring and the rain's whisper as he always did on the first night in camp; peaceful, without regret or fretting, telling himself that was all right too, who didn't have so many of them left as to waste one sleeping. ("Delta Autumn," p. 343.) □

GALATIANS 3:28, FACULTY APPOINTMENTS AND THE OVERCOMING OF CHRISTOLOGICAL AMNESIA

J. Louis Martyn

The exodus from established positions, which characterizes the Church in its true being, has never taken place without apocalyptic hope. . .

Ernest Käsemann

It happens, on occasion, that an institution and a text collide. When that happens, the major question is whether or not the collision proves to be redemptive. And that question turns to a large extent on yet another: whether the people related to the institution are able to draw something linear out of the punctiliar collision; in short, whether they are able both exegetically and politically to persevere. If they are able to do that, then the collision between the institution and the text can become what one might call a genuine apocalypse, that is to say, an event that brings into existence something that was not there before.

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The text in the present instance lies at the center of Paul's letter to the Galatians, written to communities suffering to the point of great danger from christological amnesia. As an antidote to that amnesia Paul explicitly brings the members of the Galatian churches back to their baptism. In part, he does that by quoting a baptismal formula that he may himself have spoken over each of these Christians at the time of that person's baptism. He says:

You *are*—all of you—children of God
through the faith
that is in Christ Jesus.
For you, who have been baptized into Christ,
have put on Christ,
as though he were
your clothing.
Here—in Christ—
There *is*
neither Jew nor Greek;
there *is*
neither slave nor free;
there *is*
no male and female.
For you *are*—all of you—
one person
in Christ Jesus.

That is the colliding text. The institution is Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

Picture in your mind's eye the Auburn Library at Union Seminary, and a meeting there of the Faculty one afternoon in 1970. Some may remember the general setting. We had experienced what was called "the bust" and its consequences at Columbia University. And correspondingly we had had on our side of the street what was dubbed "The Free University," that institution that replaced scheduled classes, commencing about two o'clock in the afternoon, and running non-stop until about two o'clock the next morning. You might even recall an instance of the acerbic wit of Edmund Steimle, who observed that the sole requirement for graduation from the Free University seemed to be the possession of a cast-iron fundament. A number of the discussions were endless and fruitless. Some, however, became serious deliberations, and one of these was taking place in the Faculty meeting to which I have just referred.

The subject was "the make-up" of the Seminary Faculty, with an accent on what was phrased as "the imperative of appointing more blacks and women." At one point in this discussion, one of the colleagues boldly suggested that the situation might bear illumination from the scriptures! I remember that the suggestion waked us up, and from facial expressions one could also see that it caused some of the colleagues to be suspicious.

"Do the Faculty members not recall," our colleague continued, "the clear affirmation of scripture, that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female? Is it not, then, inconceivable that an institution that takes its bearings from Jesus Christ should adopt a policy of appointments focused on distinctions once for all obliterated in Christ?"

The argument of this colleague—as I recall it—was brief, and it was clear. I also recall my own reaction to it at the moment. On the one hand, I remember feeling discomfort at what I took to be the reactionary thrust of the argument. "Damnation! Once again the use of scripture to canonize the status quo!" Yet, on the other hand, there was a suspicion that the basic point might prove to be incontrovertible. How can we make the Christian confession in chapel services, perhaps on occasion even using this text, and then, a few hours later, engage in deliberations about Faculty appointments, in which we fail to allow ourselves to be informed by that confession? I have to say, in short, that I found the colleague's remark both aggravating and arresting.

It will probably come as no surprise to you that after a short pause the discussion was taken up by a colleague in another corner of the room, whose remark was equally brief and equally clear. It ran somewhat like this: "In order to perceive that this Seminary Faculty is not in Christ, all one needs to do is to glance around this room! The discrepancy between the text you have cited and the present 'make up' of the Faculty shows that the text is, in fact, a summons to justice."

Explication of that remark seemed at the time to be unnecessary. Nothing was more obvious than that the Union Faculty had been built for a long time, and to a large extent, out of what has been called "the old-boy network," and what should have been called "the old-white-boy-network." Fishing nets cast according to the rules of the old-white-boy network bring in relatively few blacks and relatively few women.

Again, I recall my own reaction: the point seems incontrovertible! If Christ be conceived as the genuinely new space in which there is neither slave nor free, no male and female, then one would have to say that the Seminary Faculty was not altogether in that new space. To a considerable extent, it was somewhere else, namely, of course, swimming along rather placidly, for the most part, in the stream of American culture, a culture obviously racist and obviously sexist. Unless the Faculty wished to continue in that cultural pattern, it would have to hear the quoted text as a ringing summons to justice. The second speaker had made his point.

How that particular Faculty Meeting ended I do not, at the moment, recall. But two elements of the picture stick firmly in my memory: First, in the midst of a highly political discussion the Union Seminary Faculty had actually been plunged into an exegetical consideration of christology! Subsequent developments have shown us what a remarkable event that was. Second, the collision between the politics of this institution and the christology of that text from Galatians produced in fact a momentary flash. It was not followed up with any consistency. There was an exegetical failure of nerve.

Let me be clear. We did take some very important steps, not least as regards Faculty appointments. We now have on the Faculty a number of highly valued colleagues, whom we would not have among us, had we stuck with the hegemony of the old order. I want to say emphatically that a large part of the impulse for the present remarks stems from a sense of thanksgiving for those colleagues.

I have to confess, however, to a nagging conviction that we may not even yet fully understand the significance of their presence, and of the prospective presence of still others who will be appointed. And that conviction is related to another: that we have some rather important unfinished business, precisely with that baptismal confession in Paul's letter to the Galatians. The brief collision of that text with our institution in the Faculty meeting of 1970 invites comparison with the instance of two birds that mate on the wing, but then fail to set up the kind of housekeeping that will require them to work through—with perseverance—the radical implications of their first encounter. Whatever image one may select, to say it in a word, the text of that baptismal confession is waiting, and its waiting invites us to pose the question whether it is possible to sustain a discussion that is both realistically political and exegetically christological.

What such a discussion might produce is not for an individual to say. That baptismal confession is waiting not for any particular one of us, but rather for—primarily—the body politic called The Faculty, and also for the Board of Directors. As a contribution to that discussion I want briefly to offer three suggestions:

First, Galatians 3:28 is not a status quo text.

Second, it is not a summons to what Caesar calls justice.

Third, it is, on the contrary, a thoroughly apocalyptic text about God's victorious call to life in the real world, and thus a text that may be pertinent even to the making of Faculty appointments.

Go back to these two speakers in the 1970 Faculty meeting. Whatever the full intention of the first speaker may have been, his remark was interpreted as an endorsement of the status quo, and thus as a rationale for leaving untouched the time-honored routes for making Faculty appointments. But an endorsement of the status quo is exactly what this text is not. The distinctions, or, properly speaking, the antinomies,

Jew / Greek,
slave / free,
male / female,

embody, of course, the established order. A text that denies validity to those Old-Age antinomies belongs, then, to the strains of early Christian thought that are utterly radical. This text belongs to the language of radical discontinuity, because it speaks of the New Creation, God's New Creation of One New Person in Jesus Christ. Whoever will cite this text in order to protect the current state of affairs in a human institution has failed to hear it. The text is a counter-culture text. It is an anti-religious text. It is a text that stands opposed

even to nature. But, most important, it is all of these things because it is a text about the God who in Christ is breaking in, and breaking up the established order. (Paul L. Lehmann, *The Transformation of Politics*, 1975, pp. 45-46.) To use this text to protect the status quo of our institution or of any group in it is to be trapped in one form of christological amnesia. It is to forget that the God who has taken hold of us in Christ is the God who calls The New into existence.

To some degree the second speaker sensed as much. He saw that the confession is not a status quo text. The effect of his remark was to take the text as a summons to efforts in behalf of what the world calls justice. He made an assumption with which most of us are most of the time very much at home. He assumed that the opposite of endorsing the status quo must be our taking immediate action to change it. The opposite of the *indicative* mood of the establishment must be the *imperative* mood of the summons to justice.

The problem is that the baptismal formula makes no such assumption. And thus it proves to be in fact as far removed from the viewpoint of the second speaker as it is from that of the first. The major barrier to reading this text as a summons to justice is the simple fact that the verbs of the confession are in the *indicative* mood of God's New Creation. When Paul quotes it in order to combat the forms of christological amnesia threatening the churches in Galatia, he means to affirm that the Christ into whom we *have been baptized* is the Christ in whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, no male or female. The text, therefore, is not a summons to justice. It is a confession about that which is already the state of affairs in the *real* world. That is to say, it is a text that points to the New Creation that God is even now bringing into being.

This sharp note of genuine newness, and thus the sharp note of discontinuity, shows not only that the text attacks the established order. It also shows that it is impossible to bear witness to God's New Creation by taking as one's point of departure distinctions that are now *passé*. Commenting on Barth's statement that "...what converts the creature into an analogue of God does not lie in [the creature] itself and its nature..." (*Church Dogmatics II*, 1, 239), our colleague Christopher Morse has recently said, "the creature possesses no being which can by either extension or negation be proportionally attributed to God." (Christopher L. Morse, "Raising God's Eyebrows," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. 37, Fall-Winter 1981-1982, pp. 39-50.) As we shall see later, the negations in our text are *derived from* the positive of the New Creation, showing that God's deed in Christ is the new point of departure for the doing of theology.

But just so, the negatives demand a hearing. In Christ God is not building the truly new on the basis of antinomies characteristic of the old. And that means, in turn, that to read this text as a summons to what the world calls justice, and to do so by taking as one's point of departure distinctions mentioned in the text as *passé*, is to be ensnared in yet another form of christological amnesia.

To bring the point home to the early 1980's, we might pause long enough to imagine that several of us had been asked to stand at Paul's elbow, as he dictated his letter to the Galatians, in order to help him speak in a fashion truly "relevant" and "realistic." As he dictated Galatians 3:28, we might then have suggested a re-wording: "Slow down, Paul! And above all wake up to the fact that the claims of everyday life require us to be both inclusive and political in a down-to-earth fashion. Say, 'In Christ there are both Jew and Greek etc.' Once you have said that, we will see to it that there is an effective appointments-caucus for Jews, another for Gentiles, and so forth."

Lacking the benefit of our wisdom, Paul said no such thing. And thus the collision between his christologically realistic text and our politically realistic institution is a collision both genuine and significant, in that it poses anew the question, "What is it that is happening in the world that makes it the *real* world?"

That question brings us to the heart of the matter as regards the text and our institution, because it makes clear that if we are to persevere, the *sine qua non* is a fresh reading of the text. The initial step toward that reading is taken when we recognize that the text is thoroughly apocalyptic; it is a text that "comes from somewhere else." (In the scholarly literature the major theses about Galatians 3:28 are divided into two camps: one takes the fundamental background of the text to be gnostic, the other takes it to be apocalyptic. In the present setting I can only indicate my own position, assuming that those who wish to pursue the debate will consult the commentaries.)

Apocalyptic has never enjoyed the good will of the dominant church or of the dominant theology as Ernst Käsemann notes in the quotation that opens this essay. The major reason is not far to seek. Apocalyptic issues an unwelcome challenge to all prevailing views of reality, as one can readily see in the case of our text itself. Epistemologically the text is eminently foolish. Whoever speaks this text with a truly serious mind confesses to the *seeing* of something not generally visible—the corporate Christ—and to the *not-seeing* of some things that are generally visible, for example,

sexual distinctions. The confessor may thus seem to fall into company with dreamers who fail to share the pain and anguish of the human scene, and who run away from the cause of justice by embracing an otherworldly form of christology.

But such a reading can be sustained only by tearing the confession out of its context in Galatians, and, equally disastrous, out of its context in the Pauline corpus. For the speaker from whose lips we have the confession is the apostle who cannot ever be at rest in some otherworldly Zion, so long as "the god of this age" continues to take his toll in the lives of human beings (2 Cor 4:4). Far from being the kind of dreamer intent on escape, this apocalyptic theologian is one who has been sent by God into the thick of the battle, where solidarity with human suffering is most intense:

Who is weak, and I am not weak?
Who is made to fall, and I am not
indignant? (2 Cor 11:29)

One begins to see that Paul's apocalyptic vision, far from representing a retreat from the real world, is the apostle's way of bearing witness to the world *made real* when invaded by Jesus Christ, that cosmic Lord who is even now vanquishing all powers inimical to human beings, the Lord who enlists human beings in his liberating struggle, the Lord who reveals to those whom he enlists the location of the *genuine* battle lines, the Lord who makes known to the enlisted that the future of the real world is the future of the corporate Christ.

An essential part of this liberating struggle is focused on "seeing," as is indicated by the reference above to epistemology. Our ways of seeing, of perceiving, of knowing, are not left untouched by Christ's invasion. On the contrary they are fundamentally transformed. To grasp Paul's apocalyptic, it is necessary to speak of a vision that is neither thisworldly, nor otherworldly, but *bothworldly*. Elsewhere I have attempted to grasp this crucial point by speaking of "bi-focal vision." ("From Paul to Flannery O'Connor With the Power of Grace," *Katallagete*, Winter, 1981. Some thoughts rather more technical are given in "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages: 2 Corinthians 5:16," pp. 269-287 in W.R. Farmer, C.F.D. Moule, R.R. Niebuhr, eds., *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, 1967.) A considerable part of what is at stake is well formulated in a comment by Gayraud Wilmore about preaching among black slaves in 18th and 19th century America. The so-called otherworldliness of slave preaching, Wilmore says, was not otherworldly-quietistic; it was otherworldly-disruptive. (Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 1973, p. 72.)

Returning to Galatians 3:28, we can now ask why, by quoting this confession, Paul should pay attention to distinctions characteristic of the Old Age; that is, why he

should take the trouble to negate them. From the immediate context, with its emphasis on various forms of human enslavement, we can discern a significant part of the apostle's answer. In the light emitted by the apocalypse of Christ, Paul sees that these Old-Age distinctions have played and continue to play their roles in the hands of "the elemental spirits of the universe," who are bent on the dehumanization of all of the people in the world. Thus, to confess that in Christ such distinctions are *passé* is not to retreat from the real world. It is to perceive and to participate in the war of liberation that God is waging in order to make the world real.

But this participative perception is ineluctably related to that bi-focal vision of apocalyptic that has already claimed our attention, and that always brings with it that subversive epistemological foolishness characteristic of apocalyptic. For the confession of our text is apocalyptic in the sense that it is uttered by people who have received the *gift* of bi-focal vision and who, because of that gift, see (and do not see) in radically new ways. To be specific, these gifted people know that one will not perceive what makes the world *real* in Christ by taking one's bearings from religious, social, and sexual distinctions. To see the world in that way is to be blind to the real world. "But," someone will say, "what about common sense? Isn't the denial of the sexual distinction, for example, a form of insanity?"

We can take a step forward by relating our text to the setting provided by the whole of the Pauline writings. The author of our text is also the author of the seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians, a notoriously difficult passage, but on any reading one in which Paul deals very seriously with human sexuality. Since First Corinthians was almost certainly written after Galatians, alert interpreters ask whether Paul did not eventually find it necessary to correct the enthusiastic folly of the highly apocalyptic confession of Galatians 3:28. The answer to that query is an emphatic "No!" Different settings do call for different theological formulations (1 Corinthians 12:13). Precisely in 1 Corinthians 7, with its concerted discussion of human sexuality, Paul places great emphasis on his repeated expression "*as though not*," a clear pointer to the bi-focal vision of apocalyptic, a vision that is truly bi-focal because it cannot be unifocally reduced either to a pie in the sky, or to the perspective of the Old Age. To be specific, I suppose that the apostle who wrote both Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 7 was a person who *noticed as though not* noticing that some of his colleagues in the Theological Faculty at Ephesus were women, while others were men. Hence the "*as though not*" carries the liberating and disruptive thrust of apocalyptic from Galatians 3:28 through 1 Corinthians 7 into our contemporary deliberations about Faculty appointments.

A final note: Galatians 3:28 is an apocalyptic text in the form of a *baptismal* confession. Clearly it functions as a witness to the beginning of the Christian community, to the point at which God *calls* that community into existence by revelation. That is a matter of considerable importance concerning crisis-points in the life of Christian communities, not least our own. In several documents in the New Testament (Galatians, Colossians, 1 John...) one notices that at crisis-points the Christian community is not first of all exhorted in the imperative mood. It is rather called back to its *baptism*, to its beginning, to its point of departure under the gracious hand of the God who is no respecter of persons. Any community that will genuinely listen to this radical confession will find that the confession recalls that community to its origin in God's gracious vocation. As a community in Christ, it does indeed "come from somewhere else."

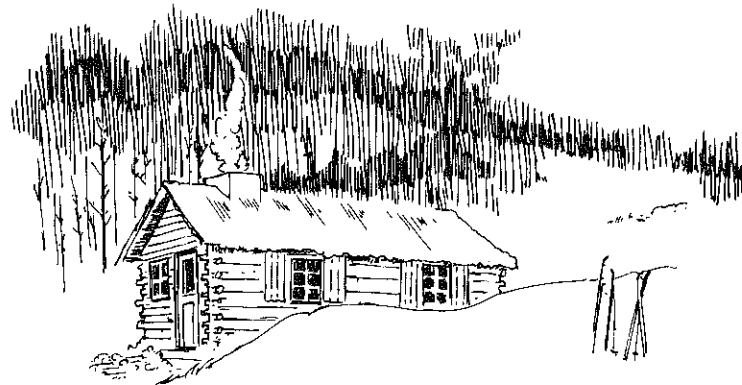
To gather up the threads, the text does not protect a human status quo. Thus it can warn us at Union Theological Seminary that we would stumble into a genuine instance of irony, were the institution so grandly served by Reinhold Niebuhr to suffer an attack of christological amnesia by forgetting its *political* heritage. We are the thankful heirs of a sensitivity to those reactionary forces that threaten to blind us—not least in the early 1980's—to the dehumanizing power of racism and sexism in our society. But neither does the text issue a summons to what Caesar calls justice toward constituencies. Thus it can serve to announce the threat of an equally ironic development, the possibility that the institution located where Broadway intersects Reinhold Niebuhr Place should witness the eclipse of the determination to persevere with the specifically *theological* issue posed by the advent of Christ. For then we would be forgetting that to which Arthur Schlesinger pointed when, at the memorial service for Niebuhr (November 1, 1971) he spoke of the paradox presented by "*this believer...[who] had so penetrating an influence on so many non-believers.*" (Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Reinhold Niebuhr: Mission to a Secular Age," p. 2 of a manuscript kindly provided by Professor Schlesinger (*italics added*); a slightly revised form of the talk appeared in the *New Leader* of January 24, 1972.)

The text that neither protects the status quo nor issues a summons to Caesar's justice is not satisfied, however, merely to offer caveats about blind alleys. It has its own strong voice, as we have seen, and that voice speaks about the apocalyptic vocation of the Christian community to be One New Person in Christ. If in making Faculty appointments we take our bearings from

the apocalyptic, vocational language of this startling confession, we could be led to inquire into the basis of that new one-ness about which the text speaks. And in doing that, we should see that *this new one-ness does not arise by replacing what exists with what exists*, that is to say, by striking "a just balance" among categories of the Old Age. That one-ness makes its appearance by the power of the God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Romans 4:17). On the apocalyptic landscape the major entities that stand opposed to one another, therefore, are not human injustice and human justice, but rather *human injustice* and *divine vocation to new community*. Every arrangement that obscures that antinomy is impotent to do anything genuinely new about human injustice. One speaks, therefore, not about a modification of politics, but rather about the transfiguration of politics. [Mr. Justice Harry A. Blackmun is reported to have remarked that "in order to get beyond racism, we must *first* take account of race" (*New York Times*, November 16, 1981, italics added.) Before rushing to apply that remark to the making of Faculty appointments in a *theological* seminary, we do well to realize that it is the sort of thing an enlightened Caesar may say, but it is all that Caesar

can say. The gospel of the cross of Christ speaks otherwise, for "Christ crucified" is shorthand for "God's Messiah is the one crucified as a criminal standing condemned under the Law" (cf. Galatians 3:13). That event cannot be a link in the continuity of Law. Beyond it can lie nothing other than yet another form of primal chaos, or a new creation. See the comments on the relationship of law to order in Paul L. Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics*, 1975, one of the most instructively provocative books of our time.]

In a word, the potent opposite to the dehumanizing effects of distinctions drawn in the Old Age cannot begin with distinctions drawn in the Old Age. The potent opposite is God's vocation in Jesus Christ, who enacted in his table-fellowship the complete absence of human presuppositions and distinctions. The movement of this text could bring us to the point at which all members of the Faculty would know: "We are here, not because the old-white-boy network was effective, and not because of a summons to what Caesar calls justice. We are here because the Faculty of which we are members is being daily called into existence by God to make expansively visible in the world the One New Person in Christ Jesus." □



Journal of the Committee of Southern Churchmen

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