

KATALLAGETE

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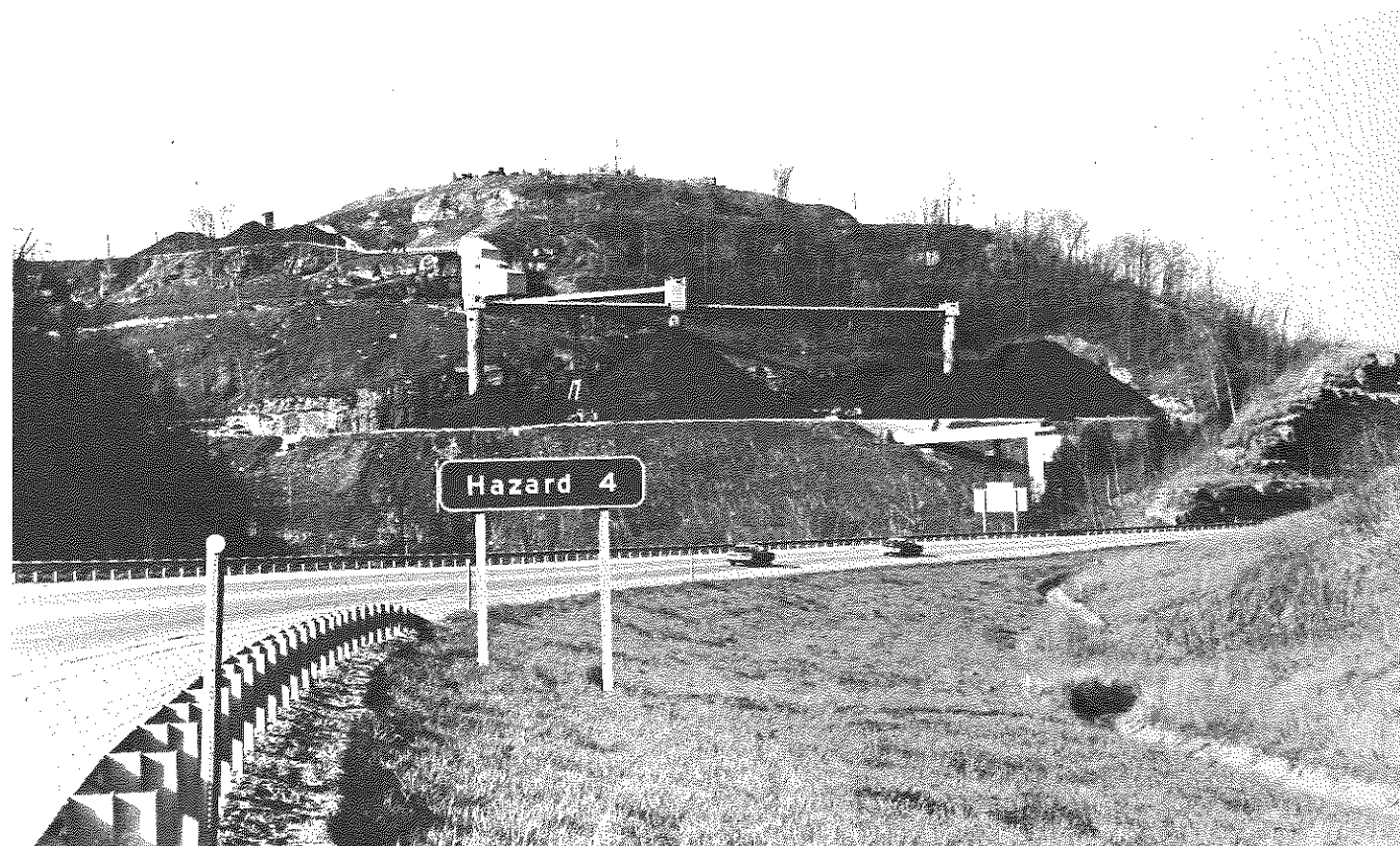
Defeated Creek Old Regular Baptist Church

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I CAN ALMOST SEE HEAVEN FROM HERE

I belong to a blood-washed army,
And we're traveling on a King's highway,
And each stop brings us nearer to our homeland,
And we'll enter a new country someday.

This highway leads over the mountain.
The end of our journey is near.
At the top of this mountain is a beautiful sight.
I can almost see heaven from here.

We are nearing the top of the mountain.
Oh, what joy waits on the other side.
Our Savior has prepared for us a mansion.
'Twas for our sin that He came here and died.

Soon our journey here will be over.
The saints are rejoicing I hear.
I'm getting homesick and I want to see Jesus.
I can almost see heaven from here.

KATALLAGETE

SPRING, 1983

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I CAN ALMOST SEE HEAVEN FROM HERE

John Wallhausser

Nineteen eighty-two was the worst time in years for those working in the coal mines of Eastern Kentucky. Television went into the mountains to cover the funerals. That winter and spring I heard from the tube that distinctive sound I had become so accustomed to the previous summer. I would go into the room with the set and listen to the tearing lament, a holy wail, a cry to God. The cry is haunting. It joins heaven and earth with a sound I had never heard before coming to Kentucky.

Religious man is not an abstract idea. He is a man planted in space and time—modeled by his river and his mounts, moulded by his "pampa" or his city. A concrete being, with his rhythm and his culture, his geography and his roots. The surroundings become his music, his dance, his melody: it lends its image and its poetry. Adam, the earthy, takes not only from the earth his breath but his form of speaking, of communicating, of exteriorizing his troubles, his joys, his sorrows, and his loves, his hopes and his anxiety.

And that concrete man, upon entering the temple to speak with God and to communicate with his brothers, must he necessarily enter a strange world? . . . Must he redress himself in a strange liturgical personality in order to refer to God and to unite himself in communion with his brothers of faith?

The Liturgy must find the point of union between the Church and the land. To produce the marvel of the spirit that would permit man to feel inside the temple as he does in his own house, as he does in his own country. . .

[Liturgy] is a synthesis and an invitation. It opens its arms to man to be able to tell him: "Come to Church with all that is in your flesh and blood: with your cultures and your rhythms, with your forms of expression and your landscape." The Church does not want a strange language to be spoken in the temple. Her language is that of Pentecost: the maternal language that man learned in his harsh vital contact with his own land. "Let the dance and the music come." "Let the land itself come."

(Carolyn and Carl Fjellman first called my attention to this statement on the meaning of liturgy. It is found in the program notes, "Liturgy and Folklore," to Ariel Ramirez's composition of a Latin American folk mass, *Misa Coriolla*, Phillips Records.)

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The Outset

I am not easily given to thrusting myself into other people's homes and churches. Yet I had been awarded a Mellon grant to study "the continuing Calvinist tradition within Appalachia." By "Calvinist" I understood a tradition in the mountains that differed from perfectionist churches with their tests of personal purity and worthiness. The tradition I wanted to look at—the Primitive Baptists and Old Regular Baptists—was utterly foreign to my own high church background. I was initially drawn by the solid, strong articles of faith and doctrine (published in their annual *Association Minutes*) which I associated with a robust Reformed tradition.

I knew I was yet one more academic voyeur (since the '60s they move in and out of the mountains regularly) and I hated it. These intrusions could be awkward for everyone. Yet the people of the Indian Bottom Association of Old Regular Baptists made it easy for me. They were kind, generous and hospitable. They treated me not as an academic intruder but as a brother in Christ. My response was simply to show at all the meetings and services. Within a month or two my wife and I were invited into homes for Sunday dinner. We became acquainted with both older members of the congregations and younger families. Most important was our reception, shortly after a baptism in the river on a deliciously warm summer Sunday, by the family of Manus and Mary Ison. Manus Ison is the past Moderator of the Indian Bottom Association. After two years I now dare to call that acquaintance a deepening friendship. I will not dwell on the personal reversals of the expected that took place through that friendship. It is, however, the real context within which most of my work went on. To keep the precise theological framework in my language, it was not just "lucky" or "fortunate" but "providential" that Brother Elwood Cornett introduced us to Manus Ison one June Sabbath after that baptism beside the Campbell Branch Elementary School.

Looking back two years later, I can discern the pattern clearly: not only was I learning much about the Indian Bottom Association of Old Regular Baptists. Something had also been happening to me. I had moved from interest to respect, from appreciation to affection. What I discovered upon looking back was something that crept up on me: I developed a rather fierce loyalty and so have learned something about myself.

At the outset of the academic study I sought to avoid a *functional* method. By functional method I mean one that interprets behavior and beliefs in terms of social and psychological processes, according to how these activities and commitments aid individuals (or groups) successfully to adapt to their environments. The *meaning* of an action or belief, that is, is located in its social and psychological usefulness and consequences. I do not argue, certainly, that this is a dominant and valid methodology in academic study today.

By contrast, however, I decided to understand the Old Regular Baptist faith from *within* their own theological commitments, their own religious tradition and language. I was an outsider but I didn't want to look only from the outside. I wanted, as much as possible, to "get inside," to see life and the meaning of the Gospel as they see it, to listen, to make my mind conform to theirs as I listened.

The approach adopted fits my own academic disciplines. These are the efforts of the deciphering and interpretation of texts as well as the method of phenomenology which stresses an attitude of "understanding" from within rather than "explaining" phenomena functionally.

The third academic activity informing my project is translation. Comparing my study to the complex activity of translation occurred to me during a conversation about a month into the project. Having shared a marvelous Sunday dinner at the Ison home I was then asked what my exact intentions were, what I hoped to achieve. "I am translating," I answered. The text was the living experience of this community and its worship. The task was not to judge but to interpret. I explained I would try to translate what I heard and saw into my own words, words that would also convey to academic colleagues and students some of the content and meaning I had experienced. In *translating*, a double test or check is involved: my friend should be able to recognize himself and his faith in what I say; people from a different tradition and background should also be able to recognize the integrity and authenticity that is in that faith. In any case, the idea of my study of the Indian Bottom Association of Old Regular Baptists as *translation* was fixed in my mind. The success or failure of my translation is still uncertain. I am not confident I can convey the richness and authenticity of the tradition I discovered in the mountains of south-eastern Kentucky. I do know that I shall try.

Who Are They?

Histories are sparse and the ones available are not always reliable. Nonetheless, the outlines of the developments in the United States are clear. The theological traditions of that history are striking. Their distinctive theological positions were shaped *before* the

controversies and wrangles of the nineteenth century. The Old Regular Baptists and Primitive Baptists trace their American roots to the eighteenth century, behind the splits that shattered the Baptist Churches in the wake of the Great Revival and the Civil War.

The name "Regular" goes back to the revival preached by George Whitefield in New England in 1739-1740. Whitefield had broken with John and Charles Wesley, finding them Arminian—that is, attributing too much to the human role in salvation. Whitefield was a dedicated Calvinist in doctrine according to which *all* glory is given God for human salvation.

That "Great Awakening," backed by Jonathan Edwards, was proving divisive, pulling the denominations into two camps. Among Presbyterians the division split into the "Old Sides" and the "New Sides," and among New England Congregationalists the "Old Lights" and the "New Lights." Those "New" who went with Whitefield and approved the revival were the "Separates." The traditional groups (the "Old") who resisted the revival were called the "Regulars."

By 1742 the controversy penetrated the Baptist churches of New England. The result was a division into *Separate* Baptist Churches and *Regular* Baptist Churches. The Baptist faith that moved south in the 1750s, influenced by Whitefield's revival, was Calvinistic.

An irony of history occurs at this point. The Separates were originally the more Calvinistic, stressing with Whitefield predestination and salvation by God's grace alone. Yet before long the Separates began reversing their Calvinist identity and became increasingly Arminian. The loss of their Calvinism stems from the Separatist refusal to subscribe to creedal statements being prepared to help



overcome the divisions. The absence of a strong creedal reference permitted some Separates now to preach widely divergent interpretations of Scripture. Many disenchant-ed Separates reunited with the Regulars. The theological content of the names reversed. Eventually the Old Regulars became the bearers of the older orthodox tradition of Calvinism as expressed in the "Philadelphia Confession."

This early decision of Regular Baptists to affirm creedal statements is important because, I am convinced, it holds the key to the present theological tradition in the Articles of Faith maintained by the Old Regular Churches. This creedal faith is the historical backbone that has given these communities their tenacity, resilience, and theological toughness.

During the 1770's Baptist preachers came into Kentucky with the early settlers by way of Virginia and North Carolina. The dispute between Separates and Regulars continued in Kentucky. However, the more Calvinist preachers in Kentucky united with the Regulars that solidified, in an Old Regular Baptist phrase, "the common standard of orthodoxy." By 1785 two associations of Old Regular churches were formed in Kentucky, the Elkhorn and Salem. In the late eighteenth century a series of efforts were made to unite the Regulars and Separates, leading to their eventual reunion in 1801. The Great Western Revival at the turn of the century supported these movements toward union.

This is not the place to continue tracing the fifty-odd divisions among the Baptists. The impact of the Great Western Revival, positive and negative, on the Old Regular churches at the turn of the nineteenth century is important to their history. Sixty years after the Great Awakening in New England, revivalism hit the American frontier with a robustness that matched its setting. The Great Western Revival—the "Second Great Awakening"—started at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801 and in the decades that followed rearranged the religious life of frontier America. Baptists in Kentucky doubled during the opening years of the nineteenth century. The revival also added emotional rawness to the doctrinal faith; subjective experiences of grace given to the reborn joined the objective standards of orthodoxy.

The Great Revival, however, was essentially anti-Calvinistic in theology. It was a revival of Arminianism, stressing perfection and cooperation with God in salvation. According to Sidney Ahlstrom's now classic *A Religious History of the American People* (Yale University Press, 1972), this new burst of American revivalism also encouraged "the rise of conflict and schism" dividing particularly the Presbyterian and Baptist churches (p. 436). The dynamism of the revival created not only new momentum but new denominations, new movements, new religious/social agencies and societies.

In the wake of the Great Revival the Regular Baptists retained their confessional anchor. The strict Calvinism of the Philadelphia Confession was modified as a result of the reunion of the Regulars and Separates; the doctrines of the work of Christ in the atonement and double predestination were reinterpreted. The stricter Reformed doctrinal tradition would be carried on by the Primitive Baptists ("Hardshells," I was told because not even the Devil could crack them); their theology remains a remarkably direct restatement of the articles of faith adopted at the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619. Old Regular Baptists with whom I have talked continue to share in the classic Calvinist theological tradition of what Brother Elwood Cornett regularly calls today the "grace covenant." They disagree with the "Hardshells"—while respecting them—on two critical points. The Old Regulars reject the two doctrines of limited atonement and double predestination. Old Regular Baptists, as I understand them, believe in a universal atonement: that is, Christ died for all, not just the elect. They also reject a rigid double predestination. They agree that we do not save ourselves, God does. Yet, God renders us responsible (compels us to make a response) by calling us "to answer." This answer they call "repentance," the gift of grace is being "born anew."

Innovations triggered by the pietism of the Great Western Revival in the early nineteenth century also led to fundamental agreements among the Primitive Baptists and Old Regular Baptists. They agree in rejecting movements they thought altered the Church. For example, they resisted reductionistic innovations transferring the churches' local responsibilities to specialized agencies or "societies" which proliferated in the early decades of the century. The Baptist Foreign Missionary Society was founded in 1814. A decade later was founded a society to disseminate tracts, periodicals, Bibles, Sunday School literature. In 1840 this office became the American Baptist Publication Society. In 1832 the American Baptist Home Mission Society was founded.

The Calvinist Baptists resisted these developments, seeing them as movements of specialization funnelling responsibility—and (increasingly) money—into bureaus that would act autonomously. As I understand it, resistance to these new agencies had a theological basis: these agencies represent specialization of function which diverts and divests the responsibility of the local church. That is, the witness and mission of the church becomes located in *ad hoc* professional agencies and not in the congregations themselves. I have been told that Old Regular Baptists are "anti-mission." When I asked Manus Ison about this he insisted that if you are called to go as a missionary you must go! But don't depend on or wait for a sponsoring or supporting agency to do it for you. Underlying their resistance to mission boards is, I suspect, a deep-rooted egalitarian belief in the "priesthood of all believers" in which each is responsible



for all. The contrary is what they reject: no specialized "part" is allowed to assume responsibility for the whole.

This tradition against specialization of labor, responsibility, and witness has interesting echoes in Old Regular attitudes today. Preachers with whom I have spoken have expressed real suspicions about today's instant religious gimmicks, particularly the new television evangelism. The objections raised are similar to their nineteenth-century objection to the tractarians: it is a too-easy and too-specialized substitute for preaching the Gospel and caring for the flock at the level of the local congregation. It implies the hit-and-run, quick-fix religion of modernity. As one preacher stated in a sermon: "We don't need to stick a cross in our lapel and walk up and down Main Street with a Bible under our arms to be Christian."

Moreover, the Primitive and Old Regular Baptists did not adopt the practice of Sunday School that characterized American congregations in the nineteenth century. The Sunday School movement was originally sponsored by independent societies and advocated through their periodicals. The early stages of this ecumenical movement suggested that Sunday School and Church were distinct entities. In addition, the Sunday School movement, absorbing the nineteenth-century belief in process as upward organic growth, came to reflect a kind of "Christian gradualism," implying that Christianity is not so much the struggle of an adult decision but a guided, evolving growth into maturity.

Even today the Old Regular Baptists do not have Sunday School. Children are not set aside into their own rooms and programs. They are part of the worship service. Because the service lasts two and a half hours or more, they are given remarkable freedom to move about,

to sit with Mamaw and Papaw, even to walk outside for a time, or to go to the water cooler usually set at the side or in front of the pulpit. The community includes all and is not broken into different segments.

Among Old Regular Baptists the tradition of worker preachers is retained. There is no group of professional preachers, separate from the community itself. Each is a tent-maker, has a job, a source of income independent of the congregation. The following conversation was reported to me: "A preacher was once chided: 'You are only a part-time preacher for you also have a job.' The preacher turned the accusation around: 'We are *all of us* part-time preachers!'" The "all of us" is the important phrase. The community itself takes responsibility for the preaching. There are no paid, professional preachers set apart: "How can you say that I won't preach unless I get paid?"

Both the Primitive and Old Regular Baptist Churches retain traditional Calvinist stark and unadorned churches. They sing without the use of any instrument except that made by God—the human voice. A remainder and a reminder of a much earlier Calvinist tradition of music, *lining out*, is perhaps the best known historical/religious deposit in the Kentucky hills. However, the Regular Baptists have also held onto pre-nineteenth-century traditions in their beliefs, their orthodoxy, their polity, and their stark yet generous Christianity. Having held themselves apart and having held on to an authentic Christian tradition they *may* have something important to say about what it means to be a Christian "in but not of the world."

Polemic

My early reading had set up neat compartments, historical, sociological, theological. Once in the mountains, the churches and in the homes, I was compelled to unlearn most of the academically packaged distinctions. Many of my neat formulas unraveled. There it was: in a Socratic way I knew that I didn't know. Once the neat formulas and generalizations became suspect, the need to listen carefully and to attend to the particular was reinforced.

I became more of a nominalist during the course of the project. That is, I became more and more suspicious of broad generalizations about religion in Appalachia. Much of what I have read not only did *not* serve to prepare me for the Old Regular Baptists, much of it was downright misleading, falsifying what I was encountering at first hand.

I once told Manus Ison after our friendship was firm, that I didn't want to offend anyone by my continual presence. He told me that people were curious but not offended. But: "Yes we do worry about the instant experts. We have welcomed people who come in for one service, write a report, and then ridicule us without understanding. It hurts."

The point is an important one. Many of the broad categories used in recent literature about religion in Appalachia do not illumine the subject but merely reflect ideological biases that are closer to middle-class, suburban Christian values and clichés. New perspectives describing the *particulars* (specifics) of mountain religious traditions need to be developed. These perspectives not only need to be more accountable to the people and the traditions they represent, they also need to be more theologically sensitive and informed. For example, what is often a remarkably faithful allegiance to St. Paul's manner of proclaiming the Gospel is not appreciated for what it is: a powerful respect for the historical presence within the preaching. Instead, categories such as "escapist," "other-worldly," "fundamentalist" are used without in any way discriminating the intricate, let alone profound tradition of Pauline theology that reverberates through the mountains.

An example of the widespread but wrong-headed set of categories may highlight the need for new perspectives and closer, more accountable descriptions. An article by James Kerr entitled "A Pastor's View of Religion in Appalachia" provides a brief summary of the cliché categories. (The essay appears in the popular study edited by John Photiadis, *Religion in Appalachia*, West Virginia University Press, 1979.) Kerr writes:

...other aspects of the mountaineer religion include a Literal Interpretation of the Bible, the Bible as Magic, Fundamentalism, Other-worldliness, and Social passivity." (p. 88)

These "trappings of religion that the mountaineer must live with" (an appalling, patronizing phrase!) Kerr formalizes into some of the following categories:

Spiritualism. Spiritualism here means the lack of any ritual, the absence of liturgical structure. Kerr does note, however, that there is form in the informality which allows one "to anticipate." I'll return to this point shortly.

Individualism. While the faith I found in the mountains is intensely personal as Kerr identifies it, it is in no way individualistic. My experience is that there is a stronger sense of community in this worshipping congregation than in any suburban or urban church I have yet found. The sense of solidarity and support is moving. There may be opportunity to suggest this communion in later examples. Here I note only a comment of one of the young people of the church: "If ever, if ever you find yourself in trouble in the mountains, the first place you want to go is to the church."

Other-Worldly. A friend recently did a study on the sense of "place" in Appalachia. I told him once that the Old Regulars have an enormous sense of "place." It is called Heaven. Heaven is the name of their hope. This fallen world is called "Nature," meaning "fallen nature" into which they do *not* place their hope. But it would be a gross distortion to say that because of their devotion to their true "home" they adopt a gnostic despoliation of creation, as the provisional "place" God has given them here. I have heard preachers who returned to Knott and Letcher counties from Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois; I have eaten the good food put on the table; and I have heard sermons drawing on the seasons, the mountains, the rivers, the land. Devotion to Heaven does not negate this world, fallen as it is. Rather, Heaven puts it into its proper perspective, allowing them to see this life not only as a vale of tears but as a gift from God. They have given it up but they have received it back as a provisional gift to be enjoyed. As one preacher said to the young people: "There is a joy we have even in this life which you young ones may not always notice in us older ones. But it is a real joy, a true joy." Those who share the worship services and listen to the preaching are obligated to hear what is going on in three-dimensional and not the easy two-dimensional plane of a flat surface. The preaching brothers say there is no preaching in Heaven. That is because preaching takes place in and deals with the time still left us *between* this age and the new age. Preaching is the confrontation between our present age and God's future for us that gives the depth, the three-dimensional character to Old Regular preaching, keeping it from either a flat this-worldliness or other-worldliness.

Revivalism. Old Regular Baptists don't have revivals. No special times are set aside for something different from the rest of the year. Manus Ison: "Why, Brother John, every Sunday is a revival with us."

Social Uninvolvement. "Churchmen," Kerr writes, "for the most part are uninvolved with the community and its problems. They sit back and watch, and do not participate in the decision-making process" (p. 77). Wrong. Old Regulars run for political office. In fact, I was told that if you think you know how to resolve a social issue or problem—from county roads to the use of public funds—it is your *obligation* to run for political office. The Church must not be politicized. But its members are accountable, responsible citizens for this interim time.

There are other clichés that are simply not fair to Old Regular Baptists. They are easily found and their perpetrators ought to be held accountable. It is time now to leave polemics and to present the outlines of a positive statement about the Old Regular liturgy and faith.

Liturgy Unites Heaven and Earth: "I Can Almost See Heaven From Here"

An appreciation of the faith of the Old Regular Baptists begins and ends with their worship. A "fitting" theological understanding (to use one of H. Richard Niebuhr's categories) that is, *must* be a statement about the worshipping community. Said another way, even more emphatically, any *theological* statement has to be a *liturgical* one. Liturgy is the proper "work" to be done through the Church: reconciliation is made. The worship of Old Regular Baptists *enacts* their faith in a way that is at once vivid, dramatic, raw, stark, gripping, doctrinal and moving.

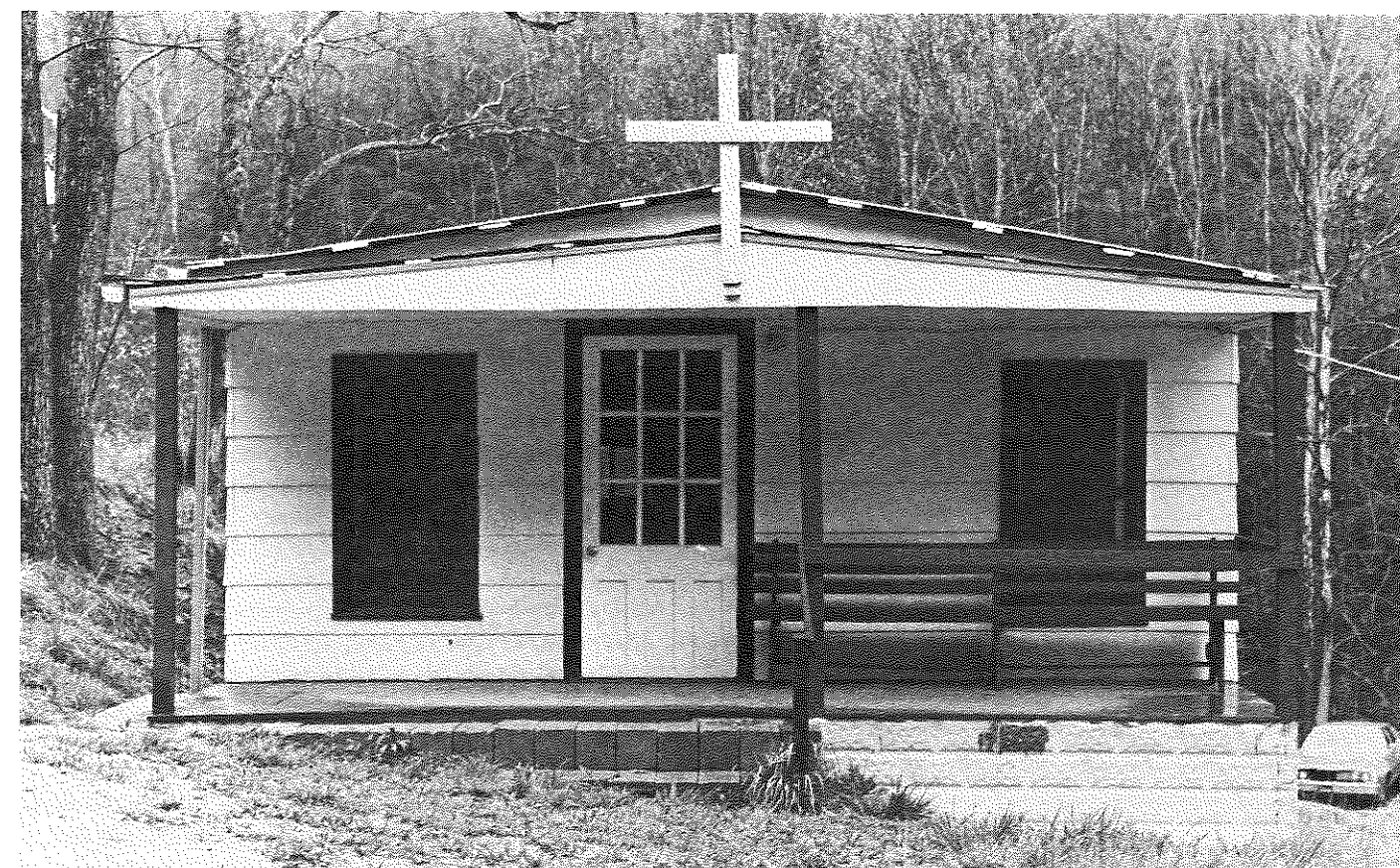
In insisting that we see this Church as an authentic liturgical community I do not simply repeat the truism that any repetition is liturgical insofar as it allows one to anticipate patterns. Indeed, there is such "form." "Good and decent order" is a traditional Calvinistic phrase the preaching brothers often delight in using. By "liturgical" I mean an ordering of their worship which is authoritative and real for this community in this mountain setting. Reconciliation is its gift. It works for them and they respect that tradition. I have often heard a brother say, "We are a peculiar people." I understand this to mean that they know themselves as belonging to a distinctive history, a tradition that has given them a unique identity,

serving them still. It gives a center, a constant in a fallen and transitory world.

The role of geography for this distinctive community cannot be over-emphasized. The severe and narrow mountains and valleys and hollows made—and continue to make—movement in and out of the region difficult. The location is remote from urban centers. This isolation was a factor that enabled Old Regulars a heightened sense of community, preserving their distinctive witness.

The faith of the Old Regular Baptist, then, is not separable from its expression as a worshipping community. I was struck to hear Brother Ivan Amburgy say during a sermon: "Even if someone showed me that what I believed was wrong I would still have to come back to be part of this church. I couldn't do without that." The same preacher, a former country singer, called that *center* a "song," a "sound" he had to hear. I had been trying to give a name to the distinctive preaching chant I was hearing. That helped me a great deal: at once metaphorical and literal the song *is* the worship service. The singing, the preaching, the praying *is* their *sound*, their "new song" to the Lord. It is a song that is located in the oral tradition of the community, passing through the generations. In their song they pray to God.

The Old Regular faith is very strong on doctrine. But that faith is not abstracted doctrine. It sets itself forth, it is embodied weekly in the *liturgia*, the true work of the community. Have you ever heard Pauline theology, in all its intricacy, *sung*?



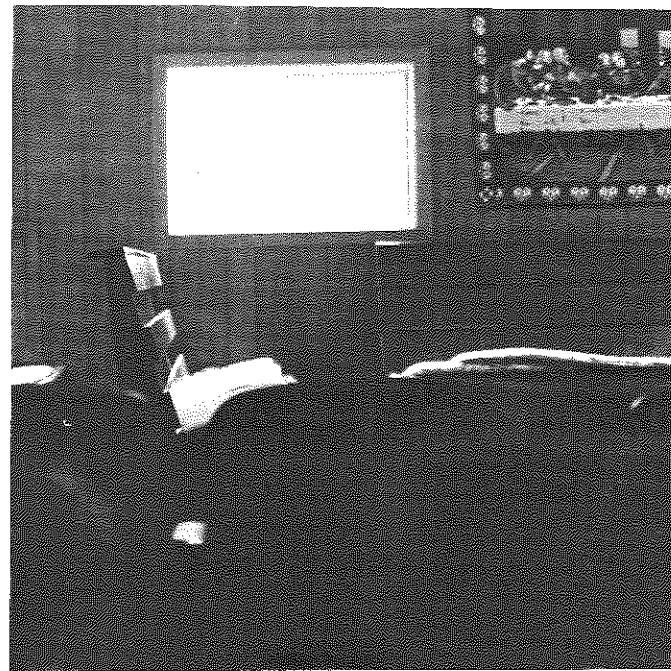
Second: the Old Regulars I know do *not* make their traditions a norm for judging others. It works for them. But, I have been told repeatedly, it need not work for everyone. They do not claim that the work and worship they follow is viable for everyone outside their tradition. It *works* (not in the sense of pragmatism) but *liturgically* for those who are in this place and in this history and geography of the mountains and the rivers. There is a compelling modesty in their self-estimate. Christ died for all. "I don't care what name they got tacked on the church door. They are also my brothers and sisters." They are proud and firm in their distinctive witness to Christ but they do not expect that others duplicate that witness. The refrain I heard for two years: their way is not the only way. There is a modesty in their favorite diminutive they apply to themselves and their churches: "little." "I feel so little this morning." "Little Dove Church." "Little Home Church." At the same time there is a compelling strength and firmness in their own identity.

The Old Regulars don't need *our* approval. And I don't need to pretend to be someone else other than I am to enter into friendship. From a conversation on what it means to be a Christian: "You know the main trouble with Christians today? They want to judge other Christians, to inform them that they are better. That is not in the New Testament." A preaching brother pondered the parable of the wheat and the tares. "Once the weeds spring up among the wheat there are those who are anxious to pull them up on a hurry. But the Master says, 'that is my business. You, you let them alone.'"

The third "key" I used for translating my experiences these past two years is that the Indian Bottom Association is an eschatological community. In the New Testament eschatology directs us to the "end-time." The early church arose as a community filled with the vivid expectation of God's ending of history. But their expectation was not a passive waiting. Nor was it simply a liturgy for re-enacting the past. It was a pre-enacting. How they lived *now* was an apocalypse, an unveiling, a disclosure of what God's *new* future would be. The Church is eschatological when its witness incarnates, here and now, its hope of the future. So by looking at the witness of the church here and now there are glimpses—even now—of God's future for us.

"I CAN ALMOST SEE HEAVEN FROM HERE."

I have understood the New Testament Church in this eschatological, apocalyptic fashion. The Old Regulars taught me more: they added a vividness, an unsettling immediacy, a raw emotional impact to what had been for me an intellectual model of the New Testament community. Examples fill my head. Could I record all of



them! Brother Elwood Cornett drove in from the mountains to be with us during my father's funeral; the welcome these Christians gave relatives visiting from Germany. But the examples all tell me: this is how heaven will be. I couldn't bear for it to be less human, less touching, less loving. This eschaton, this end, is no longer simply a time still ahead of us, a simple "not-yet." As one preacher put it: "We don't have to wait for heaven to enjoy this goodness of God. We can enjoy God in this life too, here in this church." In Pauline terms, the future is a power that can break into the present, shaping it, giving the present a content that is not possible from within our fallen human nature. This *power* is what St. Paul—and the preaching brothers—call "the Spirit." There are many examples. I limit myself to two: handshaking and an incident that occurred during the ritual of footwashing.

The Old Regulars love to shake hands. Hand shaking has a clear liturgical function. Someone is always extending a hand to someone, handshaking is built into the order of worship, preaching, liturgy. During the first half-hour of singing the Moderator of the congregation and his wife and the preaching brothers for that day circulate through the congregation greeting the brothers and sisters. After the opening sermon and before the congregational prayer they again greet each other with handshaking and hugging. Throughout the sermons the preaching brothers will often support each other by reaching for a brother's hand. One might study history and discover the origin of handshaking and hugging was in the age of the circuit riders. Mountain people did not see each other for long periods of time and the

greeting became an important part of the service. Behind the history obviously lies the ancient passing of the peace. So even today, during church and during Association meeting times, the handshake and the hug express "the warmth of feeling and pleasure in your friends." But even more, the handshake has become a witness to something more than present friendship: it points to the form of community in heaven. "I can't wait to get to heaven to shake everyone's hand." "In heaven we will all shake hands again." The preaching brothers have made it clear that in heaven there will be no preaching (grins and smiles). That belongs to this time before the end-time. But notice, there will be handshaking in heaven. A liturgical act of human contact and affection gives us insight into the eschatological community occurring even here and now. (It is more than coincidence, I am convinced, that the passing of the peace, handshaking, hugging, are retained in the most ancient orthodox traditions of contemporary Christian liturgy.)

"I CAN ALMOST SEE HEAVEN FROM HERE."

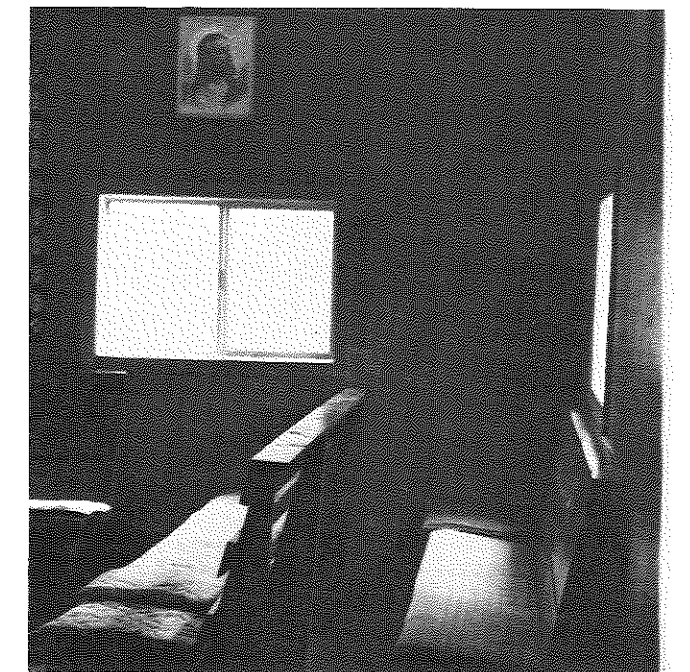
Handshaking expresses the strong egalitarian attitude among the congregation. No one is better than anyone else no matter what status they may enjoy in "the world." "Brother John, you may be a theologian, but that doesn't make you better than anyone else, does it?" "God is no respecter of persons," is often heard in the sermons. Family, mother and father are important in worship as objects of reverence. The reuniting of families is a prominent expression of the hope of the future. But how many times I was reminded that in heaven our biological family members have no precedence. We are all part of *God's family*, brothers and sisters. In heaven there is no favoritism. Therefore, even now, even here in Knott and Letcher counties, the worshipping community itself is one's intimate family. Powerful support comes through physical contact, with a handshake, with a vigorous hug, telling us about a human future that is to come in God's time and yet . . . already here.

"I CAN ALMOST SEE HEAVEN FROM HERE."

The Lord's Supper and Footwashing are a vivid reminder of the eschatological dimension of worship. The Sacrament is offered once a year for each church in the Association, usually mid-summer. Over a two-month period the various churches celebrate the sacrament. After the morning service the congregation moves outside as the sisters and deacons prepare the sacrament.

Someone brings apples or another fruit to pass around. The congregation has been there since 9:30 and it is now past noon. Singing recalls the congregation to re-enter the church. Those members who will partake sit together. Pews are set apart for friends and observers. Before the elements are distributed the members reconcile themselves, shaking hands and embracing. All human barriers and separations are removed. With dignity and solemnity the elders consecrate first the bread and then the fruit of the vine. Christ is now present among them. (I was careful on this point. Is this community theologically sacramental? Since they call themselves Baptists is the communion a memorial rather than a *sacramental* presence? I asked the same question many times: What happens during "sacrament," during the Lord's Supper? Some answers: "Christ is *in* the bread and the wine." "We eat the flesh and drink the blood." "It is a memorial but it's a lot more than that.") Deacons and white-clad sisters aid in the distribution of the bread and wine. There are more tears now than at other times of the worship. My youngest son Carl did not understand the tears; he was uncomfortable. In a conversation afterwards Elder Manus Ison explained that tears can also come from happiness. Tears are the response to the incredible, powerful intimacy of a community which becomes incarnate among the people as foot washing begins.

I cannot easily articulate my response to the sacrament of foot-washing. Even as an observer I was drawn into it. I must confess it was one of the strongest emotions that has ever shaken me. John 13:1-20 is read and enters time. Here water, earth, and heaven are ecstatically united in the simplest, profoundest, intimate acts of human



humility I have ever witnessed. (I have a friend of thirty years who is a gad-fly nipping the hind-quarters of the Church as horse. A trained theologian and lover of Scripture, he has forced this question on many, particularly on those of us from "sacramental" churches: "why, why not foot washing as a sacrament in sacramental churches? Foot washing is *in* the text." If the Church's criterion for sacrament is direct institution by Christ, then, indeed: why not?)

Delmar always sits in the front row. His body is crippled. He sits on the corner by the aisle, in position to leave early. His face is angular, his grey hair crew cut. His frame is small, twisted. On this Sunday he was set aside by an act of grace. All of us are maimed in one way or another. On this Sunday God showed us he uses the maimed as his witnesses.

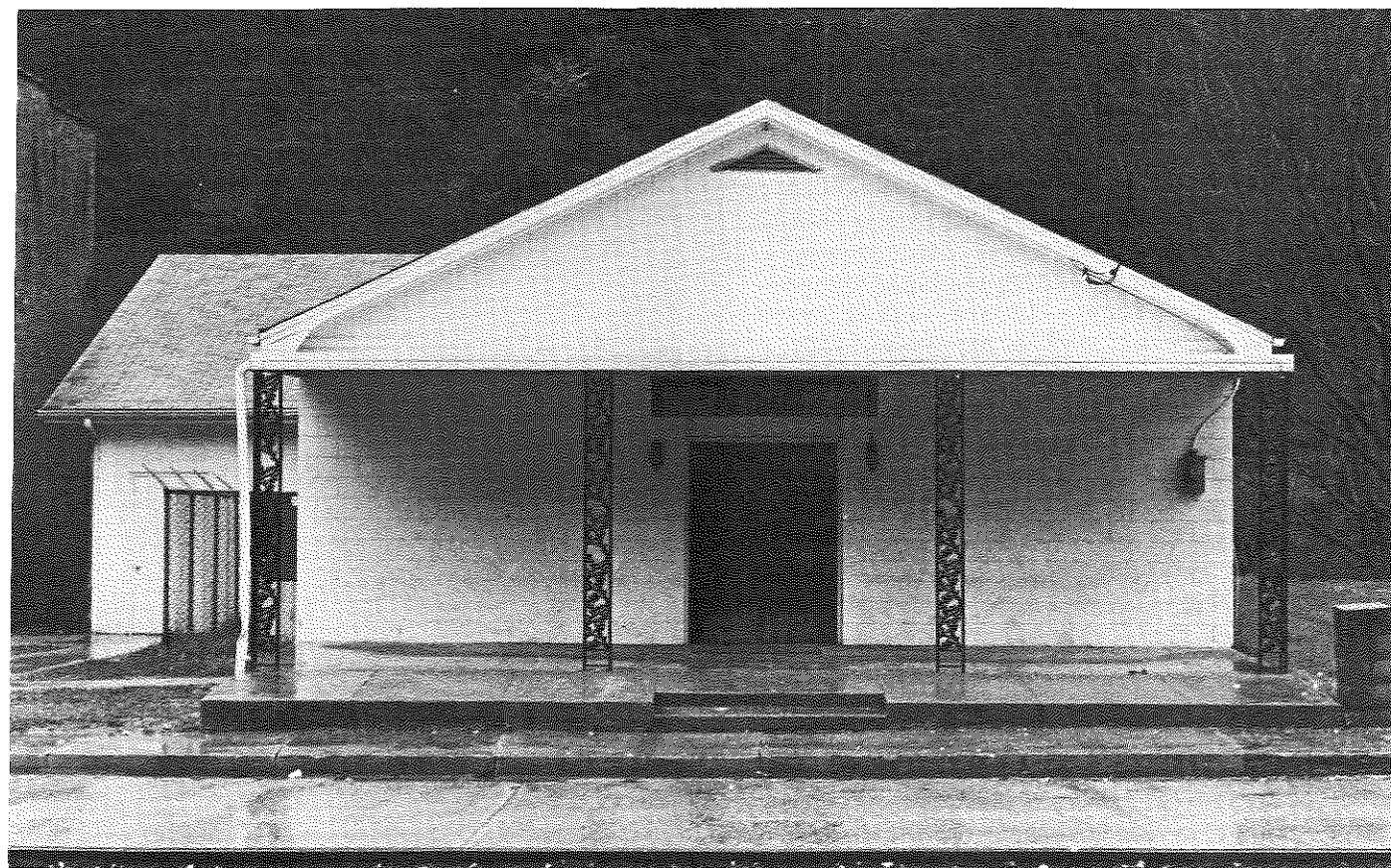
Elder I.D. Back initiated the sacrament, the washing of feet. Still singing his sermon-prayer he tied the white towel around his waist and picked up the basin. He singled Delmar out in the front row aisle seat. "I'm going to wash your feet, Honey." And as he came off the "stand" and knelt before Delmar he continued his song as a sermon-prayer-hymn directly to Delmar: "God is going to clean you up and dress you in a new body, Honey."

Old Regular Baptists do not avoid the realities of death and tragic pain. The sermon song did not mince the reality of the twisted body, hands, and feet. But I.D. Back also sang of the resurrection and the new body God would give: a glorious body, a transfigured body. Delmar reached out and hugged I.D.'s neck. They wrapped their arms around each other. I could see from the shaking shoulders that Delmar was crying. I.D. kept on singing. Delmar wanted to wash I.D.'s feet but the twisted hands wouldn't work. A brother came, knelt between them and told Delmar he would help him wash the feet. The three were kneeling together, singing, crying, holding each other.

There is a song the Old Regulars love to sing, called, "I can almost see heaven from here." I could.

Delmar left to get ahead of the crowd. He dragged his body around and down the aisle. I saw his face. In that face, on that Sunday, I believe I saw a glimpse of the resurrection of the body.

The next Sunday we were at a baptism surrounded by the mountains, the river, the sky, the land. Delmar was with us at the edge of the river bank. I.D. Back, the liturgist, saw him and sang again about Delmar's witness the previous Sunday. I know now what a witness is. □



NARCISSISM IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

Jim Gardner

Describing our present technological milieu, Jacques Ellul, in *The Technological Society*, provides a rationale for this study:

Precisely what is modified in man by this violent upheaval of every element of his environment? We do not know. But we do know that violent modifications have taken place, and we have a foreboding of them in the development of neuroses and in the new behavior with which contemporary literature acquaints us (p. 331).

With the development of technology comes a deterioration of traditional systems of faith and the rise of narcissism as the dominant personality type. Selected literature by William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and John Updike give insight into day's "Culture of narcissism." Integrating the novels with studies by Ellul, Sigmund Freud, Christopher Lasch, and Philip Rieff provides the focus for this discussion.

IN SEARCH OF A DEFINITION

A psychological definition of narcissism can be found in Freud's essays which influence current discussions by Lasch, Rieff, and others. Freud argued that narcissism is the universal original condition in the infant, preceding the development of object-love (or "object-libido": sexual energy). According to Freud, "we say that a human being has originally two sexual objects—himself and the woman who nurses him—and in doing so we are postulating a primary narcissism in everyone, which may in some cases manifest itself in a dominating fashion in his object-choice." ("On Narcissism: An Introduction," *Standard Edition*, p. 88). For the libido, the development of object-love follows this primordial narcissism. It may proceed two ways: the narcissistic type or the anaclitic type. In the narcissistic type, the person may choose to love himself (his own ego) or someone who closely resembles himself or what he would like to be. The anaclitic type loves the mother who feeds him, the man who protects him, or a

substitute who takes their place. ("On Narcissism," p. 90). The normal development of object-love (the anaclitic or "attachment" type) does not negate the primary narcissism, however. For example, complete object-love "displays the marked sexual overvaluation which is doubtless derived from the child's original narcissism and thus corresponds to a transference of that narcissism to the sexual object" ("On Narcissism," p. 88). This type of object-love is characteristic in the male. In the female, the arrival of puberty brings about a resurgence of the original primary narcissism and, consequently, the need to be loved rather than to love. This utilization of the libido compromises the development or sustenance of external object-love. When the libido is withdrawn from the external world and is directed toward the ego, the resulting state is narcissism.

Although Freud perceived primary narcissism as being universal, the focal point of his study was derived from his analysis of narcissistic neuroses (dementia praecox) and related disorders, such as hysteria, hypochondria, and paranoia. Studying such cases, Freud could postulate about the characteristics of narcissism, and thereby draw conclusions. For example, seeing that, in cases of organic disease and hypochondria, the patient "gives up his interest in the things of the external world, in so far as they do not concern his suffering," Freud concluded that "the sick man withdraws his libidinal cathexes back upon his own ego, and sends them out again when he recovers" ("On Narcissism," p. 82).

Such observations are crucial for the present study. Recently, however, a new type of patient has dominated clinical literature—the borderline patient who represents secondary or pathological narcissism rather than the primary type. Specifically, secondary narcissism is "the incorporation of grandiose object images as a defense against anxiety and guilt," often in response to a frustrated object-love (*The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 36). Christopher Lasch describes the new patient:

These patients . . . tend to cultivate a protective shallowness in emotional relations. They lack the capacity to mourn, because the intensity of their age against lost love objects, in particular against their parents, prevents their reliving happy experiences or treasuring them in memory. Sexually promiscuous rather than repressed, they nevertheless find it difficult to "elaborate the sexual

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impulse" or to approach sex in the spirit of play. They avoid close involvements, which might release intense feelings of rage. . . . Often these patients suffer from hypochondria and complain of a sense of inner emptiness. At the same time they entertain fantasies of omnipotence and a strong belief in their right to exploit others and be gratified. (*The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 37)

Such characteristics of psychological patients are alarmingly common in mainstream culture, prompting Lasch to coin "the culture of narcissism."

Using different perspectives to arrive at analogous theories, Lasch, in *The Culture of Narcissism* and Philip Rieff, in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, analyze cultural change and its influence on personality in the twentieth century. Lasch emphasizes sociological and historical elements in his analysis of the rise of a dominant personality type that resembles the character disorder of psychological studies. The prevalence of this personality type, he explains, stems from changes in today's society and culture—"from bureaucracy, the proliferation of images, therapeutic ideologies, the rationalization of the inner life, the cult of consumption, and . . . from changes in family life and from changing patterns of socialization." (*The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 32.) Rieff's study is primarily psychological, concentrating on Freud and his "disciples" who constructed theories about man's need for faith. Describing how Christianity has been replaced by a therapeutic outlook as the primary influence on modern man's faith, Rieff perceives a personality type that closely resembles the one described by Lasch. Their understanding of the causes and implications of the new personality differ.

According to Rieff, "culture is another name for a design of motives directing the self outward, toward those communal purposes in which alone the self can be realized and satisfied" (*The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, p. 4). Culture communicates ideals which serve as bases of agreement between individuals, ideals that distinguish right and wrong conduct. Culture holds systems of moral demands that are so deeply ingrained in the personality of individuals that they are commonly understood and accepted. From this, Rieff labels the controlling agent of culture a "censor," or "faith," which binds individuals to the moral demand system. "Faith is the compulsive dynamic of culture, channeling obedience to, trust in, and dependence upon authority." (*The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, p. 12). With a censor structure built into culture, individuals submit to the moral demand system of that culture.

Aware of the relationship between culture and personality, Rieff analyzes the communal history of Western civilization. Western culture was long dominated by Christianity. "Spiritualizers" were the main influence

upon the moral demand system. That culture represented what Rieff calls a "positive community," i.e., a community in which participation provided a form of salvation for the individual. An ascetic personality was the primary type, characterized by faith in a system of "thou shalt not's." With the emergence of science in the eighteenth century, however, the proliferation of "spiritualizers" as manipulators of cultural censorship was jeopardized. Rieff cites the French Revolution as the point when the deconversion of Christian culture began.

Post-religious culture represents a change in the relationship between personality and culture. Psychologicalizers have replaced "spiritualizers" as the dominant censors; the symbolic of control has been replaced by one of release. In response to the absent God, the concept of a positive community has been overtaken by a counter-faith, a "culture of the indifferent." Thus, the ascetic personality is superseded by what Rieff calls the "therapeutic."

In this post-religious culture Freud developed his system of psychoanalysis. Unlike his successors, Freud did not attempt to envision or create a new culture, nor did he ask the religious question of salvation. Instead, he developed an analytic attitude, thinking that modern man could better cope thus with the emptiness and loneliness produced by culture. Freud imagined an ideal patient whose ego could "fight more capably for itself in the subtle and universal war against all." (*The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, p. 33). Despite Freud's aversion to proposing a new morality and the intended moral neutrality of therapy, the analytic attitude became similar to the religious in its relationship to culture: Rieff: "Faith, however, even one that accents the remission of control, is never neutral. The analytic attitude is an alternative to all religious ones" (*The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, p. 36).

What kind of personality emerged from the analytic attitude? An anti-ascetic character who no longer seeks salvation or perfection through a communal end but seeks "self-fulfillment." In place of God is self-fulfillment; in place of preachers are therapists. Ascetic deprivation has been replaced by therapeutic appetite. No longer accepting a traditional hierarchy of good and evil or superior and inferior, today's psychological individual is free to pursue his own well-being. "That a sense of well-being has become the end, rather than a by-product of striving after some superior communal end, announces a fundamental change of focus in the entire cast of our culture" (*The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, p. 261).

The psychological or therapeutically-inclined individual described by Rieff corresponds to the narcissistic personality perceived by Lasch. Lasch, however, is more distressed by the new individual. Using recent clinical studies to augment Freud's theories on primary narcissism, Lasch finds symptoms of secondary narcissism repeatedly: "dependence on the vicarious warmth provided by others combined with a fear of dependence, a sense of inner emptiness, boundless repressed rage, and unsatisfied oral cravings." Lasch connects this personality type with patterns of contemporary culture, such as "the intense fear of old age and death, altered sense of time, fascination with celebrity, fear of competition, decline of the play spirit, deteriorating relations between men and women." (*The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 33). Far from obtaining any sense of well-being, the narcissist lives "in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire" (*The Culture of Narcissism*, p. xvi).

In determining the causes of narcissism of our culture, Lasch looks to political and social changes: the development of capitalism and the work ethic, the rise of technics, the disintegration of the family, the merger of politics and spectacle, the degradation of sport, the failure of mass education, and the socialization of reproduction have profoundly affected the nature of modern culture and personality. The present culture is characterized by bureaucracy and violence, and these promote the narcissistic personality. "Narcissism appears realistically to represent the best way of coping with the tensions and anxieties of modern life, and the prevailing social conditions therefore tend to bring out narcissistic traits that are present, in varying degrees, in everyone" (*The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 50).

Rieff also sees the present culture as impoverished. Aware that the traditional "censors" (the controlling agents of culture, in Rieff's terminology) have become blurred if not entirely obsolete, Rieff, unlike Freud, toys with the idea of a new culture. In a tone frightening if viewed from a traditional standpoint, he states, "If the religious imagination is purblind. . . then we will have to make our way to a more pleasant city, using our secular vision of comforts that render all salvations obsolete" (*The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, p. 12). Rieff argues that morality loses its meaning with a therapeutic outlook, but he insists that the next culture will require the therapeutic character-type. By necessity, the next moral demand system will be morally neutral: "Not trained in a symbolic of obedience. . . Western man could be free at last from an authority depending upon his sense of sin." (*The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, p. 245).

This direction toward moral neutrality frightens Lasch. Seeing the therapeutic outlook as part of a "new paternalism" in which ties of personal dependence have been revived under socialization, Lasch writes: "Therapeutic modes of thought and practice exempt their object, the patient, from critical judgment and relieve him of moral responsibility. . . therapeutic morality encourages a permanent suspension of the moral sense" (*The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 230). Therapy requires the patient to be unable to manage his own life—thus the proliferation of specialists and counselors, the popularity of handbooks on child-rearing, sex, and marriage.

Lasch's horror of the present culture, however, does not smother his hope for a better society. Unlike Rieff, Lasch believes that certain traditional values, such as the work ethic and family life, may have a place in the next culture. However, both Lasch and Rieff are more concerned with analyzing the present culture than with predicting a new one. Both writers perceive a dying culture in which the dominant personality type is unaffected by Christianity. The shift in the twentieth century of the moral-demand system has resulted in the dominance of narcissism and therapy.

Despite the work of Lasch and Rieff concerning the relationship between personality and culture in the twentieth century, another phenomenon must be considered: technology. Lasch mentions "the rise of technics" as contributing to the narcissistic culture, but he goes no further. Both he and Rieff underestimate the technological system's influence on man's personality. In *The Technological Society* (1954) and *The Technological System* (1977), Jacques Ellul convincingly describes the autonomous, total, and universal nature of today's technological milieu, which is approaching its completion not as a society but as a system. Pervading every aspect of human life, the technological system has today become a determining factor. It is the canvas on which narcissism and therapy appear, an underlying cause for the upheaval in personality and culture. Although Ellul's study is sociological rather than psychological, it sharpens Lasch and Rieff's arguments concerning the new personality.

Ellul studies technology as a system—not a series of individual machines, but an integrated ensemble of means whose aim is efficiency and power. Machines are included in the system, but they are joined by economic, political, and human techniques (psychological and pedagogical techniques, propaganda, advertising, sport,

medicine, amusement). The human techniques are responsible for adapting man to the system: "Man is not adapted to a world of steel; technique adapts him to it" (*The Technological Society*, p. 6).

Man's involuntary and inevitable adaptation to the technological system causes the psychological changes discussed by Lasch and Rieff. Ellul perceives the danger of the techniques that adapt man: "I have no doubt that it makes men better balanced and 'happier.' And there is the danger. It makes men happy in a milieu which normally would have made them unhappy if they had not been worked on, molded, and formed for just that milieu" (*The Technological Society*, p. 348).

Corresponding with this adaptation is the end of freedom. Leisure supplies an escape hatch which gives the illusion of freedom. And the system allows deviations in behavior, such as the hippies' long hair and blue jeans. In reality, however, such protests are superficial, because they in no way affect the system. Any choice is determined and directed by technology.

Neither man nor group can decide to follow any road that is not technological. Man is placed before this very simple dilemma: On the one hand, he can decide to safeguard his freedom of choice, he can go on using the traditional or personal, moral or empirical means, and he then has to compete with a power against which he has no effective defense. His resources are useless, they will be plowed under or eliminated, and he will be vanquished. On the other hand, he can decide to accept the technological necessity: he will then be the winner, but he will submit irremediably to technological enslavement. Hence, there is absolutely no free choice. (*The Technological System*, pp. 250-251).

Further, Ellul argues that technology has become autonomous. It has, therefore, passed the stage of being morally neutral: "Technology, judging itself, is now liberated from what was once the main check on human action: beliefs (sacred, spiritual, religious) and ethics. . . It no longer has to fear any limitation whatsoever because technology exists beyond good and evil." It is self-legitimizing and "is turning into a judge of morality":

Modern man takes for granted that anything scientific is legitimate, and, in consequence, anything technological. Today we can no longer merely say: "Technology is a fact, we have to accept it as such, we cannot go against it." This is a serious position which reserves the possibility of judgment. But such an attitude is looked upon as pessimistic, antitechnological, and retrograde. Indeed, we must enter the technological system by acknowledging that everything occurring within it is legitimate per se. There is no exterior reference. There is no question about truth. . . or the question about good, or the question about finalities. None of these things can be discussed. The instant something is technological, it is legitimate, and any challenge is suspect. Technology has even become a power of legitimation. . . This is very remarkable, for hitherto, man has always tried to refer his actions to a superior value, which both judged and underpinned his actions, his enterprises. But this situation is vanishing for

the sake of technology. Man in our society both discerns this autonomy demanded by the system (which can progress only if autonomous) and grants this system autonomy by accepting it as legitimate in itself. This autonomy is obviously not the outcome of a struggle between two personified divinities, Morality and Technology! It is man, who, becoming a true believer in, and loyal supporter of, technology, views it as a supreme object. For it must be supreme if it bears its legitimacy in itself and needs nothing to justify it! (*The Technological System*, pp. 148-49).

This is certainly not the morally neutral culture Rieff envisions. Man is freed from sin, perhaps, but his "more pleasant city" is a technological one that enslaves him in its own morality. Man is not indifferent to technology, but a loyal supporter.

Ellul realizes that, despite human techniques which adapt man to the system, man remains unhappy. Man "feels" he lives in a "splintered, incoherent" society. He "feels" a "growing sense of individual solitude in a world of universalized communications." In the technological environment, "man is dissatisfied for being man." Manipulated by a power that discards anything irrational, we are left emotionally jaded by technology (*The Technological Society*, pp. 38-45).

This dissatisfaction described by Ellul corresponds with the emptiness and vague sense of rage in the narcissistic and therapeutic types perceived by Lasch and Rieff. Utilizing the studies of Ellul, Lasch, and Rieff, therefore, a definition of narcissism can be reached: In a dying culture in which traditional morals have eroded and faded, traditional asceticism has been replaced by a therapeutic outlook; the resulting dominant personality type is narcissism. Narcissism is modern man's inward turn, a result of "liberation" from religious beliefs and simultaneous adaptation to the technological system.

I have used broad strokes in discussing the studies of Freud, Lasch, Rieff and Ellul, but these ideas provide a basis for analyzing selected literature. Although such a perspective could prove enlightening, I have not attempted to study the characters in terms of their adaptation to the technological system, but refer mainly to Lasch and Rieff. The narcissistic personality as found in the literary characters can be viewed in relation to the decay of the traditional moral-demand system (Rieff's "censors") and the resulting rise of the therapeutic. Two obvious possibilities arise: the character still pressured by the traditional censors who seeks to escape or cope with them; or the character indifferent to the old moral demand system.

THE WEIGHT OF THE CENSORS

Faulkner's *The Sound And The Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* provide a starting point. *The Sound And The Fury* may or may not reflect the downfall of the South. It does, however, describe the fall from honor of the Compsons, a family which inherits the traditional moral-demand system only to watch it decay during their lifetime. The Compsons' ancestors included a general and a state governor. The "Compson place" was once the governor's mansion. Yet the family was "doomed," and the old governor "was the last Compson who would not fail at everything he touched save longevity or suicide" (*The Sound And The Fury*, p. 408). So the last generation of Compsons are tragic characters: the childlike Benjy, a 33-year-old idiot; his older brother Quentin, who commits suicide after a year at Harvard; their brother Jason, the last "sane" Compson, a ruthless, selfish stoic; their sister Candice (Caddy), a promiscuous but unselfish woman whose illegitimate daughter (named Quentin!) is under the custody of Jason; their father, a satiric alcoholic; and their mother, a hypochondriac. Then, the black servants of the household, the most important being Dilsey, a loving elderly woman who provides the only tenderness in the disintegrating household. The four sections of the book occur between June 1910 and Easter 1928. The first three sections are seen from the viewpoint of Benjy, Quentin, and Jason, and the fourth focuses on Dilsey and an Easter service at the black church, a scene which takes place in the midst of "the sound and the fury" of the Compsons' lamentable events.

Thomas Merton (in "Time and Unburdening and the Recollection of the Lamb: The Easter Service in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*") caught Faulkner's concern: each of the characters has a different concept of time. Benjy, the idiot, has no concept of time as chronology—everything past and future is in the present time. Quentin, however, is haunted by chronology; he is aware of every ticking of the clock but cannot escape it. Jason's perception of time is our usual business time which, Merton points out, is also the most destructive. In contrast to these is Dilsey's idea of time. Dilsey's is a Christian understanding: "I've seen de first en de last. . . I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin" (*The Sound And The Fury*, p. 371). Each of the characters (less Benjy) lives by a time that corresponds to their response to the traditional moral-demand system.

A closer look at Quentin's attitude toward time reveals an inner conflict caused by the pressures of traditional censors and his attempt to cope with them, a conflict resulting in desperation and characterized by

self-absorption. In the first of Quentin's section, he wakes ("then I was in time again," *The Sound And The Fury*, p. 93), goes to the dresser, and smashes his watch, which nevertheless keeps ticking. Later that morning, he takes the watch to a jeweler's shop and asks if any of the clocks on the wall are correct. When the jeweler tells him the time, Quentin says, "Don't tell me, please sir. Just tell me if any of them are right" (*The Sound And The Fury*, p. 103). As he walks around Cambridge, the town of Harvard University, he is constantly aware of both the ticking of the broken watch in his pocket and the striking of clocks. He is a prisoner of time; he cannot escape the strain of his clock-awareness. Time haunts Quentin until his suicide. (Faulkner once said "man is never time's slave." Quentin's obsession must therefore be emphasized as a weakness.)

Faulkner's character sketch in his 1946 appendix for the book describes other reasons for Quentin's inner turmoil:

QUENTIN III. Who loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honor precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead as a miniature replica of all the whole vast globy earth may be poised on the nose of a trained seal. Who loved not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian concept of its eternal punishment: he, not God, could by that means cast himself and his sister both into hell, where he could guard her forever and keep her forever intact amid the eternal fires. But who loved death above all, who loved only death, loved and lived in a deliberate and almost perverted anticipation of death as a lover loves and deliberately refrains from the waiting willing friendly tender incredible body of his beloved, until he can no longer bear not the refraining but the restraint and so flings, hurls himself, relinquishing, drowning. Committed suicide in Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 1910, two months after his sister's wedding, waiting first to complete the current academic year and so get the full value of his paid-in-advance tuition, not because he had his old Culloden and Carolina and Kentucky grandfathers in him but because the remaining piece of the old Compson mile which had been sold to pay for his sister's wedding and his year at Harvard had been the one thing, excepting that same sister and the sign of an open fire, which his youngest brother, born an idiot, had loved. (pp. 411-412)

Quentin's stream-of-consciousness section is filled with anxious thoughts about virginity, time, responsibility, incest, and death, and includes frequent references to his father's philosophical and moral aphorisms. "He said it was men invented virginity not women. Father said its like death: only a state in which the others are left and I said, But to believe it doesn't matter and he said, That's what's so sad about anything: not only virginity, and I said, Why couldn't it have been me and not her who is unvirgin and he said, That's why that's sad too; nothing is even worth the changing of it" (p. 96). Quentin's father recognizes the degradation of the South and responds to it cynically. Quentin, however, is more aware than his father of the implications of the disintegration of mores

and becomes obsessed with the censors. Quentin is absorbed by guilt. He assumes blame for Caddy's loss of virginity, so he has a desire to confess to his father about committing incest (the phrase "Father I have committed" occurs repeatedly in his thoughts). He also feels guilt because Benjy's pasture was sold so that he could attend Harvard. His concept of time is dominated by events of his past, especially Caddy's sexual maturation and his fight with her lover. Quentin is so self-absorbed with such thoughts that he starts a fight with a fellow in Cambridge while thinking about Caddy. Later he does not remember starting the fight. His self-absorption causes him to commit suicide. Death becomes the only escape from the guilt and despair caused by his exaggerated sense of honor and duty.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin's character is further revealed. Relating the story of Thomas Sutpen as told him by his father and as learned through Rosa Coldfield and Henry Sutpen, Quentin displays ties with the past which pressure his conscience. The story of Sutpen becomes Quentin's own, not as a memory but as a reality in Quentin's mind. The guilt of Henry's lust for Judith is shared by Quentin. The scene of Henry and Charles Bon on horseback is discussed by Quentin and Shreve seventy years later, but the four characters are united in time (or out of time but in thought). Faulkner writes, "the two, four, now two again" (*Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 346) to reveal the involvement of Quentin and Shreve (Quentin's roommate at Harvard) through memory in the actual events. Recalling his father's narration of the Sutpen story, Quentin thinks, "Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us" (p. 262). The story is intriguing to Shreve, but it is a burden on Quentin. Quentin declares, "I am older at twenty than a lot of people who have died" (p. 377).

Cleanth Brooks observes that Quentin and Shreve relate differently to the traditional censors. Shreve is "basically rational, skeptical, without any special concern for history, and pretty well emancipated from the ties of family, race, or section." In contrast, Quentin is dominated by his Southern past:

What is it that Quentin as a Southerner has that Shreve does not have? It is a sense of the presence of the past, and with it, and through it, a personal access to a tragic vision. For the South has experienced defeat and guilt, and has an ingrained sense of the stubbornness of human error and of the complexity of history. (*Yoknapatawpha County*, pp. 313-14)

The final scene in *Absalom* conveys Quentin's obsession. Shreve asks, "Why do you hate the South?"

"I don't hate it," Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; "I don't hate it," he said. *I don't hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; *I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!* (*Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 378).

Unable to view his Southern past and the disintegration of his family with the unemotional detachment of Shreve, Quentin instead turns inward toward an intense preoccupation with the past.

Cleanth Brooks' analysis connects the narcissism of Quentin's character to Lasch's study. Brooks asserts that Quentin's obsession with the past impedes any forward vision. Looking backward, Quentin turns his back on the future. He cannot handle the changes the present and future must bring. His inability of looking into the future while simultaneously coping with the past causes his weakness concerning time and results in his inward turn and eventual suicide. Lasch's subtitle to *The Culture of Narcissism* is "American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations." Lasch notes that people today are not concerned with the past and do not regard the future in terms of succeeding generations. There is no sense of continuity. Quentin is an exaggeration of this attitude. Whereas people in a culture of narcissism have no concept of the past, Quentin is dominated by it. Concerning the future, however, he coincides with today's narcissist's inability to look forward. The concept of time, which Faulkner explores so skillfully, is changed from previous times in today's culture of narcissism.

Although Quentin is the prime example of narcissism in *The Sound And The Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, other characters display narcissistic traits. In *The Sound And The Fury*, Quentin's mother is a hypochondriac. Freud believed that sick people concentrate on themselves and return their interest to the external world when they recover. Mrs. Compson is always sick and only concerned with herself, worrying about getting medicine or being waited on by Dilsey. The greedy Jason is also entirely self-centered, but for different reasons. He is a short-tempered liar who thinks that no one has problems as bad as his. He finds a cruel amusement in his family's disintegration. He is not concerned with the loss of traditional morals—he proudly claims, "I'm glad I haven't got the sort of conscience I've got to nurse like a sick puppy all the time" (*The Sound And The Fury*, p. 284). Not surprisingly, Jason thinks "nothing whatever of God." Not allowing himself to be influenced by the past or by God, he is convinced he is totally in control of his destiny. Similarly, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Thomas Sutpen is driven by a self-conceived "design." When his plan fails, he is convinced that he made a mistake at some point. Like the narrator of the Merle Haggard song which proclaims, "I must have done something bad sometime in my life/ And I've paid for it time and again," Sutpen

attributes his problems to an early mistake. But Sutpen is assured of having done something *wrong* rather than something *bad*; there is no question of paying for a sin, only a mistake. Jason possesses a meaner character than Sutpen but both view the world similarly: they don't look back (the past), they don't look up (God), and when they look forward, the racehorse-like blinders of a willful rationality directs their vision.

The dissolution of the Compson family is portrayed by the remaining members who live in the Compson place at the end of *The Sound And The Fury*: Jason, Benjy, the mother, and Caddy's daughter Quentin. They are all self-absorbed, so the family unit is scarcely more than a polarized group of selfish individuals (excluding Benjy). This is contrasted by the black servant family, headed by Dilsey. Thomas Merton calls Dilsey a saint. She provides an unselfish love and enduring calmness to contradict the absurd actions of Jason, the mother and the young Quentin. Dilsey's faith is in God and therefore her identity is unquestionable in her own mind. As one of God's creatures, her focus is not on herself but on others and on God. The Compsons are too self-absorbed to consider faith in God. They are in despair with no hope of renewal. But Dilsey maintains faith and hope in the midst of "the sound and the fury."

A similar reflection on marriage and middle-class life occurs in Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*. Harry and Charlotte, the lovers in the story, reject middle-class values to pursue ideal love. When Harry quits medical school and Charlotte abandons her husband and children, the pair leave New Orleans to escape society and everyday existence. Early in their relationship, Charlotte describes their intentions:

Listen: it's got to be all honeymoon, always. Forever and ever, until one of us dies. It can't be anything else. Either heaven, or hell: no comfortable safe peaceful purgatory between for you and me to wait in until good behavior or forbearance or shame or repentance overtakes us. (*The Wild Palms*, p. 53)

Like Tristan and Iseult's, Harry and Charlotte's love can exist only in opposition to society, so they embark on a desperate flight. Whenever their relationship approaches what Harry calls "respectability," or the bourgeois married lifestyle, they pack up and go elsewhere. Harry and Charlotte's attitude toward marriage is common in a culture of narcissism. Lasch states that people increasingly view marriage as "the ultimate trap, the ultimate routine in a routinized society, the ultimate expression of the banality that pervades and suffocates modern life." (*The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 197)

Although Harry and Charlotte have substantial grounds for rejecting the middle-class lifestyle, their response (to withdraw from society altogether) is

characterized by narcissism and leads to destruction. Their search for love does not produce happiness; they incessantly *talk* to verify their love. Needing to fill their inner emptiness, Harry and Charlotte use talking as therapy. This is contrasted brilliantly by Faulkner in the counterpoint story, "Old Man," presented in alternate chapters to *Wild Palms*. The tall convict and pregnant woman caught in the Mississippi River flood of 1927 provide an antithesis to the therapeutic. They do not talk, talk, talk about a problem—they simply *live*. Against all odds, they survive the monstrous flood, and the pregnant woman bears her child atop an Indian mound. In counterpoint to this birth, Charlotte convinces Harry to attempt an abortion on her. She refuses to have a child because "they hurt too much." Demanding that the focus of attention be herself, Charlotte is not willing to give her love and care to a child. Harry bungles the abortion, and Charlotte dies soon after, refusing medical attention. Thus, in *The Wild Palms*, Faulkner shrewdly anticipates the abortion issue, which cannot be considered apart from its relation to narcissism. The attitude that if human life is an obstacle to individual goals then it can be obliterated is frighteningly narcissistic. (Abortion must also be seen in terms of technology. Abortion is a technique, and, as Ellul notes, allows the woman to negate the consequences of her actions. It is an irresponsible rather than a liberating act.)

The Wild Palms, therefore, is the story of two lovers typical of the modern psychological type. Harry and Charlotte withdraw from society into themselves, and the result is destruction rather than renewal. Thomas Merton's description of the pair is poignant:

They are typical, modern people who don't believe in anything, are convinced that death is the end of it, we live our lives since that's all there is. This is what people today think! I want to get something out of life before it's too late! ("Faulkner Meditations: The Wild Palms," *Katallagete*, Summer, 1975, pp. 3-14)

Merton interprets Faulkner as saying in *The Wild Palms* that "the man-and-woman relationship—which is to say, what it is to be *human*—can never be a completely symbiotic thing. When two people become wholly submerged in each other, it is destruction, not love." (p. 14). Today, we find a culture of Harry-and-Charlottes, a culture of narcissism, seen in counterpoint to the tall convict and the woman, cast not by their narcissism, but by the floodwaters of "Old Man" (the Mississippi River).

Hazel Motes, protagonist in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* is a monomaniac—his obsession is to reject Jesus Christ. Hazel ultimately fails in his delusion of superiority, but only after his monomania causes destructive aggression in narcissistic fashion.

Hazel's monomania stems from his fundamentalist origins. His stern mother causes strong feelings of guilt when she harshly condemns his loss of sexual innocence (he sneaked into a "SINsational" carnival tent). The source of guilt is the preaching of his grandfather. Hazel's notion that the "way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin" (*Wise Blood*, p. 22) is an attempt to reject his grandfather's sin-oriented theology. Later, his army buddies convince him of the possibility of nothingness, which he embraces as a revenge against that "wild ragged [Christ] figure" in the back of his mind. Enraged by the accusation of sin by a blind street-preacher, Hazel starts to preach his own "truth" and forms the Church Without Christ,

where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that way. . . It's the church that the blood of Jesus don't foul with redemption. . . there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn't the first two. Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar (*Wise Blood*, p. 105).

This monomania pervades Hazel's life, seen in his hostile relationships with other people. In the train scene that opens the book, Hazel rudely says to a talkative lady across from him, "I reckon you think you been redeemed" (p. 10). He remains virtually silent except for such remarks. In the diner, he challenges another lady: "If you've been redeemed, I wouldn't want to be" (p. 16). Later, when a truck driver asks him to move his car out of the middle of the road, Hazel replies, "There's no person a whoremonger who wasn't something worse first. That's not the sin, nor blasphemy. The sin came before them" (p. 76). Even when he preaches on the street, his sermons are consumed by his obsessions so that he is really talking only to himself.

Hazel Motes' sermons fail because of his inner struggle and the resulting aggression of his narcissism. Flannery O'Connor stated that "Haze knows what the choice is. . . either throw away everything and follow Him or enjoy yourself by doing some meanness to somebody, and in the end there's no real pleasure in life, not even in meanness." (*The Habit of Being*, p. 350). Like Thomas Sutpen, Jason Compson, and the Misfit of O'Connor's short story "A Good Man is Hard To Find," Hazel "don't want no hep," because he is determined to control his own existence. For a time, Hazel follows the meanness, the narcissistic outward expression of his inner aggression. David Eggenwiller observes that Hazel is battling an inner desire for death in Christ, and turns this self-destructing aggression outward toward other objects. This is displayed in his relationships with other people and finally when he runs over his double, Solace Layfield (who impersonates Hazel's preaching to make money), with his car. "In murdering his double, he becomes both aggressor and victim, which in fact has been his dual role throughout." (*The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 111). In the end, however, Hazel accepts

his guilt and sin and chooses redemption rather than nihilism.

Hazel's change at the end of the story is puzzling. Irvin Malin contends that we are not prepared for Haze's transformation "unless we take it ironically as another act of grotesque narcissism" ("Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque," *The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 112). And Frederick Hoffman believes that "Motes' reversal is still self-centered, as the rebellion had originally been." ("Search for Redemption," *The Added Dimension*, p. 40). Is Hazel still a narcissist even after his conversion? After he blinds himself, his landlady takes interest in him. "To her, the blind man had the look of seeing something . . . his face had a peculiar pushing look, as if it were going forward with something it could just distinguish in the distance" (*Wise Blood*, p. 214). The simple-minded Mrs. Flood cannot understand why anyone would do what Hazel has done: "He might as well be one of them monks, she thought, he might as well be in a monastery" (*Wise Blood*, p. 218).

What is the difference between Hazel's aggressive narcissism and his Christian isolation? At this point, Thomas Merton is helpful. Merton defines the contemplative life as "an advance into solitude and the desert, a confrontation with poverty and the void, a renunciation of the empirical self, in the presence of death, and nothingness, in order to overcome the ignorance and error that spring from the fear of 'being nothing.' . . . The solitary, far from enclosing himself in himself, becomes every man" (*Raids on the Unspeakable*, pp. 17-18). The difference, therefore, is contemplation with God is no longer self-serving, no longer narcissistic. Although Hazel is still withdrawn after his conversion, he becomes a "pinpoint of light" in what was previously total darkness for the landlady Mrs. Flood and thus relates positively to another person for the first time.

The narcissism of Hazel and Quentin is destructive—indeed, it leads to murder, suicide, or death in each case. Each character responds to a traditional moral-demand system which weighs heavily on the conscience despite the decline of these censors' influence on culture. Another type of narcissistic personality, however, is found frequently in contemporary fiction: the character not influenced by (or who seeks to escape) traditional censors but who seeks to fill an inner emptiness. Often this search for self-fulfillment is characterized by a flight from society and feeling. Again, Lasch and Rieff are useful in analyzing the literature.

THE FLIGHT FROM FEELING

Binx Bolling, self-proclaimed "moviegoer" of Walker Percy's novel, displays traits common to the psychological type described by Lasch and Rieff. A prime example of a modern individual not governed by traditional cultural censors—"My unbelief was invincible from the beginning. I could never make head or tail of God" (*The Moviegoer*, p. 118)—the intelligent, wealthy, and charming Binx is nevertheless consumed by an inner emptiness. Binx observes the meaninglessness of everyday existence in lives of his friends and relatives, but, ironically, he lacks the conviction to pull himself out of everydayness. He is interested in the possibility of a "search" ("the search is what anyone would undertake if he were not stuck in the everydayness of his own life," p. 18), but he never engages in the critical self-examination such an endeavor would require. He thinks, ruminates, reacts, and calculates but never contemplates. Unable to define the search or to give it any goal other than itself, Binx makes no spiritual progress. Instead of concerning himself with reflection, Binx goes to movies, which serve the same purpose as a search—an escape from everydayness—but require no diversion from his narcissistic ways. Lasch seems to have Binx in mind when he states that a characteristic of the narcissist is to live vicariously through others more brilliant than oneself. The media are magnets for the narcissist:

The mass media, with their cult of celebrity and their attempt to surround it with glamour and excitement, have made Americans a nation of fans, moviegoers. The media give substance to and thus intensify narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encourage the common man to identify himself with the stars and to hate the 'herd,' and make it more and more difficult for him to accept the banality of everyday existence. (*The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 21)

Ellul's discussion of movies and the "efficient silence-fillers" (television and radio) adds a dimension to Lasch's point and likewise applies to Binx. Describing the average man who comes home from a meaningless job, Ellul writes:

At home he "finds himself" again. But what does he find? He finds a phantom. If he ever thinks, his reflections terrify him. Personal destiny is fulfilled only by death; but reflection tells him that for him there has not been anything between his adolescent adventures and his death, no point at which he himself ever made a decision or initiated a change. Changes are the exclusive prerogative of organized technical society, which one day may have decked him out in khaki to defend it, and on another in stripes because he had sabotaged or betrayed it . . . He no longer needs faith or some difficult asceticism to deaden himself to his condition. The movies and television lead him straight into an artificial paradise. Rather than face his own phantom, he seeks film phantoms into which he can project himself and which permit him to live as he might have willed. For an hour or

two he can cease to be himself, as his personality dissolves and fades into the anonymous mass of spectators. The film makes him laugh, cry, wonder, and love. He goes to bed with the leading lady, kills the villain, and masters life's absurdities. In short, he becomes a hero. Life suddenly has meaning. (*The Technological Society*, pp. 376-77).

This passage portrays Binx Bolling the moviegoer. Binx is interesting only because he knows he is a "moviegoer." He knows something is amiss, but he lacks the guts to face his own phantom. So is he any less a slave? His cleverness does not change the nature of his moviegoing habit; it still remains primarily an escape. "What man seeks is evidently an absolute distraction, a total obliviousness of himself and his problems, and the simultaneous fusion of his consciousness with an omnipresent technical diversion" (*The Technological Society*, p. 380).

Seeking to establish his reality through the movie characters, Binx avoids the search and engages instead in what Lasch calls "pseudo-self-awareness." Acting as if a movie camera is following his every move, Binx envisions himself in his office as a Dana Andrews or a Gregory Peck (p. 87).

With his pseudo-self-awareness, Binx exhibits a narcissistic attitude toward women. His promiscuous relationships with beautiful secretaries indicate his desire for self-fulfillment. Viewing sexual pleasure as an end in itself, Binx sees the secretaries as objects rather than people. Consequently, his lust only adds to his inner emptiness.

Binx's most important love affair contains little erotic dimension. His relationship with his cousin, Kate, whom he eventually marries, is therapeutic rather than erotic. Kate is a narcissist too, but different. Her search for meaning in life is more desperate than Binx's. A reflective person, Kate is aware of the abyss that permeates everyday life, but it is even more appalling to her than to Binx: "She would a thousands times rather find herself in the middle of no man's land than at a family party or luncheon club" (*The Moviegoer*, p. 91). Convinced that "only in time of illness or disaster or death are people real" (p. 69), Kate rashly consumes pills in times of severe depression. After brief periods of optimism during which she embraces "freedom," she finds herself again in despair, facing the possibility that life may be meaningless. In an ironic attempt to escape despair, Kate "longs to be an anyone who is anywhere" (p. 152), and looks to Binx to plan a life of steady, mundane everydayness for her. Why does she turn to Binx for this twisted therapy? She explains "You can do it because you are not religious. God is not religious. You are the unmoved mover. You don't need God or anyone else—no credit to you, unless it is a credit to be the most self-centered person alive" (p. 157).

Kate's description of Binx is echoed by another character: Aunt Emily. A proud Stoic who laments the passing of an age when men were virtuous and the traditional cultural censors applied, Aunt Emily perceives Binx's personality after trying to impress on him the traditional ways. After being let down by Binx one too many times, she explains her understanding of Binx's "discovery":

Your discovery, as best as I can determine, is that there is an alternative which no one has hit upon. It is that one finding oneself in one of life's critical situations need not after all respond in one of the traditional ways. No. One may simply default. Pass. Do as one pleases, shrug, turn on one's heel and leave. Exit. Why after all need one act humanly? (p. 174)

Arguing that in the past people displayed recognizable traits (courage, pity, fear, embarrassment, joy, sorrow, etc.), Aunt Emily is repulsed by the new psychological man exemplified in Binx. Not wanting to shake his relationship with his aunt, Binx abandons any attempt at "the search" and settles for the everydayness of medical school. Thus, Binx the moviegoer does not change—at the end of the novel he is still a moviegoer and a narcissist.

Using a style and setting similar to *The Moviegoer*, John Updike describes today's narcissist in *Rabbit, Run*. Updike's Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, however, is a more repulsive representative of modern psychological man than Percy's irresolute but charming Binx Bolling. Through a series of events that grow more and more dismal as the story develops, Harry displays narcissistic attitudes toward sex and emotion which cause broken family relations and eventually the death of his baby daughter. Abandoning his pregnant wife and two-year-old son, Harry moves in with a prostitute he meets on a blind date. This relationship fails also, as she recognizes his grandiose self-image and pleasure-only attitude toward sex. Persuaded by a therapeutic minister to try married life again, Harry returns to his wife at time of the birth of their daughter. A brief period of happy, responsible family life is curtailed when Harry demands sexual performance from his wife to satisfy his own desires. This results in an argument, and Harry once again leaves. His disconsolate, drunken wife then accidentally drowns the baby. Harry returns for the funeral, only to flee again. After once more seeing the prostitute (who is now pregnant by him and wants to get married), Harry is last seen, predictably, running away.

The meaning of the book can be approached through the title. *Rabbit, Run* as a title is significant for two reasons: the name "Rabbit" indicates the sexual absorption of Harry; and "Run" denotes a flight—or, in Lasch's terms, a "flight from feeling." Lasch's chapter "The Flight From Feeling: Sociopsychology of the Sex War" helps to explain *Rabbit, Run*. Lasch states that "the degradation of work and the impoverishment of communal life force people to turn to sexual excitement to satisfy all their emotional needs" (*The Culture of Narcissism*, pp. 194-195). Harry Angstrom provides an apotheosis of this observation. His degrading job as a demonstrator for "MagiPeel" food preparation gadgets, his lack of substantial friendships, and his adverse relationships with his parents and in-laws add to his desire to escape his marriage and family life. A hometown basketball star in high school, Harry views marriage as second-rate—probably because he is no longer the focus of activity. He turns to sex to feed his narcissism, and his sexual acts become increasingly appalling as the story develops. When he fornicates with his girlfriend Ruth, "he feels impatience that through all their twists they remain separate flesh" (*Rabbit, Run*, p. 82). Harry wants his partner to actually become an extension of himself so that his own ego may be fed by the sex act. Typically, he looks at Ruth as an object: after sex, he proclaims, "You were a beautiful piece" (p. 83). Eventually, Harry demands that Ruth perform oral sex with him to "prove her love." Sex is war, not love, as Harry admits when he demanded this particular sex act so that she would be humbled (p. 178). Harry's sexual absorption continues after he returns to his family. While his wife remains in the hospital, he fantasizes about another woman (the minister's wife!), and masturbates to fulfill his self-serving lust (p. 214). When his wife returns home, he demands sex soon thereafter. After she refuses because of her exhaustion, Harry perversely uses her body to stimulate himself (p. 229). He reveals his self-concern when she objects to his degrading sexual act:

"Why can't you try to imagine how I feel? I've just had a baby."

"I can. I can, but I don't want to, it's not the thing, the thing is how I feel. And I feel like getting out." (p. 230)

Unwilling to consider anyone else's feelings, Harry separates sex from love. This narcissism prevents him from maintaining any family life or even an affair. His answer is to escape: Rabbit run.

Rabbit, Run is a gloomy picture of middle-class America. Updike's description of Harry's family life is no accident. As Lasch notes, many of the traditional values and institutions have disintegrated. Our culture no longer views marriage and family life as communal institutions, but rather approach them from an individualistic perspective: "How can I benefit from a relationship?" The attitude that marriage is the epitome of a monotonous everyday existence becomes prevalent.

As Harry complains in *Rabbit, Run*, "It seemed like I was glued in with a lot of busted todays and empty glasses and television going and meals late and no way of getting out" (p. 100). Harry feels imprisoned by marriage and family life.

NARCISSISM AS THE ANTITHESIS OF CHRISTIAN SOLITUDE

In these novels, the theme of narcissism is connected with a conviction that Western culture is dying. Lasch states, "In a dying culture, narcissism appears to embody—in the guise of personal 'growth' and 'awareness'—the highest attainment of spiritual enlightenment" (*The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 235). In a culture that has lost its ties with the past and its hope in the future, the rise of narcissism should come as no surprise. The decay and/or corruption of traditional values and institutions—Christianity, education, the family, the work ethic—has created the psychological person who lives for release rather than restraint. Narcissism is a defense for the individual against a dying culture which no longer offers salvation or meaning.

Both the censor-ridden and therapeutic characters in the literature we have surveyed turn inward in an attempt to cope with a dying culture. This inward turn is not unique in history, however. In the past, individuals (Plato is an example) who perceived that their culture was dying also turned inward, but their inward turn became a transcendence. The inward turn of the modern individual, however, meets a narcissistic ego. No spiritual transcendence is possible. The result of inwardness today is a neurotic personality and a culture of narcissism.

"Christendom" remains in born-again, moralistic-majority movements in politics and religious institutions. Everyone must become "Christian"! That for Kierkegaard is "the monstrous illusion." But that illusion of "Christendom" in a culture of narcissism threatens individuals who are Christians. The characters who display narcissism in the novels we have discussed do not have faith. They are absorbed by the past (Quentin Compson), by rationality (Jason Compson, Thomas Sutpen), by rejection of sin (Hazel Motes), by escape (Binx, Rabbit), or by sex (Binx, Rabbit). They are pitifully inward, yet their inwardness, in most cases, is not contemplative. Only their self-being counts. These characters narcissism reflects despair and emptiness.

A further look, however, must be taken at Hazel Motes in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. He turns inward not for therapy or for salvation from a banal world. Instead, his awareness is an intense rejection of God. Whereas the other characters do not have the inclination or strength to undertake a meaningful search, Hazel inquires into the meaning of man and God. His rejection of God is frightening and leads to destruction, but he displays a change of character toward the conclusion. For Hazel it involves a physical penance: blinding himself, wrapping barbed-wire around his body, and putting rocks and nails inside his shoes. *Wise Blood* can be read as a journey—Hazel travels through the wilderness of rejection of God eventually to reach a communion with God through forgiveness.

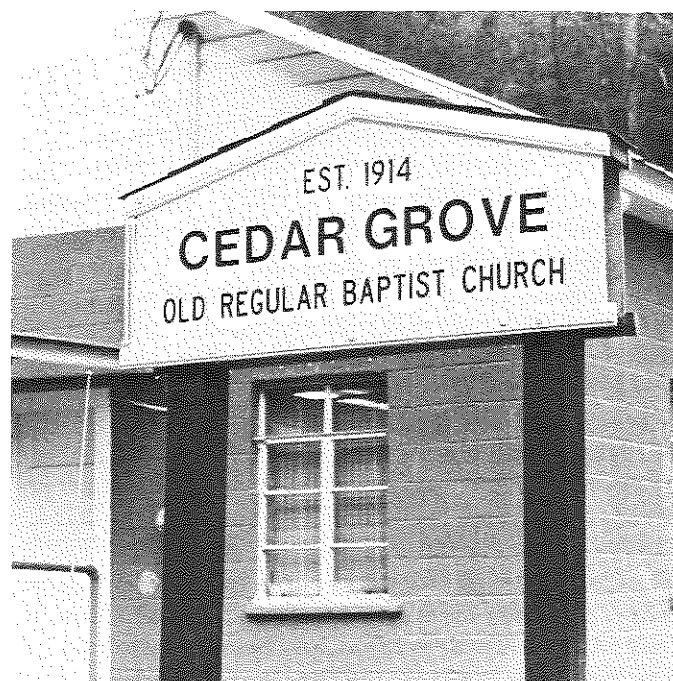
Is the inward turn that Hazel Motes takes a necessary step before reaching true Christian solitude? Is the initial rejection required for the eventual acceptance of forgiveness and reconciliation? Is there a fine line between narcissism and Christian solitude? Is reconciliation found for the would-be Hazel Motes of our culture who seek but do not find?

Lasch states that narcissistic traits appear in everyone. But there are characters in literature we have surveyed who are not narcissistic—Dilsey in *The Sound And The Fury* is an example. And Dilsey is a Christian. I do not think everyone displays narcissistic traits in their personality, but the effects of a culture of narcissism do reach everyone, including Christians. A giving-up of self-interest is necessary for total faith in God; a culture of narcissism attacks this possibility.

The culture of narcissism is in the present age. We are levelled by an abstract process, and the threat of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor is real. One hears talk of a return to traditional ways; one hears that the "me-generation" died with the '70's. But the stakes are higher. Narcissism is not a phenomenon that vanishes with a decade. A return to traditional ways is impossible without understanding of the present age and man's place in the technological system. In a time when hell exists in the threat of nuclear weapons, when people call themselves Christians but worship Caesar, when a television network proclaims "Get High On Yourself" week, when men dressed in military uniforms are praised as "men of peace," when John Lennon is shot down on the streets of New York, when the President of the United States calls nuclear disarmament a "drift toward war," when young people wonder not *if* but *when* they will be blown up, when the rejected, scorned, abused Christ is replaced by a Christ with nuclear bombs, well then. . . Christian faith is attacked in the name of Christ.

Kierkegaard anticipated the culture of narcissism without knowing the phrase. He realized that "Ours is the age of advertisement and publicity." He knew the emphasis on spectacle and self-aggrandizement: "No one is satisfied with doing something definite, every one wants to feel flattered by reflection with the illusion of having discovered at the very least a new continent." More importantly, he realized the selfishness of a culture and the importance of individual religious isolation (inwardness with an object: God): "Man's only salvation lies in the reality of religion for each individual" (*The Present Age*, pp. 40-60).

The levelling process is not the action of an individual but the work of reflection in the hands of an abstract power. It is therefore possible to calculate the law governing it in the same way that one calculates the diagonal in a parallelogram of forces. The individual who levels down is himself engulfed in the process and so on, and while he seems to know selfishly what he is doing one can only say of people *en masse* that they know not what they do; for just as collective enthusiasm produces a surplus which does not come from the individual, there is also a surplus in this case. A demon is called up over whom no individual has any power, and though the very abstraction of levelling gives the individual a momentary, selfish kind of enjoyment, he is at the same time signing the warrant for his own doom. Enthusiasm may end in disaster, but levelling is *eo ipso* the destruction of the individual. No age, and therefore not the present age, can bring the scepticism of that process to a halt, for as soon as it tries to stop it the law of the levelling process is again called into action. It can therefore only be held up by the individual attaining the religious courage which springs from his individual religious isolation (*The Present Age*, p. 54). □



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GRACE IN KARL BARTH'S WORLD AND OURS

Christopher Morse

Our subject is understanding the grace of God as presented in the theology of Karl Barth. Barth, a Swiss theologian of the Reformed tradition, lived and continued to write until 1968, when he was eighty-two. In terms of both the volume and influence of his works it has been said that his achievement is paralleled only by that of St. Thomas Aquinas. Barth had no patience with such flattering comparisons or talk of his achievement, and I will say no more in praise of him. To dwell upon the importance of Barth, rather than of grace, would misrepresent the message of his theology. That message speaks for itself. We, obviously, are not bound to agree with everything Barth writes or view him as some authority beyond criticism. His judgments have always provoked controversy, particularly among both liberals and conservatives in America.

One of his first American critics wrote in 1931, before any of the major dogmatic works had even appeared, that Americans would have a very hard time understanding Barth's strong emphasis upon preaching as the proclamation of the Word. As this critic put it, "It is important to remember . . . that the difference between modern preaching in America and Protestant Europe is fundamental. The American sermon is seldom Biblical and expository. Its reference to the Scripture is in the majority of cases casual or superficial. It deals generally with 'religious' topics." "In that case," Barth replied, "I may expect among the successors of the Pilgrim Fathers neither interest nor understanding. . . ." And then he added, "But perhaps even there there is at least a dim recollection that the preaching of the Church might stand in some sort of distant connection with the Bible. And even there it will surely happen some day that 'religious topics' get for some so stupid and stale that from that dim recollection a clear one may arise once again." (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, Part I, ¶7, 1936 ed. (1932) (Dates in parentheses here and elsewhere are those of the original German publications) (pp. 291-292).

What Barth has to say about the grace of God is found throughout the thirteen separate books of his *Church Dogmatics* and in numerous other writings. It is the central theme of every doctrine he discusses, but nowhere does he deal with grace as a fixed object to be captured in a single definition, conceived as an abstract idea, or broken down by analysis into categories. There is, however, a consistency, though almost never a mere repetition, in the references to grace in the multiple questions of the church regarding our knowledge of God, the nature of God, the doctrines of election, creation, providence, reconciliation, the Christian community, ethics, and our life and vocation. I wish to convey a sense of this consistency of theme, the grace note, which runs through all the contrapuntal variations of Barth's interpretation of the Gospel. We shall not in the end have heard more than words familiar to every Sunday School child, "God is love." But on the way we shall confront Barth's claim that only God can make these words matter and show us what they mean. And when God does, that meaning is never familiar.

At the outset, let us note what Barth says grace is *not*. Grace is not something any of us in and of ourselves wants or favors. Grace is not something we expect. Grace is not something we can discover. Grace is not something we can produce, either as an idea or as a reality. Yet strangely enough, grace is not something we can escape, and not something the least bit uncertain in occurrence.

Therefore, to address such a subject as "God's grace in a troubled world" is to begin with a great embarrassment. Insofar as the grace of God is truly our subject we are, in Barth's words, "able neither to speak nor be silent." (*The Epistle to the Romans*, second ed. 1935 [1922], p. 327.) All our theology is in fact, says Barth, the "description of an embarrassment." ("The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching" [1922] and "The Word of God and the Task of Ministry" [1922] in *The Word of God and The Word of Man*, pp. 101-102, 185-186.) Being called to speak God's Word of grace, we are *unable* to speak God's Word of grace. Now what does he mean by this?

To answer this question we must go to Barth's beginning as a young pastor in the second decade of this

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century. He had been a student of the most renowned theological scholars at leading German and Swiss universities and in 1911 he undertook the ministry of a church in an industrial-farming area of Switzerland.

Almost immediately he faced two crises which shaped his understanding of the Gospel for the remainder of his life. The first was the responsibility of preaching. "I myself know what it means," he wrote, "...to mount the steps of the pulpit, conscious of the responsibility to understand and to interpret, and longing to fulfill it; and yet, utterly incapable. . ." (*The Epistle to the Romans*, Preface to second ed., p. 9.) The crisis was that he found it humanly impossible to preach God's Word. That is to say, he recognized the terrible fact that no preacher can make God's grace real to anyone no matter how hard he or she tries. The call of the Church is to signify the Gospel, but the Church is powerless in itself to make the Gospel significant. We simply cannot determine when in our words and actions God will choose to confront us and others through, and in spite of, what we say or do. The preacher can no more conjure up the Spirit or produce God's grace for others than one human being can produce faith within another, or hope, or love. Falling in love is something which finally no human being can compel. In this recognition Barth was close to Augustine who said that to "delight in the law of the Lord," as *Psalms* One puts it, is not subject to our control, for whatever power resides in the human will it cannot make us delight in something. (I have expanded on this in my article, "The Future of Karl Barth's Theology," *Dialogue*, Vol. 20, Winter, 1981.)

The second crisis in Barth's early ministry was the struggle for social justice. "Class warfare," Barth wrote later, "which was going on in my parish, before my very eyes, introduced me almost for the first time to the real problems of real life. The result of this was that my main study was now directed towards factory legislation, insurance, trade union affairs and so on, and my energies were taken up in disputes sparked off by my support for the workers. . ." (As quoted in Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life From Letters and Autobiographical Texts* Fortress Press, 1976, p. 69.) Barth had no doubt that the Christian must be on the side of those whose lives are put in jeopardy by others. The "movement for social justice," he argued in the first year of his pastorate, is not something peripheral to the Gospel. It is nothing less than the "content" of what it means to talk about Jesus himself. ("Jesus Christ and The Movement for Social Justice" [1911] in George Hunsinger, ed., *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* [Westminster Press, 1976], p. 19.) In this connection Barth aligned himself with the secular socialists, who often had no use for the church, rather than with the religious liberals who in Jesus' name reduced the Gospel to a set of morals and values.

Barth's active involvement on the side of the workers did not set well, of course, with the factory owners, the leader of whom was a member of Barth's congregation.

"My dear pastor," he was advised in an open letter in the local newspaper, "you are still very young. Therefore, let an older man say to you that even in the twentieth century there is still a difference between theory and praxis than even the most ancient, and hence today no longer pertinent, Bible sayings do not help to remove." (*Ibid.*, p. 39.) This notion that the Bible had to do with an idealistic world of theory and that the real world was one of social management where people were truly practical confronted Barth from two opposing sides. First, the factory owners argued in this vein. On the other hand, workers in the socialist parties, with whom Barth sought to identify because of the Gospel, claimed that the struggle rested entirely in their hands. Barth was tempted to give up the ministry for full-time party work. Some friends did just that. But a new agenda urgently thrust upon him by these difficulties occupied him. It was the agenda of understanding the faith in a way radically different from the one he had been taught. It centered on the question of God's grace.

These two interrelated crises of having to preach and trying to work for social justice come to focus in a talk in 1916 ("The Righteousness of God [1916] in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, pp. 19-20.):

It is a wonderful illusion, if we can comfort ourselves with it, that in our Europe—in the midst of capitalism, prostitution, the housing problem, alcoholism, tax evasion, and militarism—the church's preaching, the church's morality, and the 'religious life' go their uninterrupted way. And we are Christians! Our nation is a Christian nation! A wonderful illusion, but an illusion, a self-deception! We should above all be honest and ask ourselves far more frankly what we really gain from religion. . . What is the use of all the preaching, baptizing, confirming, bell-ringing, and organ-playing, of all the religious moods and modes, the counsels of 'applied religion' 'for the guidance of parents,' the community houses with our without motion picture equipment, the efforts to enliven church singing, the unspeakably tame and stupid monthly church papers, and whatever else may belong to the equipment of modern ecclesiasticism? . . . Are we hoping that something may happen?

What Barth affirmed, out of this early period of intense disillusionment, is that something happens when the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and lived out as parable in the social conflicts of this age. That something is grace, and the insight which came to Barth was that grace is always a *happening*. Grace is not something that we have to make a place for in the so-called "real world." Grace takes place. Barth had been taught that the purpose of the church was to foster religious values based on the best of human culture, that we relate to God through some timeless connection human nature shares with the Divine, that Jesus is to be valued mainly for his ennobling ideals. He began to see that none of this is the

Gospel of which the apostle Paul speaks in his *Epistle to the Romans* when he writes, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel: it is the power of God for salvation. . ." (Romans 7:16). The power to lift the world is lacking in our religious activity whenever we think the Gospel is something to be applied, like a theory to practice. Such is not the New Testament view, where God is seen breaking in upon things as they presently are in the events concerning Jesus. God's power breaks up all that stands in the way of the coming of this crucified and risen Lord. We meet God not through some timeless connection of our souls with eternity but when God breaks in upon the events of this present.

This understanding of grace as event or occurrence Barth called "the strange new world within the Bible." When this "strange new world" is seen not as some other world but as our actual world in its true light, then what is impossible with humans becomes possible, indeed actual, with God. ("The Strange New World Within The Bible" [1916] in *The Word of God and The Word of Man*, pp. 28-50.) Then we know God's grace as that power for salvation which happens to us and through us. What is impossible from our side becomes possible from God's side, and the embarrassment of being called to speak God's Word of grace and being unable is the source of freedom, not paralysis. God acts through us and in spite of us to save.

This emphasis upon grace as something that happens to us and among us from beyond us is most developed in Barth's early writings, his commentaries on the *Epistle to the Romans*, 1919 and 1922. Here he gropes his way in this "strange new world within the Bible." The results of his work when published, it has been aptly said, exploded "like a bomb on the playground of the theologians." (Karl Adam, as quoted in T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931* [SCM Press, 1962], p. 17.) From that point on Barth was propelled into a life as a theological professor, and he remained amidst theological debates until his dying day.

If the first step in Barth's new understanding of grace was that grace is eventful, something that happens, the second step was to see that Jesus Christ is the life-story that names and identifies this happening. This second point comes increasingly to the fore in the long work on *Church Dogmatics*, with the publication of the first half-volume in 1932, followed by the second half in 1939.

To declare simply that grace is an event, something that happens, can be a trivial statement. Lots of things, in our everyday manner of speaking, "occur to us." Those seeking to understand the Christian faith need to know what such a statement means. If grace is an occurrence which resists all fixed conceptions and generalizations,

how is it to be identified? Barth answers that the life-story of Jesus Christ identifies what is happening among us and through us as grace. To say the same thing, the life-story of Jesus Christ identifies love. We look for our understanding of grace not within ourselves and our capacities or incapacities, not even within the highest and best our culture creates. We recognize grace when the life-story of Jesus opens our eyes to what takes place in every situation we face. (See, for example, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Part I, ¶27, 1957 [1940], p. 251.)

I use the term "life-story" to convey what Barth means by the German word *Geschichte*. The German meaning can be either "history" or "story," and generally in English translations of Barth "history" is used. What Barth means by the "history of Jesus Christ," however, does not limit the life of Jesus to what the nineteenth century called "the historical Jesus," and mean by that only those years between his earthly birth and death. Rather, the life of this one who comes into the world and is proclaimed in the New Testament as having overcome the world has a history, a story, which does not begin at birth or end at death but has its source in God. Jesus Christ is not a symbol, an idea, a fixed teaching, or a set of values. He is a living Lord whose story is not concluded.

In 1954 a Dutch scholar published an assessment of Barth's theology up to that time, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*. (G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, (Wm. B Eerdmans, 1956). The study criticized Barth for making grace so triumphant over sin and evil that all account of struggle was lost. In a letter to the author Barth wrote: (As quoted on Busch, p. 381.)

I'm a bit startled at the title, *The Triumph*. . . Of course I used the word and still do. But it makes the whole thing seem so finished, which it isn't for me. *The Freedom*. . . would have been better. And instead of . . . *Grace* I would much have preferred. . . *Jesus Christ*. My intention, at any rate, has been that all my systematic theology should be as exact a development as possible of the significance of this 'name' (in the biblical sense of the term) and to that extent should be the telling of a *story* which develops through individual events.

In a later volume of *Church Dogmatics* Barth returned to this criticism and responded with careful attention. Rather than saying grace is triumphant, he argued, we should say Jesus is Victor. Rightly understood the meaning is the same, but "grace" and "triumph" sound like some "logical principle" when considered apart from the suffering, and yet the victory, of the crucified Jesus. The difference, Barth explained, is that "we can trust a person, and in the case of this person. . . unconditionally. . ." but "we cannot grasp a person,

and especially not this person, in the sense of conceptual apprehension and control." (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Part III (first half), ¶69, 1963, [1959], p. 176.)

Thus, we have the second step in Barth's understanding of grace as eventful. The life-story of Jesus identifies what is happening to us and through us in events of the present, in this "strange new world of the Bible." If this indeed is the message of the Gospel, Barth argues, then we know who God is and who we are by the identification of both God and ourselves occurring through the life-story of Jesus.

As a third step, let us note what the Gospel, as Barth understands it, leads us to confess about God. After discussing how God is revealed in Jesus Christ, Barth proceeds in *Church Dogmatics* to consider Who is revealed. Quite simply, God is identified in Jesus Christ as One who is for us without condition. Through literally thousands of pages, many in small print, Barth sounds again and again this single grace note. Having ears, this one note we seem most often not to hear. God is for us without condition: this is what the grace of God means.

Barth circles this central point with different expressions, all attempting to say the one needful thing. He writes of God's "openness," for surely that is what God's grace is. Grace is not something that God has; grace is the way God is, the One whose openness to us and for us whether we know it and trust it or not, is "free," "undeserved," "unexpected," and always "new." (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Part I, ¶26, 1957 [1940], p. 129). Barth writes of God's "readiness," for surely that is what grace is. What we recognize in the life-story of Jesus is that God has time for "the least of these" whom Jesus called "my brethren." Not only does our Creator create time; our Creator takes time for us, and meets us in mercy not ahead of time or too late but at the right time. This is God's "readiness." But if we follow events concerning Jesus in the Gospel, God's "openness" and "readiness" to us and for us cannot be thought of as passive qualities; "I'm available if you want me, but you have to come to me." Nothing of this sort of passivity on the part of God can be argued in Christian faith. Barth attacks such notions. In metaphors stretched nearly to the breaking point he wrote (and one can almost hear the thunder and see the rainbow), "God has acted in His grace. . . as a free subject in Jesus Christ. . . What He has done is not just something which applies to us and is intended for us, a proffered opportunity and possibility. In it He has actually taken us, embraced us, as it were surrounded us, seized us from behind and turned back again to Himself." (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Part I, ¶58, 1956 [1953], pp. 88-89.)

The description of God's grace as overtaking us and embracing us from the opposite direction to the one we are heading, even "seizing us from behind," is central to Barth's thought. The words have no meaning apart from the Gospel account of Jesus, his death and resurrection. But what is the message of the resurrection if it is not that the Risen Lord overtakes those who think they know what is going on in Jerusalem, but are actually headed toward Emmaus, in the opposite direction? In Barth's reading of the Bible the movement of faith is always from God toward us. We are not the seeker, God is. The Cross shows that in and of ourselves we are disposed not to desire grace but to reject it. The Cross shows that when grace appears among us it is not what we expected, not what we think can meet our need, not what we find congenial. The message of the Resurrection is that God does not allow our opposition to grace to defeat it. All that overcame Jesus on the Cross has been, is being, and shall be overcome. In this is both our judgment and our hope.

This understanding of grace as God being for us without condition in Jesus Christ is elaborated most thoroughly in Barth's writing on the doctrine of election. This doctrine, often considered with the doctrine of predestination, has created problems of interpretation for the church since the time of Augustine. The truth of the doctrine Barth finds to be the recognition that God elects us. We do not elect God. So important is this recognition, Barth believes, that he writes, "The doctrine of the divine election of grace is the sum of the Gospel." (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Part II, ¶32, 1957 [1942], p. 10). In the history of the Church, and in his own Calvinist tradition, Barth contends, the meaning of God's election has often been misrepresented. It has usually been taken to mean that God elects individuals to receive mercy and be saved from their sins and God rejects others to be lost forever in their sins without mercy. There are thus two groups predestined by God, the elect and the rejected.

This interpretation Barth denies as contrary to the grace revealed in Jesus Christ. In the Gospel, Barth argues, Jesus Christ is declared both the Rejected One and the One elect of God. All humankind share in his rejection and election in that Christ dies for all and is raised for all. In the Cross we see ourselves identified as those who reject the grace of God which has come to us. In the Resurrection we see ourselves identified as those whose rejection is not allowed to prevail. "There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." (*Romans* 8:1.) God in the Resurrection, as confessed in the Gospel, is the One who refuses to allow our rejection of life to be the final word. The rejected are elected by God through no merit of their own to share in the new life in Christ.

What the doctrine of election attempts to teach us, said Barth, is that God refuses to "acquiesce" in our tendencies toward "self-destruction." (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Part II, ¶32, 1957 [1942], p. 34.) "The righteousness of God in His election. . . means that God does not acquiesce in the creature's self-destruction as its own enemy". Thus the distinction the Gospel message draws is not between one group of human beings who are elect and another who are rejected. The distinction is between those who recognize that they are loved without condition and those who yet do not. Barth writes (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Part I, ¶58, 1956 [1953], p. 148):

Jesus Christ was born and died and rose again for all. . . To that extent, objectively, all are justified, sanctified and called. But the hand of God has not touched all in such a way that they can see and hear, perceive and accept and receive all that God is for all and therefore for them. To those who have not been touched in this way by the hand of God the axiom that Jesus Christ is the Victor is as such unknown. It is a Christian and not a general axiom; valid generally, but not generally observed and acknowledged. . . But the hand of God has touched and seized Christians in this way—which means the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. . . This is without any merit or co-operation on their part, just as the reconciliation of the whole world in Jesus Christ is without merit or co-operation.

Now, the grace of God identified in this way in Jesus Christ leads Barth, in a fourth step, having spoken of who God is, to consider who we are in the light of grace. Two questions in this fourth area are often posed today, questions which Barth addressed in later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*.

The first question has to do with human responsibility. It goes something like this: If we are to understand God as the active agent Barth describes, who without any cooperation on our part saves the whole world in Jesus Christ, then how are we to understand ourselves as the recipients of God's grace, and how are we to understand our calling in faith?

Here we come back to the two crises which confronted Barth in his first pastorate—preaching and the struggle for social justice. "I decided for theology," Barth once said, "because I felt I needed to find a better basis for my social action." (As quoted in John Deschner, "Karl Barth As Political Activist", *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Fall 1972, p. 56.) Has he found it? What does it mean to serve Christ in this world?

Barth sees the question of human responsibility, as did Augustine, as concerning our ability to respond. What sustains the movement for liberating action in human history and prevents its self-deception is precisely the reality known to faith that God acts to overcome all that overcame Jesus on the Cross. Our calling, as Barth sees

it, is to signify God's action through our actions, to become, in his word, "parables" of what God is doing. This means that the life of faith is not one of passivity, because we are called to be witnesses. We are enabled to respond freely to events only insofar as we know that we are not the Savior of the world. We are witnesses of the Savior. It is God who refuses to acquiesce in the world's tendencies toward self-destruction, whether personal or societal. Grace calls us to signal that refusal on the part of God by every means of brain and effort which God allots us. But how our efforts become the bearers of God's grace, how the freedom granted us in Christ to respond to the times is used to bring freedom to others we are not given to know.

Since grace happens in events and cannot be packaged as our possession, we are not given to know what forms our obedience to God's grace will take in the days which face us. So the New Testament admonishes us to "watch and pray" and "to wait on the Lord." Such watching is the opposite of passivity, and to wait on the Lord is to refuse to wait for any other Master. But all our responsibility, Barth writes, is finally thanksgiving, because whatever our circumstances God's only command of grace is that we be free. "More and other than one is," writes Barth, "God does not require." (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part IV, ¶56, 1961 [1951], p. 624).

The second question concerns Barth's stress upon the centrality of Jesus Christ. By saying that grace is always the "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (*II Corinthians* 13:14) does he mean to suggest that God's grace is restricted to Christianity? Here Barth's answer is emphatic. "The statement that Jesus Christ is the one



Word of God has really nothing whatever to do with the arbitrary exaltation and self-glorification of the Christian in relation to other men, of the Church in relation to other institutions, or of Christianity in relation to other conceptions" (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Part III, ¶69, 1963 [1959], p. 91). To proclaim Jesus Christ as the "Light of the world" is not to overlook the fact that this light may be reflected, in Barth's words, "outside the circle of the Bible and the Church" (*Ibid.*, p. 97). It is the light of *Jesus Christ* which is reflected, however, and not some other light if in it we are to behold the glory of God. Any will or way which contradicts the will and way of Jesus Christ is not of God.

One thing alone is certain, Barth believed, and that is true for all the world of every time and place—"neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things

present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Romans* 8:39).

On these two questions, but on many others as well, debate continues about the adequacy of Karl Barth's interpretation of grace. Barth welcomed such debate, because he knew that all attempts in theology to describe the grace of God are faulty, human efforts of uncertain value which must always be undertaken anew. □



S.K. 124C 41 +

William J. Schafer

ALTERNATIVE WORLDS

... faith is in this paradox, that the particular is higher than the universal.

Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

In 1911, an itinerant science writer, struggling to explain and popularize the infant device of wireless telegraphy (radio, to you and me), assembled a magazine called *Modern Electrics*. Pressed for matter to fill the journal and reach a lay audience, this scribbler constructed a romance, an epic vision of a technologically ordered future, called *Ralph 124C 41+* (read one-to-foresee-for-one, plus—the cognomen of the tale's scientific-wizard-protagonist). This author was Hugo Gernsback, sometimes described as the father of modern science fiction. More a restless promoter and entrepreneur than a literateur (his prose is no more nor less than authentically *awful*), Gernsback inhabited the generation after Jules Verne and H.G. Wells and by his example stimulated the subsequent generation of writers who created science fiction as a uniquely American (and subsequently international) genre of popular culture. Science fiction's highest annual writing award is named the Hugo, in Gernsback's memory.

The Gernsbackian incarnation of science fiction (he liked to call it "scientifiction") focused on visionary gadgetry and *gee-whiz!* ideas, consumed with what Jacques Ellul has called "technique" and its all-encompassing "milieu" in modern culture. It was a fiction that purportedly offered us *fact*, a genuine peep into the future, in the guise of romance. For the half-century after Gernsback's rather banal tale, science fiction in popular magazines explored a myriad of variations on some of his basic themes. The prophetic strain in science fiction owed also to Jules Verne and H.G. Wells and other nineteenth-century utopian writers, but the future-orientation of the genre became a fundamental stance to post-Gernsback writers and

readers. The basic process of science fiction is sometimes called "extrapolation"—tracing the logical outcome or development of extant trends or ideas, trying to be Ralph, to foresee for one, plus. Yet—as much as the popular imagination might think of it as "literature of the future"—the attitude has less to do with authentic social prophecy than with the basic power of imagination, the construction not of "foreseeing," of positing *probable* future worlds, but of building alternative realities—*other* worlds than this.

A modern science fiction writer, Norman Spinard, sees this habit of foretelling as the nexus of his art:

Science fiction writers... are psychically at home in the future. Even the term "*the future*" is an oversimplification of the science fiction consciousness, for (with the exception of some writers who get bogged down in setting all of their stories in the consistent future) science fiction writers contemplate *different* futures every time they set out to write a new story. They are at home not merely in "the" future but in multiplex futures. They have assimilated the multiplex nature of reality, the new realities that radiate outward from the nexus of every possible space-time event. The consciousness of science fiction is a transformational consciousness; the logic of science fiction is the logic of perpetual flux. ("Rubber Sciences," p. 63)

The key words here are "transformational" and "flux." The science fiction writer sees the future not as *one* immutable and determined line of development from the present but as "alternative futures"—the *many* genies of time that may spring from the bottle of the present instant.

As modern science fiction has become more philosophical and introspective, less a subspecies of gothic romance, this has become a kind of subtext or discrete theme in many stories. A basic way of dealing with time in science fiction is the familiar time-travel tale, rooted in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1898). This kind of story usually becomes involved with the paradoxical notion of movement through time into the past or future (e.g., "what would happen if you went into the past and murdered your grandfather before your father was born?" or "what if you could go directly to the future and alter it, leapfrogging causality?"). Time as substance or medium creates puzzles with ceaseless

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fascination. Another version of time other than the fairytale-like "Once upon a time in the twenty-fifth century" or "Me and my time machine" has been speculative works of the sort Spinrad outlines—imaginative projections of other worlds than ours but based on the framework of our present reality, genuine *alternatives* to our reality, not fantasias or magical visions, more like Keats's summary of Adam's Dream: "He awoke and found it truth."

Stories which have become staples of modern science fiction using the "alternative realities" approach include: L. Sprague DeCamp's *The Wheels of If* (1940), a seminal novella that unreels a kaleidoscopic series of alternatives to our reality; Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* (1952), which posits a world in which Robert E. Lee won at Gettysburg and the Southern states set up a powerful agrarian regime; Harry Harrison's *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!* (1972), which builds an alternative nineteenth century, based on the high-Victorian colossal engineering feats of Isambard Kingdom Brunel; Michael Moorcock's *The Warlord of the Air* (1971) and *The Land Leviathan* (1974), developing similar Vernian worlds of nineteenth-century technology; John Brunner's *Times Without Number* (1969), which shows us a world in which the Spanish Armada won and plays with a number of time-twisting paradoxes; Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration* (1977), a similar exploration of neo-medieval realities; Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), a haunting and subtle novel describing a world in which the Axis won W.W. II; and Frederic Brown's *What Mad Universe* (1949), a parodic *tour de force* which exhausts the theme in a set of brilliant variations spoofing pulp-magazine science fiction.

The alternative-future theme in science fiction is more than a logical extension of the process of extrapolation, more than a rhetorical technique—it is structural. The very act of imagining *one* future leads to variants, to differentiation. Jorge Luis Borges, in a brilliant fable that outlines the process of mystery-story thinking, "The Garden of Forking Paths," expresses the idea of the future as a maze or labyrinth, with each present-event leading to a series of alternative futures, branches, with each new choice on a branch leading to a new set of branches, and so on *ad infinitum*. This is the vision of science fiction that creates the "Wheels of If" effect. The fundamental imaginative process of science fiction requires a writer to envision alternative scenarios.

The vision of the future in science fiction is prophetic in essence without being eschatological. That is, the future that arrives is *unfinal*, historical, not "last things" but (in H.G. Wells's phrase) "things to come." The future will continue to unreel, beyond the present,

forever and ever, world without end. Or, in another mode, it is a vision of "parallel universes," "alternative dimensions," "contiguous realities," etc. There is an apocalyptic-eschatological strain in science fiction, ascendent since World War II and the gruesome omens of Hiroshima-Nagasaki, which is well-defined in David Ketterer's *New Worlds for Old* (Anchor, 1974). In this kind of vision, there is a finality, a "sense of an ending," but the most prominent form of science fiction since Hugo Gernsback's day has been a permutation of American technological optimism, not the catastrophic end of things but the New Jerusalem that waits beyond the final battle.

The utopian prophecy of Ralph 124C 41+ is a message from the heart of the nineteenth century, the age of the Dynamo transcendent, as Henry Adams viewed it. It is the message of progress, or patriotism, or positivism, leading directly to George Babbitt & Co., the rampant boosterism of Zenith and Gopher Prairie alike. Ralph is a Faustian, streamlined double for Babbitt, both members of a twentieth-century mainstream. If we go back to another prophetic voice from the nineteenth century, we may find unexpected affinities between the apostles of material progress and one of the most trenchant critics of "Christendom," the husks of secularized religion in Western culture.

FEAR AND TREMBLING

He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd.

Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

Soren Kierkegaard's skill as a profound meditator on Christian beliefs was his ability to reconcile the long tradition of Western philosophy with the most basic tenets of Christianity. His dialectical thinking, drawn from a critique of Hegel, fused the most high-flown strand of philosophy with the direct experience of faith. In one of his most beautiful early discourses, *Fear and Trembling* (1843), Kierkegaard focused on an incident central to Judeo-Christian concepts of faith, Abraham's testing by God on Mount Moriah. In this work, as in his subsequent books, S.K. achieved two notable effects: 1) The creation of a straightforward, everyday *language* of discourse, which might be called "realism" or "existentialism," passing to us important terms like "the absurd," "dread," "either/or," etc. 2) The creation of a *form* of discourse significant for its imaginative variety, offering a series of alternative angles of vision. This second achievement is the focus here.

Fear and Trembling is subtitled "A Dialectical Lyric" and was putatively authored by "Johannes de Silentio,"

an ironic mask or *persona* adopted by S.K. as a narrative device. This "John of Silence" speaks to us as a virtuoso meditator, a voice of voices, a lyrical dialectician, assuming a series of positions that arise from the depth of his silence, the well of contemplation of Abraham's monumental figure. His lyrical disquisition begins with a Prelude (*Stemning*), "Once upon a time there was a man who as a child had heard the beautiful story about how God tempted Abraham, and how he endured temptation, kept the faith, and a second time received again a son contrary to expectation" (p. 26). We are given here several subtle forms of narration: 1) fairytale—"Once upon a time," 2) a frame-story locating the narrator as a reflexive (autobiographical) object of the discourse—"there was a man who as a child had heard," 3) Biblical redaction—a resume of the Abraham-Isaac story (from Abraham's perspective, note). This opening flourish sets up a complex psychic perspective: a man recalling a child's-eye vision of a story of a father called on to murder (or sacrifice) his beloved son. The Abraham-Isaac story becomes an obsession or an *icon* for the narrator: "his soul had only one wish, to see Abraham, one longing, to have been witness to that event" (p. 26). The man is defined at the end of the Prelude: "That man was not a thinker, he felt no need of getting beyond faith; he deemed it the most glorious thing to be remembered as the father of it, an enviable lot to possess it, even though no one were to know it." (p. 26)

After this, the Prelude encompasses four relations of the Abraham-Isaac story, each constructed as a moral fable in a formulaic way, beginning "It was early in the morning—" and ending "Happy the person [or child]." The thrust of the four fables is to reverse our viewpoint from the man's focus on Abraham to one on Sarah and Isaac. The four tales are followed by a new section restoring the focus on Abraham, "A Panegyric upon Abraham."

All this material is an overture. The bulk of *Fear and Trembling* follows—"Problemata," consisting of a "Preliminary Expectoration," three formal discourses and an epilogue. What began with the naivete of fairytale and confessional has become a dense, sophisticated theological-philosophical exploration in a parody of the toploftiest scholastic style. Just as Plato delighted in myths, extended analogies, gossip, homely comparisons, fables, S.K. has sewn a patchwork of ideas evolved from the statement that his "man" was "not a thinker." Evolving from all these variants of discourse is a way to "think about the unthinkable," to describe the operation of faith, an experience indefinable and beyond words. Building as surely upon paradox as the New Testament, S.K. uses the Abraham-Isaac story as a parable to define faith as the doorway to infinity.

Abraham is compared to the poet and to the tragic hero and found greater: he is the model of the "knight of faith," who learns to make the "movements of infinity"

but who abides in finitude, the man who believes in the "preposterous," believes "by virtue of the absurd." Abraham's central action of faith is summarized: "For it is great to give up one's wish, but it is greater to hold it fast after having given it up, it is great to grasp the eternal, but it is greater to hold fast to the temporal after having given it up" (p. 33).

S.K.'s three problems with the Abraham-Isaac story explore the "ethics of faith." He asks first "Is there such a thing as a teleological suspension of the ethical?" (p. 64) and finds that "The story of Abraham contains. . . a teleological suspension of the ethical. As the individual he became higher than the universal. This is the paradox which does not permit of meditation. . . Faith is a miracle, and yet no man is excluded from it; for that in which all human life is unified is passion, and faith is a passion." (p. 77) The second question is "Is there such a thing as an absolute duty toward God?" (p. 78), and S.K. finds the answer in the purely *individual* nature of faith, that the "true knight of faith is a witness, never a teacher, and therein lies his deep humility" (p. 90), that the "individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute" (p. 91). The third problem asks "Was Abraham ethically defensible in keeping silent about his purpose before Sarah, before Eleazar, before Isaac?" (p. 91) and finds in Abraham's silence his definition as a pure exemplar of faith, the step beyond the esthetic hero or the tragic hero. For this "John of Silence," Abraham's determination to obey God, to have absolute faith, is *defined* by his silence. Yet Abraham's "last words" are recorded, the breaking of the purposeful silence of faith:

First and foremost, he does not say anything, and it is in this form he says what he has to say. His reply to Isaac has the form of irony, for it always is irony when I say something and do not say anything. Isaac interrogates Abraham on the supposition that Abraham knows. So then if Abraham were to have replied "I know nothing," he would have uttered an untruth. He cannot say anything, for what he knows he cannot say. So he replies, "God will provide Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (p. 128).

The discourse ends with S.K. reaffirming the novel and surprising qualities of faith, its function as a means of defining and authenticating a life, outside of history and beyond time:

But the highest passion in a man is faith, and here no generation begins at any other point than did the preceding generation, every generation begins all over again, the subsequent generation gets no further than the foregoing—in so far as this remained faithful to its task and did not leave it in the lurch (p. 130).

The series of "alternative histories" of Abraham has served to show that S.K.'s famous "leap of faith" is a function of *immediate experience*, the permanent *Now* of faith: each moment is the crisis on Mount Moriah, and we are faced with Abraham's task of ceaselessly making the movements of infinity while remaining *inside* the finite, of transcending the ethical, of assuming a burden of paradox, realizing that God's will is beyond simple understanding, that faith operates "by virtue of the absurd," not through the minute particulars of history or the rigors of philosophical analysis. The prophecy Johannes de Silentio reveals through S.K. is not eschatological, then, but a prophecy of the infinite that is packed, telescoped (or *telescoped*) into the finite, the instant of faith, the *Now* which is regained by the sacrifice of infinite resignation.

PORTALS OF PROPHECY

The absurd is not one of the factors which can be discriminated within the proper compass of the understanding: it is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen.

Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

S.K., that joyful churchyard Dane, would point us to the infinite by means of our sense of finitude, our resignation by virtue of the absurd to the will of God. Modern science fiction, two generations after the rude efforts of Hugo Gernsback and his prophetic hero, has refined its modes of prophecy, also. In the years after World War II, in the mushroom shadows of Hiroshima-Nagasaki, science fiction turned increasingly away from nineteenth-century positivistic utopias to darker visions—dystopias like Huxley's *Brave New World* or Ape and Essence, Orwell's *1984*, or Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, or to more apocalyptic prophecies in a spate of literal-end-of-the-world stories. The alternatives for humankind's collective future seemed tragic after the experience of Auschwitz and Belsen, Dresden, Monte Cassino, Okinawa, Hiroshima-Nagasaki. In the 1950s and early 1960s, American science fiction extended and deepened itself. Three works agreed by critics to be representative masterworks of science fiction as it came of age all point us toward new visions of alternative realities: Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (1956), Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) and Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962). None of the three writers was exactly a typical science fiction author, but each had an odd and important angle of vision which developed the genre's scope.

A Canticle for Leibowitz (to begin with the most transparent example) is a mock-history of epic proportions, covering the period from the mid-twentieth-century "flame deluge" (an antiphonal apocalypse to Noah's flood), a nuclear war in which a survivor was one Isaac Edward Leibowitz, an electronics engineer who eventually becomes a Christian martyr (he is Jewish) after the catastrophe. The novel is divided into three sections chronicling the Church's reconstruction—"Fiat Homo," "Fiat Lux" and "Fiat Voluntas Tua"—covering nearly two millennia.

"Fiat Homo" describes the epoch of Leibowitz's canonization and the rise of the order founded in his name. We are in the purview of what S.K. called "Christendom"—the secular majesty and material power of the Church as a cultural institution. But the narrative focuses also on the humanity of the institution—individual figures who preserve and reconstitute the scraps of scientific knowledge gathered as the holy relics of St. Leibowitz. The first story, "Fiat Homo," revolves around Brother Francis Gerard, a novice in the order, who in an act of faith makes an illuminated copy of a Leibowitz blueprint (without ever understanding its significance). Brother Francis is martyred also, murdered by cannibalistic mutants. "Fiat Lux" (3147 A.D.) describes a renaissance in which members of the orders and secular "natural philosophers" rediscover the principles of electricity (St. Leibowitz's special province) and build a generator and electric light. In "Fiat Voluntas Tua" (3781 A.D.), we arrive at high technological culture in another cold war setting—the wheel of fortune or the Wheels of If turning over—and an imminent second Flame Deluge. As an atomic holocaust breaks out, the order sends a shipload of monks to the stars, and the description of the war becomes a theodicy, in which Father Zerchi defends the ways of God against the scientific rationalism of Dr. Cors, who has set up euthanasia camps for the fatally wounded. Father Zerchi is martyred also, in a final explosion which unearths the bones of Brother Francis. Zerchi's last vision is of an awakened mutant form, a new shape of humanity rising in the flames of apocalypse.

Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* is less overtly theological. It is a wild Blakean epic (alternate title, *Tiger, Tiger*, a hero named Gulley Foyle—cf. Joyce Cary's Blakean artist-hero Gulley Jimson in *The Horse's Mouth*) of the twenty-fifth century, when it has been discovered that humans have the innate capacity to "jaunt," to teleport themselves by an act of visualization and concentration anywhere on the surface of the earth. Developing as a thriller, the novel also details the sociopolitical order created by such a discovery and speculates on the hidden capabilities of the mind. It is literally about "leaps of faith," a "what-if" story about revenge, justice, torment and barbaric cruelty, in which

the nearly subhuman spaceman Gulliver Foyle is transformed by the experience of his own powers, not corrupted but brought to a sense of self-transcendence. He recovers a lost superweapon, PyrE, and delivers it out of the hands of the ruling military-industrial oligarchy to the people in a kind of cold war parable: "I've handed life and death back to the people who do the living and dying. The common man's been whipped and led long enough by driven men like us." (p. 231) He then discovers that he can jaunt extraterrestrially, in fact can instantaneously cross the galaxy, defeating space and time. It comes as the result of his self knowledge:

"I believe," he thought. "I have faith."

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

"Faith in faith," he answered himself. "It isn't necessary to have something to believe in. It's only necessary to believe that somewhere there's something worthy of belief." (pp. 232-33)

The Stars My Destination can be interpreted as a triumph of liberal humanism, but Bester persistently deals with ontological, teleological and eschatological queries in the work, which is about the human spirit, not the gimmickry of high technology. He introduces a sect of "Cellar Christians" into the story, the catacomb-meeting revenants of the church after the secular society has expunged it, and he also describes a cargo-cult-like space society living on the debris of junked spaceships and the detritus of abandoned myths and religions. The focus of the novel is on concepts of human nature and its spiritual capacities. Although the story is a broad imitation—in effect, a parody—of standard "space opera," Bester diminishes science and technology in subordination to human will and belief. Gulley Foyle is a "tiger-man," a manifestation like Blake's "Tyger" of the *mysterium majesticum*, God's wrathful, superactive aspect, the mighty Contrary to the Lamb.

Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* also seems at first far removed from religious themes. It describes an alternative history, a world in which Roosevelt died in 1933 and the Allies lost World War II, set in a North America divided into a Nazi zone (the East), a neutral buffer strip (the Rocky Mountain states) and a Japanese colony (the West Coast). It follows a series of characters in San Francisco—Americans, an occupying Japanese official, a Japanese trader, a counterspy disguised as a Nazi emissary, etc.—as events move toward a cataclysmic nuclear war of Nazis vs. the Japanese hegemony. The strands of the story are linked through a mystical preoccupation with time and events built on the *I Ching* and what Carl Jung called "synchronicity," the confluence of causes and effects which can be construed as coincidence but which seems like destiny.

The patterning of events in *The Man in the High Castle* revolves around a novel written by a mysterious reclusive

author, Hawthorne Abendsen, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* (see *Ecclesiastes* 12:5), which describes an alternative world in which the Allies won World War II. Thus we are plunged into a *regressus ad infinitum* of the Jorge Luis Borges type, so that we observe a world radically different from ours which is observing a world radically different from it, a typology of concentric worlds like the medieval world-picture, different from a "garden of forking paths" as a means of illustrating coexistent alternative realities. This effect connects us to a Jungian-Confucian notion of synchronicity, a connection of destinies described in the Oracle, the *I Ching*, which all the characters consult.

Juliana Frink, who has been married to a despised Jew and has murdered an S.S. agent, seeks Abendsen at his "high castle" of legend, which turns out to be an ordinary suburban home (reality here is never what it seems). She finds that Abendsen wrote his novel by consulting the *I Ching*, and when she asks the *I Ching* what *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* means, she interprets the reading to say that the novel is *true*. Abendsen is skeptical, but Juliana believes: "Truth, she thought. As terrible as death. But harder to find. I'm lucky" (p. 239). We are made to see the realities of fascism and genocide through the looking glass, and Juliana's discovery brings us back to our present reality, back from a voyage through a different kind of "what-if," a speculation on what-might-have-been, but a vision as disturbing and prophetic as any description of a remote future or an imminent apocalypse. The dreadful present reality of a Nazi-Japanese occupation invests the book with a nightmare immediacy which the story-within-a-story, self-reflexive devices only intensify.

EITHER/OR

... the interesting is a border-category, a boundary between aesthetics and ethics.

Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

Perhaps science fiction is a border-category, too, an antechamber of the prophetic. Early propagandists of the genre like Hugo Gernsback or John W. Campbell, Jr., sometimes insisted overmuch that science fiction was authentically prophetic, that it could foresee the inevitable future of positivism, progress and eschatological technarchy. This adolescent optimism, however, diminishes the genuine virtues of science fiction as literature, its imaginative expansiveness, the infinite variety of its vision. If it is only a *Popular Science*, Sunday supplement glimpse of a mechanized Pisgah, it becomes only a "document," a bit of prehistory. Its prophetic voice is lyrical, like S.K.'s, and manifold.

That atomic weapons, space flight, ICBMs, computers have all "come true" after their early description in science fiction is irrelevant. These details are only numbers of the Beast. What is more significant is that science fiction has probed the capacities of humankind and asked potent questions about where we have been and where we are now. Its eschatology is not placed in the future, despite the "distancing" devices of the genre. It is as immediate in space-time as the Kingdom of God.

Which brings us back to Johannes de Silentio, Abraham and Isaac and the mountaintop. The luminous vision S.K. presents of the moment of Abraham's testing, rendered as a series of musical variations, is precisely the imaginative substance of science fiction. The "teleological suspension of the ethical" which S.K. sees as the heart of Abraham's drama is akin to Coleridge's definition of the audience's role in imaginative literature, the act of a "willing suspension of disbelief"—i. e., not the act of *believing* a fictitious representation of reality, but an act of will to suppress the blocking power of *unbelief*. In S.K.'s paradoxical terms, the act of suspending disbelief is a way of believing—not to disbelieve is a silent manner of belief, like Abraham's powerful irony of silence.

The science fiction novels cited (*A Canticle for Leibowitz*, *The Stars My Destination*, *The Man in the High Castle*) revolve around the mystery of faith, a theme more challenging and problematic than the entire edifice of technology. Ultimate prophecies have not to do with wiring diagrams, astronomy or theories but with humanity—the diagrams encoded in the spiral helix, the two sides of the brain and their dialectical interaction, the basic miracle of life itself—and with the central question facing Abraham: how to know the will of God, how to live in the heart of a paradox, how to see the ineluctable nature of faith. The essence of faith transforms Abraham's act from would-be murder to self-transcendence, to an identity with the will of God, to a reconciliation of the unreconcilable paradox.

The variations proposed by Johannes de Silentio are ways to create the dialectical tension necessary to *illustrate* the paradoxical nature of faith, its ambiguous, duplicitous, in-between state. The four beautifully turned narrative variations in "Problemata" and the three larger disquisitions that follow are each ways to re-invent the Biblical account, to make Abraham, Isaac and Sarah alive for us. They are also ways to force us to review the terrible drama on Mount Moriah, to displace it out of an "aesthetic" category like "tragedy" or an "ethical"

category like "crime." As S.K. is at great pains to show, we must be in awe at Abraham, at the uniqueness of his position. If we attempt to conventionalize the narrative, to categorize it stiffly into *one* story, we lose its essential wonder. As S.K. says, with caustic irony, "It is supposed to be difficult to understand Hegel, but to understand Abraham is a trifle. To go beyond Hegel is a miracle, but to get beyond Abraham is the easiest thing of all." (p. 43) And S.K. as Johannes de Silentio, the quiet meditator on the icon of Abraham, goes on to confess:

I am convinced that God is love, this thought has for me a primitive lyrical validity. When it is present to me, I am unspeakably blissful, when it is absent, I long for it more vehemently than does the lover for his object; but I do not believe, this courage I lack. For me the love of God is, both in a direct and an inverse sense, incommensurable with the whole of reality (pp. 44-45).

Johannes de Silentio speaks of his perception and admiration for Abraham, who has passed through infinite resignation to faith. The prophetic vein of *Fear and Trembling* lies in its multiplicity of views knitted by dialectic into a lyrical sense of the suspended instant of faith atop Mount Moriah. As in the alternative worlds/futures of science fiction, we are exhilarated by absorbing the sense of paradox, a "movement of infinity," of sublimity, an experience of the identity of passion and faith. Perhaps this feeling of wonder, which is at the still center of worship, is also the kernel buried under all the apparatus, the *schlock*, the honkytonk veneer of science fiction—a human heart in which the motions of grace, the meanings of futurity, are revealed.

□

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THE HOPE THAT HOPES ON

Daniel Berrigan, S.J.

Above all it seems important to be concrete in this matter of hope. Concrete, that is, taking in account not merely the modest vision of one's own, but a sense of the vision of others, whether admirable or worldly charged. The vision of governments as well as of citizens, of believers and humanists, of the rich and the outcast.

I see hope in this wider secular sense as a kind of jungle, psychological, densely material, an effluvium thrown up by the loam of the culture, a rain forest with few cleansing sunny days. And such hope, so often violent, shifting, feverish, seeds itself into the prevailing winds of the world. Thus for example, American hope becomes the hope of the world at large. Hoping to be like America, according to proper and strict limits. Proper, that is, to the status of the mother country; strict, according to national interests. Large portions of the world can find no better hope, we are told, than to ape American hope—those elements of our culture which ironically have reached a dead-end in their first experiment: fast food, boutique clothing, junk tv, even nuclear weapons. No more spiritually impure, culturally abused reality is at work in the world today than such hope.

To speak of ourselves, we are told by a perpetually smiling president that America's hopes run high. Indeed. They all but run off the fever chart. One is tempted to see little but a spasm of despair in this proliferation of high vulgarity, low ideals, contempt of the underdog and military muscling which define American attitudes. This is a virtually limitless appetite to own, control, manipulate, inherit, buy and sell and barter. The world itself is the prey of this hope, which views the world like a wild beast or sea monster, to be captured, roped, dragged home in triumph. But alas, there are few such noble trophies left, hoof or fin, the fathers and grandfathers of the predators having gone before.

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Thus, while the appetites misnamed "hope" remains unchecked, there is less to feed on. Which may lead to an understanding of the despair which underlies this dangerous, self-enslaving hope. A contrast suggests itself. Can there be a hope proper to Christians, except it be joined to a passionate sense of justice? Maybe it is true that the contemporary translation of biblical hope is simply *justice*. How otherwise, can we be called hopeful people, if we are unwilling to allow others a human place, autonomy, bread on the table?

Such a sense of things ("hope as justice") is rare in practice. We stand as a culture, as a religious group in our culture, on a neutral no-man's-land, *vis a vis* the misery of the great world. Meantime, something other than hope, something masquerading as the real thing, is sanctioned and fostered. It is called "hopes." This plural is of interest. Many people no longer properly hope at all but seek something commonly referred to as "hopes," an available list of goodies to be wrung at all cost from life, credentials, a slice of America.

Thus, a sense of justice, the practice of a justice worthy and hopeful, is all but swallowed up in despairing needs to protect possessions, to reach security, to verify the dream. So complete a stalemate! It must originate from a dearth of models, ikons, urgent voices, a summoning to a truly human vocation.

Property is a clue. In Central America or Southern Africa, American interests outweigh, on a strict scale of value, human life and well being. And not merely outweigh, as though the two were somehow temporarily out of kilter, to be put in better balance by some legerdemain or reform. I mean literally, and in accord with our topic, that the two are radically off balance. The weighing center is damaged. On its scales, humans are weightless. Property, possessions, special interests on the opposite pan hit the earth with a thump, tumble the living out. People are no longer a factor. They are expendable.

This large hopelessness, from which public policy issues, is a spiritual illness. It infects Christians as well, a heavy claim of despair, institutional injustice, bold, confident, in command, sanctioned at the highest levels, accepted by the citizenry as the common style and mode.

Thus, we breathe injustice as we breathe polluted air. We see the victims of injustice, we mourn their fate, perhaps, briefly. If we reflect at all as to why things are so, we conclude *they are so because they must be*. The abnormal is normalized. Injustice has rendered us unjust. Thus injustice, instead of being cried out against, made to pay up, made accountable, becomes a given, a fact of life. It becomes the bold commanding opposite of a justice which, in a far different world, a world of Kingdom Come, might be the common patrimony and right.

I think here not only of the expendability of the poor, their literal wipeout in America, but also of the tightening noose around our own humanity. We, our children, are becoming a stakeout, lure, bait, of a nuclear folly rendering us as expendable as street people or welfare clients. Have we felt the bitterness of this irony? If we have or have not felt it, the same question arises: in so desperate a strait, who shall save us?

It might be useful at this point to pause over something called "political salvation," and "saviors." As conditions worsen in society, formerly neutral offices, public functions, become charged with a religious aura. This seems a constant law. Despair with "the world, the way it goes," leads to an inflation (often in a religious form) of once modest, servicable offices. Elected to high office, a human is metamorphosed into a superhuman. More. He takes on a shaman role and becomes the keeper of the formerly secular hopes, now rendered quasi-sacred. Literally, he holds office to save us.

The president once assumed office, we are told in history books, to enhance and strengthen a public order based on justice, reconciliation, defense of the poor, limitation of the clutch of the powerful. No longer. He is in office not even as an honorable symbol of such an order. One must think here not only of the president's self-understanding but of the public's as well. Nor should one attribute this distracted political sense only to the wealthy and powerful. To them the presidency implies an advocate formerly reserved, according to the slogan, to the patrons of a great banking cartel: "You have a friend at Chase Manhattan." Among working people and formerly working people, a like sense takes hold, though they reel under the blows of the economic triphammer, aimed first at themselves. They are cynical about piratical economics, but many expect the President to act as saviour.

To save, that is, though all be destroyed in the process. Saved from what, and by what means, need not detain us long. The symbol of such "salvation" is the black box that contains the nuclear signal, a shaman's doomsday kit. It will save even the saviour. A shadow purportedly benign and certainly ominous, it accompanies him everywhere—to bed, presumably, a bride of death; to table; if need be to hospital. It must ever be ready, never used, sleepless, a servant, but only when contained. But always and everywhere to be incanted, cherished, paid tribute, worshipped. It is the god of the saviour, the ultimate "medicine" and magic.

Measuring the black box, stepping gingerly around the box, we also measure our true hope, a hope "true" only in the sense that we have put our stake, our security, in such a god. Profoundly, unutterably false, as all gods are false; as hope placed in false gods is also false. Perverted from true hope, its scope, method, object, integrity, attitude toward worldly realities, decent politics, community.

So the ethos of the modern state presents itself in the person of its chief officer. From him that ethos emerges, grandiose, persuasive, coherent—and mad. In him, the state has this to say: *hope in me*. It is not an invitation but a command.

Across the world, resistance to such pseudo-hope has brought violent and undeserved death. Resistance continues to do so. Resistance brings large numbers before the courts of many lands. In contrast to pseudo-hope, the question arises, *What do you hope for? What keeps you going?* The question persists, I think, because certain Christians have been persistent, if not skilled (and certainly not successful) in confronting the State and its soul-swamping claims, its seizure of public and private hope. How does one face the future with any resource resembling hope? One can, I suppose, get used to swimming against a current, just as one can become a drifter, going with the current. (I write this, though I see few struggling upstream.) In my limbs, I sense the force of a second current. It is as though I were suddenly feeling against my body this other, icy force, moving within, but counter to, the rather tepid and gentle one. Thus the question evokes from the back of the mind, a supposition, a common understanding, an imperative at times categorical.

The supposition goes something like this: Christians are habitually sceptical about government conduct, a habit of mind the gospel both evokes and fosters. Then,

on occasion, the habit is put to the test, and the sceptic becomes a resister. The mind of the Christian is expressed not only in a creed, but now in a command: *Do this*. So we do it.

Then, after the fact, the questions arise. And a further responsibility. One is required, now, to explain the action, to interpret it. What do you hope for? What keeps you going? I believe that if justice is another word for hope, then despair must have its synonym too. I call it fear of death—a fear that, when it overrides conscience, is another guise of death itself.

Fear of death and Christian hope cannot for long claim identical territory—life. The one must yield, the other prevail. Closely joined to hope, as code and clue, is a human vision. Once freed of illusion, one may offer a sense, coloration, modest vision of human life itself. In this sense, "hopeful," as attached to "human," is redundant. Recall the classical balance between grace and human effort, a balance uneasy, indeed, and precarious. Grace (in this case, hope) is defined by Augustine as *victrix*. I find this attractive. Experience has led me to conclude that grace is party to a struggle, barely makes it against death. Drama here—and quite possibly, tragedy.

Two questions arise in regard to hope: a question of *symbol* and a question of what I call, for want of a better term, *conduct*. Biblical prophets were entrepreneurs of symbolic action, not from arbitrary willfulness, but because they were pushed to such measures and means. Pushed by the temper of the their times, which they invariably and accurately viewed as in no sense "normal" but as morally abominable. Pushed also by the dynamic of hope, which is best understood as an irony—hope against itself, hope wrestling not only with its apes and counterfeits but with its own lesser, prior, as-yet-immature forms. In other words, hope as a virtue of extremes, a virtue *malgre lui*, a virtue pushed to the edge. The edge of society, edge of respectability? Let us say to the edge of the rational, edged out, derided as incompetent, even bizarre.

Nevertheless, the work of hope begins, here and now, in a most unlikely time and place. The task being to expose and declare the lie, the claim on the part of public authority that right reason is in command, an available resource, that the nuclear arms race is a rational undertaking. The truth being (and only hope can announce it) that rationality, coherence, not to speak of ethical understanding, are in desperately short supply. Moreover, incoherence, irrationality, have become a perverse credential of office and a very badge of office, once assumed. Bankrupt power, vacant academe, offer only straight-faced insanity—functional, self-persuaded,

all but unreachable. They talk high-toned nonsense—deterrence, MAD, window of vulnerability, peacekeeping warheads, etc. At this point—when words convey only insanity, reveal nothing of truth, conceal almost totally the intent of the speaker and so debase the powers of the soul, and when such language, taken seriously, does like damage to the hearer—at such a point, the prophet must seek another method for his own sanity, for his soul, for the salvaging of others.

This roughly describes our situation: bankruptcy of language, destruction of truth. This is why my friends and I have recurred again and again not to words, words, words, but to an edgy, non-verbal exploratory power of the soul. To free ourselves from public insanity, we construct a sign language. We play mute in the presence of the madly verbose. We gather to ourselves the natural forces and primordial realities of the earth: water, fire, ashes, blood, living flora, varied vessels and elements of life. Planted, scattered abroad, blessed, invoked, breathed upon, dug up, annointed, outpoured, in the tic and spasm of crisis, with these we dramatize the truth about our condition, our violated and violating humanity. Such may even serve to rebuke our inhumanity.

It all seems simple, in line with tradition, as we learn in reading the Prophets. But nothing, it seems, is more complex than the effort to simplify. The effort requires that one set aside, at the beginning, such considerations as effectiveness, results, costs, goals, the gimlet glance of the technocrat (even the technocrat of the spirit), the lacklustre litany composed by those whose "rational discourse," alas, reveals only rot of the mind.

In such activity as I describe, as to effect, result, goal—one does not know. One remains quite in the dark, where, it might be added, one probably belongs.

We scatter the ashes, we pour our blood abroad (formerly on draft files, now on nuclear weapons), we stage dramatic events called "die-ins," we plant trees and present flowers. We would dramatize, make vividly present, the hellish realities of nuclear war—realities the military, the corporations, the courts and jails, the pentagon, the president, the congress, most academics, until recently most churches, for reasons of their own, have rendered abstract, distant, impregnable to understanding and conscience.

Realities of death and life. Death as social method, preempting all other human skills, claiming the field, claiming all life. We cannot abide that death be so proud. And life. Life as absolute gift, inviolate. The life of the mind, the lives of children, the aged, the unwanted and

dispensable, the poor. We cannot abide that life be cheapened, bartered, given upon, weighed against money and ego and inevitably found wanting.

So we devise these quasi-liturgies, formalized, rehearsed to a degree, but with their own spontaneity too. We ground them in the liturgical year, its life-death-new-life rhythms. Literally beyond words, the actions dramatize the waste, want, moral perfidy, of nuclear war. And the alternatives lurking below surface and appearance, when the heart and eye are aware—joy, truthfulness, the sublime worth of life.

We are told something of this by *Jeremiah*. On one occasion (chapter 19), he was instructed to buy an earthen flask, to proceed in company with authorities to a public place, a gate named for the refuse and offal dumped there. Standing in that place, he was instructed solemnly to warn the people of impending doom. In sign thereof, he was to break the flask to pieces, as the people would be broken, their cities, culture, spirit and future.

The little drama has a liturgical flavor, a procession of personages, the bearing along of a symbol, to be destroyed, an instrument of memory and truth. Finally, a fierce diatribe to bring matters home. Prior to the event, matters in Israel had gone mad. Rights were trampled, idolatry and oppression were on the rampage. Some new way of revealing the truth of things was required, so recourse was to symbolic action, which in this event succeeded, but ironically. The truth was conveyed and the prophet also paid up. *Jeremiah* was scourged and placed in the stocks. For such an outcome, good sense surely forbids longing. Punishment of those who initiate such actions has not greatly altered in intervening centuries. *Jeremiah's* act was hopeful. He did not give up, though evil rode high and corruption turned pure air foul. When words went nowhere, he found another way to convey the truth, an act risky, bound to confound and displease, but which surely was grasped.

If our hope is in Christ, can we limit a discussion of such hope to this, the moral energy required to survive an average day in the mad world? It would seem not. Something more momentous and mysterious is in question.

Let us speak first of the world of His time. Certainly, time was out of joint. Hope must have been a difficult burden, not always gracefully borne. The country was occupied, the people humiliated and resentful. And Jesus appears on the scene, healer, friend of outcast, leper and whore. His powers win a following, and contrary forces get in gear. The cosmic character is His mission—elaborated later in terms such as redemption, universal salvation, expiation, sacrifice—takes its start from modest events, connections, his quixotic conduct, discourse, self-understanding, revealed one-to-one, or to a few. He was a teacher, wonder-worker, critic of religious and civil misconduct. The opposition was alerted and quickly moved against Him.

The tone of life darkens. He makes what one can only call the wrong moves of God. Indeed, He simply seems out of place in a world of power, its plays and ploys. He lacks the will to play the game and, more, He rashly challenges the game.

And yet, He acts deliberately, thoughtfully. He is no romantic, His appeal does not lie in an offhand or out-of-hand rejection of society, its mores, structures, authorities. Nothing as simple or simple-minded as that. No solutions randomly or hastily arrived at, no sterile answers in place of fruitful questions. In many instances, refusing to generalize, casting the carefully loaded question out of orbit, confounding a self-serving inquiry by insinuating a different one, playing sage, playing fool, playing dumb, He hints at the rigors and resources native to greatness. I sense deep, wide-ranging hope in such conduct.

From a stark point of view, His hope implies this. Though He must enter the dark regions of death (meantime injustice, official hostility, betrayal)—still He does not give up on life itself, which is to say, he persisted in the defense and vindication of the powerless and the victim. He persists in the most thankless task of all. Telling the truth.

The pampered children of a culture that strives, like a foolish parent, to keep unpleasant truths away from "the youngsters," we had best go slow here. For we are as distant from (say) the life and death of a Salvadoran peasant as we are from the bloody last chapters of the Evangelists. Our connections are weak and our *simpatico* in consequence, though declared frequently in worship and in print, may justly be suspect, not only by the abovementioned peasant. Or the abovementioned Christ.

Let me confess my ignorance. I cannot easily conjure images that touch on what it means "not to give up on life." I have only the faintest inklings, through sojourns in jail, through standing in many docks. No great claim on the scale of the world and humanity, if we agree that moral stature arises through suffering. Mine is indeed a pigmy report. Still, an inkling. Chiefly through friends and family who walk with me through the thick and thin of life, I gain a hint of grace under pressure—grace, pressure, the two in loving conflict. Friends who endure death, endure and come through, the death of those they love, their own death.

Such reflections occur in pondering Christ's hope. He refused to give up on life. He refused, though evil claimed him for its prey, to give up on goodness. He unmasked injustice and hypocrisy and paid the price.

Then leaving him, they all fled away.

One of you is about to betray me.

And Peter swore, "I know not the man."

My God, why have you forsaken me?

Surely these are among the darkest words of our sorrowful history. Mercifully regarded (and we had best be merciful here—the words concern ourselves), they imply the despair of those surrounding Christ, of his inner circle. Under pressure, his friends became former friends.

But a question lingers, a question larger even than their or our questionable humanity. Larger, more hopeful even than the sad fact. We read those words of despair, betrayal, abandonment, and see our own reneging, our vile second-guessing on the high worth of goodness and truth. The question might be framed like this: *How did Christ regard such evident default, such literal running out on the debts and burdens of friendship?*

If he answered despair with despair, something momentous follows. We are indeed stuck where we so often choose to be. But what *if*, in midst of such provocation, the default of the good amid the (far more easily borne) default of the wicked, what *if* He were able to absorb that mindless (as well as terribly mindful) evil, to absorb it, to turn it around? Granted that under its assault He quakes, cries out, sweats blood, suffers what can only be seen as a dreadful execution, meantime undergoing not only the cutting of social lifeline but the death of reasoned expectation. Tested to the uttermost, He dies. And wonderfully, the ending is peaceful, a kind of Buddhist *diminuendo*, horror purged.

Something extraordinary here, for us. Hope cut to the bone, vindicated in Him. He hoped as He died that friends might be faithful, enemies reconciled. Was the hope verified? The hope of Christ is our testing.

But not all of life is testing, nor all of hopes, or we Christians would be a grimmer company than we are, in a wintrier world. Let us think not only of the hope of Christ cut to the bone, cut to the shape of the Cross, but of earlier, sunnier hope, such as shed light and warmth upon beginnings. Prior to setback, prior to dampening or disillusion, hope gathered strength at the start of His public life. A youthful hope, untried, it looked fervently on life's possibility. Its skill was that of a lively imagination. Christ imagined truly and well the life He undertook in the world. Was He to be a healer? Then He must imagine healing: what would a healed human, a healed community, look like? Would He be a teacher? What images, stories, parables, would make the truth available, attractive? Would He raise the dead? What then was death? What was its claim? And could He raise others, a stupendous toppling of the empery of death, without undergoing death in His own body, without descending into very hell and so leading the enslaved back to life?

He healed, He told the truth, He vindicated life. The illness, the untruth, the captivity to death, He understood these not so much as moral deviance (except in the conduct of envious power) but as radical inability to understand and to love.

Mistrust of love, failure of imagination. These are the icy and torrid poles of the human impasse—too hot to handle, too cold for comfort. Around these poles, His spirit plays, cooling the one, warming the other. I use the word "plays" deliberately, for His imagined world is one in which no school, including His own, is without its recess, no drudgery without its dance.

He would have about Him awakened minds, mindful hearts. He is uninterested, even scornful and off-putting, toward immature, unquestioning disciples. He hopes humans, even those shy and mistrustful of self, become not robots, even sanctified ones, nor followers, even ecstatic ones. He offers a friendship respectful of temperaments, of gifts weighty and gifts scant. Granted reasonable good luck, Christians may discover that they are awakening to the hope of Christ. More, than in becoming themselves, they come to resemble Him. □

JOURNEY TO BLOCK ISLAND

Daniel Berrigan, S.J.

John Timothy Leary, age 24, died August 31, 1982, apparently of cardiac arrest. He had served the Boston poor at the Catholic Worker for four years, had been arrested several times at nuclear think tanks and abortion centers.

A young Harvard honors grad in religious studies, his life had turned in a direction hardly to be described as American, or indeed religiously typical. Honored by Harvard for his work, he described the kudo as "an award for drowning do gooders." The self mockery was endearing, and more.

Friends describe him as without guile. His work, exhausting as it was, crowded with the unexpected, crushing demands attendant on reagonomic poverty, seemed to have endowed his spirit with both simplicity and serenity. Indeed, I remember a phrase of an Italian mystic, speaking of Christ; limpidity of soul.

He died while jogging home from a meeting. As he once said offhandedly that he habitually recited the Jesus prayer while running, it is reasonable to think that he died with the name of Jesus on his lips.

And as he carried no ID, his body lay for hours in the morgue, like any of the urban poor, dead by mischance in the street.

The consonance and coherence of such a life and death, strike hard; we are unused to it.

Those who knew him best, expressed the form of it, an "inscape" of spirit. He habitually gave his bed to this or that homeless person; so he was waked at the Catholic Worker in a plain pine box made by a friend; the body lay on a sleeping bag.

One of the city medical attendants summoned by a passer by, offered an inadvertant epitaph; "It was strange, he didn't seem dead. He was smiling. You don't often see that."

Indeed, once in a lifetime, such a life, such a death. For his friends, for a time, deeper than grief; deeper also than gratitude. R.I.P.

(In memoriam; John Leary)

New England evening, pools are to evening sky
as mother to child, child to mother.

Just now, puffing into New Haven
a scarred sooty wall—
every cranny
holds like a stone
hand's palm
a tuft, a white autumn flower.
Opposites attract? say rather, life
hangs on, puts out flags.

Birds mass like bees, the train's
entourage. We lost them at household clearings.

Premature scarlet,
sumac a swipe of blood (that near-tree
of spongy resilience, tree of the poor)

I set down
grief sharpening my sense—
everything John Leary's death denies. Would bring
the round of the world
a wild autumn nosegay, to his grave.

Who can tell
if discourse or anecdote
make most of truth?
I awake, a form
sits in shadow, birth
or death watch.
Who are the dead, who
the twice born? I cried.
It vanished.
I am left with this
meld of approximation—
death watch of my father,
fields of new children
like pods of autumn, seeding spring.

Rare spirit, rare,
Harvard College had not his peer.
"An award for drowning do gooders," he joked
when honors came his way.

Now a face shines
on water, as though an angel
shone momentary there. And we weep,
letting go.

Memory, keep him,
memory, never the less.
Summon in bread and wine
primary acts. The Lord's death
barely to be borne—
must be, must be. That necessity
I take for discipline, a bell rope
ringing changes, fast, furious
must be! must be! in dead hands.

And the sun spends itself
grandly noon to evening
like creator Spirit
sent into flood
from the Maker's hand
instructed; In mid sea
make land, make do.

Imagine John Leary came
seeker and seer to this cottage
before the world broke
his untameable heart.

Imagine his short run
ended
at this land's end.
Murmuring his Jesus prayer
at last he knew
all that is knowable
though the world's brutish will
break like sticks or bones
noblest hearts first.
At wit's end, at such ending
of promise, sweetness, surmise
fantasy takes hold—
John Leary at cliff side
life's headlong venture
by no means stalled.
John Leary, child
of air, earth, fire—
his Jesus prayer
come true at last, vision
consumes belief like a straw.

In his element at last
he follows the walker of waves.

□



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