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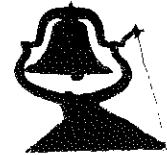
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KATALLAGETE



FALL, 1983

ABOUT THIS ISSUE



KATALLAGETE

Welcome to the "new" *Katallagete*, which really ain't so new. At least, none of us involved in putting out this thing called *Katallagete* (which nobody except us can pronounce), feel "new."

For the OFFICIAL records in some courthouse, we are a new legal entity, as the recent letter from the Committee of Southern Churchmen informed you. However, the transfer of ownership from the Committee to something called *Katallagete, Inc.*, is only making legal what has been in fact since 1975 when the Committee was no longer able to give financial support to *Katallagete*.

But there's something startlingly wonderful about thinking of this issue as representing the "new" *Katallagete*. I speak in the sense that everyday the world begins anew, and, in fact, every moment has that precious quality of newness, if we could only take on ourselves the responsibility of seizing that moment as precious and new.

So, yes, we are the "new" *Katallagete*, as we have always been new and always will be new, because we are an odd assortment of people who believe, not only with words, but especially in our lives, that the task of our living is one of, to paraphrase Buber, sifting the eternal from the pseudo-eternal. Such a process is life-long, rooted in dailiness, fraught with anxiety and filled with wonder.

So Yes! Yes! Welcome to the new *Katallagete*.

Welcome to the new, which God, in His Graciousness, brings us with each blink of our eyes.

Julius Lester

KATALLAGETE

FALL, 1983

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With this issue comes the announcement that ends the legal relationship between *Katallagete* and The Committee of Southern Churchmen—a relationship going back to the founding of *Katallagete* in 1964. Since 1975, *Katallagete*, in Berea, Kentucky, has assumed responsibilities for finances, publishing, subscriptions, business affairs, as since 1965 for editing the journal. Good friends still, *Katallagete* and the Committee of Southern Churchmen simply agreed to recognize the transfer.

At its annual meeting in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee on February 26, 1983, the Board of Directors of the Committee of Southern Churchmen voted unanimously to cease publication of *Katallagete*. A group of persons long involved with *Katallagete*, headed by the journal's longtime editor, James Y. Holloway, has formed a corporation (*Katallagete, Inc.*) to assume the assets and liabilities of *Katallagete* and to continue its publication.

NOTICE

Please address all correspondence relating to *Katallagete* — editorial matters, subscriptions, renewals, bulk mailings, contributions, and *especially change of address*, to:

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For a collection of the works of poet and satirist Anthony Towne (1928-80) I would appreciate hearing from anyone who received correspondence or unpublished manuscripts from him.

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND HOME DEFENSE

Wendell Berry

Several years ago, I attended a meeting at Madison, Indiana, that I have been unable to forget, it seems so emblematic of the fate of our country in our time. In the audience at that meeting were many citizens of local communities—my own among them—who were mistrustful and afraid of the nuclear power plant then, and still, being built at Marble Hill. Seated on the stage were representatives of Public Service Indiana, which was building the power plant, and members of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, whose job it presumably was to protect us from the acknowledged dangers of the use of nuclear power, as well as from the already recognized deceptions and ineptitudes of Public Service Indiana.

The meeting proceeded as such meetings typically proceed. The fears, objections, questions, and complaints of the local people were met with technical jargon and with bland assurances that the chance of catastrophe was small. In such a confrontation, the official assumption apparently is that those who speak most incomprehensibly and dispassionately are right; and that those who speak plainly and with feeling are wrong. Local allegiances, personal loyalties, and private fears are not scientifically respectable; they do not weigh at all against "objective consideration of the facts"—even though some of the "facts" may be highly speculative, or false. And indeed in the history of such confrontations, the victories have mainly gone to the objective considerers of the so-called facts.

They are still winning at Marble Hill, even though the fraud and incompetence of Public Service Indiana is more a matter of public record now than it was then. But that meeting produced one question and one answer which should tell us all we need to know about the nature of that victory, and more than we like to know about the role of education in such an enterprise. A lady rose in the audience and asked the fifteen or twenty personages on the stage to tell us how many of them lived within the fifty-mile danger zone around Marble Hill. The question proved tactically brilliant, apparently shocking to the personages on the stage, who were forced to give it the shortest, plainest answer of the evening: *Not one*. Not a single of those well-paid, well-educated, successful,

important men would need to worry about his family or his property in the event of a catastrophic mistake at Marble Hill.

This story would have no point so far beyond the Marble Hill danger zone if it was unusual. My point, of course, is that it is *not* unusual. Some version of it is now happening in this country virtually everywhere, virtually every day. Everywhere, every day local life is being discomforted, disrupted, endangered, or destroyed by powerful people who live, or who are privileged to think that they live, beyond the bad effects of their bad work.

A powerful class of itinerant professional vandals is now pillaging the country and laying it waste. Their vandalism is not called by that name because of its enormous profitability (to some) and the grandeur of its scale. If one wrecks a private home, *that* is vandalism. But if, to build a nuclear power plant, one destroys good farmland, disrupts a local community, and jeopardizes the lives, homes, and properties within an area of several thousand square miles, *that* is industrial progress.

For membership in this prestigious class of rampaging professionals, there are two requirements.

The first requirement is that they must be careerists—transients, at least in spirit. That is, they must have no local allegiances; they must not have a local point-of-view. In order to be able to desecrate, endanger, or destroy a *place*, after all, one must be able to leave it and to forget it. One must never think of any place as one's *home*. One must never think of any place as anyone else's home. One must believe that no place is as valuable as what it might be changed into, or as what might be got out of it. Unlike a life at home, which makes ever more particular and precious the places and creatures of this world, the careerist's life generalizes the world, reduces its abounding and comely diversity to "raw material."

I do not mean to say that people with local allegiances and local points of view would have no legitimate interest in energy. I do mean to say that their interest would be different in both quality and kind from the present *professional* interest. They could not willingly use energy that destroyed its natural or human source, or that

endangered the user or the place of use. They would not believe that they could improve their neighborhoods by making them unhealthy or dangerous. They would not believe that it could be necessary to destroy their community in order to save it.

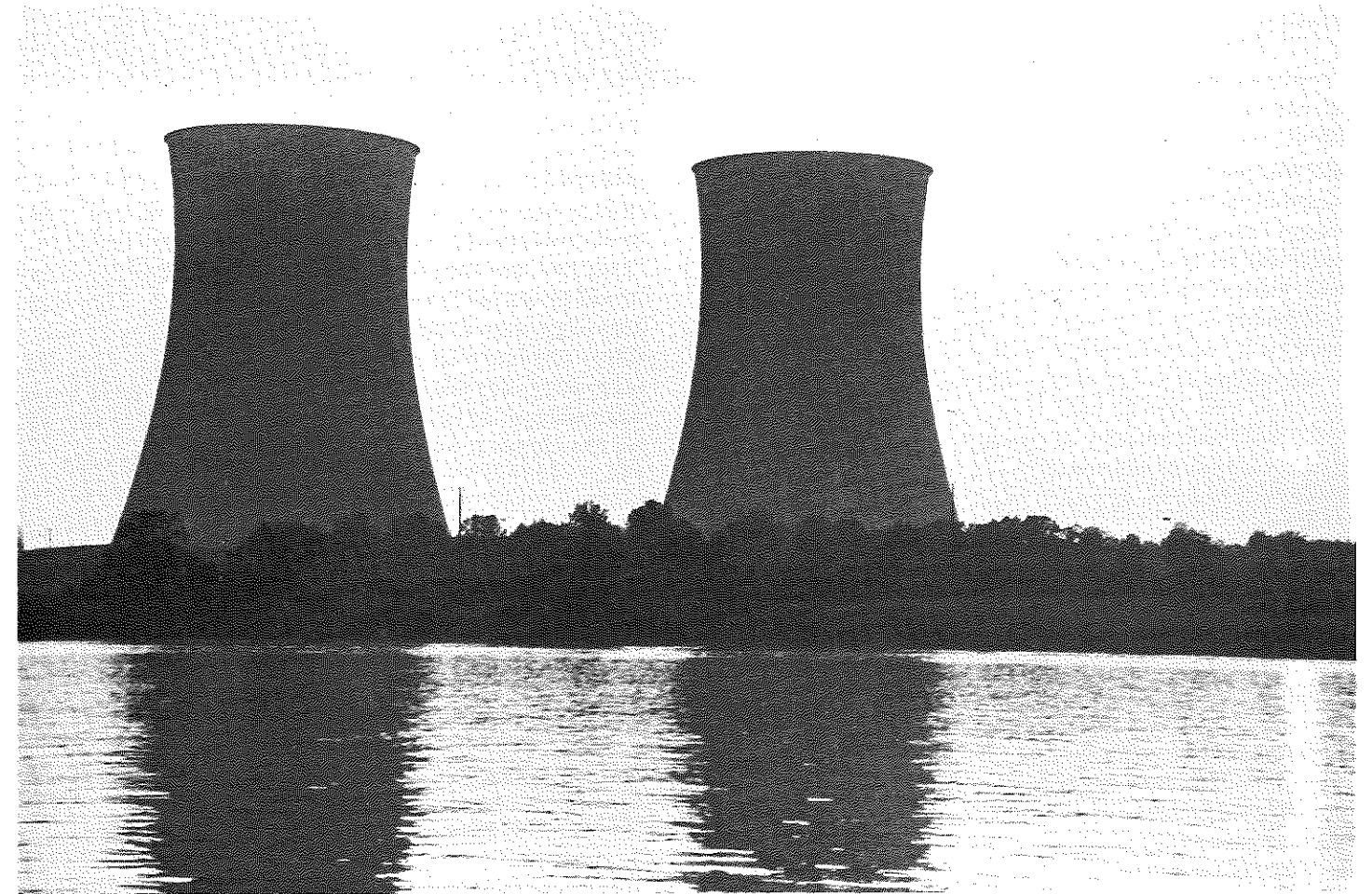
The second requirement for entrance into the class of professional vandals is "higher education." One's eligibility must be certified by a college, for whatever the real condition or quality of the minds in it, this class is both intellectual and elitist. It proposes to do its vandalism by *thinking*; insofar as its purposes will require dirty hands, *other* hands will be employed.

Many of these professionals have been educated, at considerable public expense, in colleges or universities that had originally a clear mandate to serve localities or regions—to receive the daughters and sons of their regions, educate them, and send them home again to serve and strengthen their communities. The outcome shows, I think, that they have generally betrayed this mandate, having worked instead to uproot brains and talents, to direct them away from home into exploitive

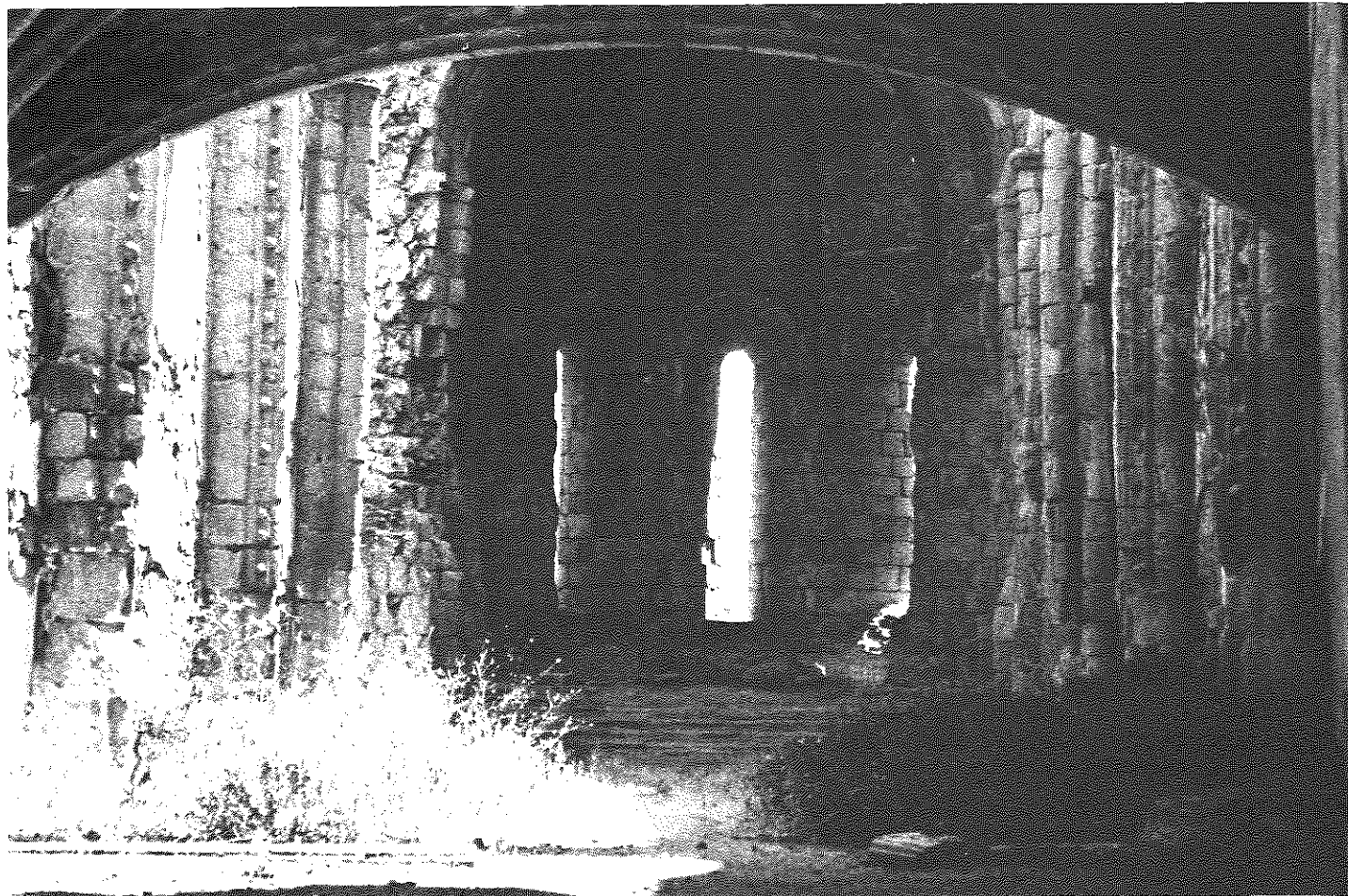
careers, and so to make them predators of communities and homelands, their own and other people's.

Education in the true sense, of course, is an enablement to *serve* both the living human community in its natural household or neighborhood and the precious cultural possessions that the living community inherits or should inherit. To educate is, literally, to "bring up," to bring young people to a responsible maturity, to help them to be good caretakers of what they have been given, to help them to be charitable toward fellow creatures. Such an education is obviously pleasant and useful to have. That a sizeable number of humans should have it is probably also one of the necessities of human life in this world. If this education is to be used well, it is obvious that it must be used some *where*; it must be used where one lives, where one intends to continue to live; it must be brought home.

Where educational institutions educate people to *leave* home, then they have re-defined education as "career preparation." In doing so, they have made it a commodity—something to be *bought* to make money with. The great wrong in this is that it obscures the fact that education—real education—is free. I am necessarily well aware that schools and books have a cost that must be paid, but I am sure nevertheless that what is taught



WENDELL BERRY is a poet, essayist, and novelist (*The Unsettling of America*, *The Gift of Good Land*, *The Memory of Old Jack* and *A Continuous Harmony* are some recent titles.) Berry resigned his teaching position at the University of Kentucky to farm full-time.



and learned is free. None of us would be so foolish as to suppose that the worth of a good book is the same as the money value of its paper and ink, or that the worth of a good teacher is equal to his or her salary. What is taught and learned is free. Priceless, but free. To make a commodity of it is to work its ruin, for when we put a price on it, we both reduce value and blind the recipient to the obligations that always accompany good gifts: to use them well, and to hand them on unimpaired.

To make a commodity of education, then, is inevitably to make a kind of weapon of it—to dissociate it from the sense of obligation, and so to put it directly at the service of greed.

The people on the stage at that meeting in Madison, Indiana no doubt thought of themselves as "public servants." But they were servants of the *general* public, which means, in practice, that they might be enemies at any time to any particular segment of that general public. As servants of what they would have thought of as the general good, they stood ready to sacrifice the good of any particular community or place—which, of course, is a way of saying that they had no reliable way to

distinguish between the public interest and their own. When they appeared before us, they were serving their own professional commitment and their own ambition. They had not come to reassure us so far as they honestly could do so, or to redress our just grievances. They had not come even to determine if our grievances were just. They had come to mislead us, to bewilder us with the jargon of their expertise, to imply that our fears were ignorant and selfish. Their manner of paying attention to us was simply a way of ignoring us.

That meeting, then, was not really a meeting at all, but one of the enactments of a division that is rapidly deepening in our country: a division between people who are trying to defend the health, the integrity, even the existence of places whose values they sum up in the words "home" and "community," and people for whom those words signify no value at all. I do not hesitate to say—what I strongly feel—that right is on the side of the defenders of homes and communities.

□

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

Rachelle Linner

My childhood is shrouded by distance; I can recall only textures and half-impressionistic images of those years. One thing I do remember is sitting with my maternal grandmother, who lived with us, and listening to stories from her Russian village life. Of all the stories she told I only remember one: when a young woman reached marriageable age and arrangements were made, the mother of the prospective husband presented the young woman with a ball of tightly meshed string and yarn, and she was asked to unravel it in a symbolic test of patience and ingenuity.

I connect that story with an event that occurred with my grandmother one hot summer day. We were sitting on our long front porch when a sudden thunderstorm threatened; as the thunder grew louder, and rain lashed down, I noticed two women in long black dresses hurrying down the street. I invited them onto the porch to wait out the storm, and so it was that my Russian Jewish immigrant grandmother with her halting English and memories of pogroms came to spend an hour offering hospitality to two Sisters of St. Joseph. Mostly, I think, she was bemused by her granddaughter's spontaneous act of hospitality, surprised by the situation she found herself in, but I sat and stared, fascinated by the large rosaries that dangled from their waist, and the strangeness of women garbed in long dresses in the summer heat.

I think of that story, because my life has been made of strands of Judaism and Catholicism; like engaged girl-women with their yarn balls, I must unravel the strands, to find where they join. That story and that event are symbolic, prophetic of the decade-long sojourn I passed in the Church.

I left the Jewish community of my birth in haste, like my ancestors who fled from slavery in Egypt without taking the time to let bread rise. I thought I would enter the promised land but found that I wandered through a desert of my own making. Instead of community, I found isolation and an identity as an Outsider.

To be Jewish in this country and culture, indeed, in most nations, is to be an Outsider. Grudgingly accepted as sojourners in this Christian nation, vigorously persecuted in other places, mocked by stereotypes of exaggeration, in spiritual and physical exile, frightened and angry—Jews have a difficult, if joyous, birthright.

As a Catholic I was part of the largest religious community in the United States: I "passed" so as to no longer be an Outsider. (Much black literature before the Harlem Renaissance has "passing" as a theme—stories of blacks light enough to "pass" as whites, until that fateful day when their true racial identity was discovered, either through voluntary confession or the involuntary and sometimes violent unmasking of the "truth." Such literature highlights the absurdity of racism but also accentuates the painful lives of those who passed.)

Despite the inherent lie in my passing, they were rich years of entering into a new faith and gaining a new vision of community, Church and God, of others and of myself. They were years blessed with friendships, experiences, thoughts and introductions that would otherwise have been closed. These are a part of me now, the religious I have known, the Catholic Worker movement, civil disobedience and "religious resistance," the magnificent beauty and awesome holiness of the Easter Vigil, the visits to monasteries, when time as I knew it ceased, suspended as I was from routine and "schedule," the smell of incense in the old stone church, the hymns I heard and sang that were a lifting of mind and heart to God, the writers and artists and poets, the ordinary, anonymous Catholics whose mute lives evangelized me in the way Pope Paul VI understood when he wrote, "the highest form of evangelization is the living of an authentic Christian life." The reality and memory of these images, and more, are parts of me, and I will not lose them because I claim them with gratitude. Yet they are only part of the story: at the center of the ball of twine is a flaw: despite my worldly identity I am not now and never have been a Catholic.

I am not Catholic because I am not baptized, never having felt called to that sacrament. I am not Catholic, but neither am I Jewish, because I believe that Jesus of Nazareth was Christ the Messiah. There are few doctrinal demands in Judaism, but one of Maimonides's thirteen articles of faith is that the Messiah has not yet appeared. To believe as I do is to be not-Jewish: despite claims, there are no such things as "Jews for Jesus" or "fulfilled Jews."

Neither Jew nor Catholic, I am both. I am an Outsider, but as I clothe myself in those robes I also name part of my vocation—to speak to both communities of faith, as one knowledgeable of each, one who has gained much from each, one who knows what is basic and what is superstition, what is false and constructed on the scaffold of hatred and ignorance.

RACHELLE LINNER is the circulation manager of *Katallagete*.

I was young when I fled Judaism and did not know what I was leaving. I thought it a religion incarnate in a heightened sense of family, community, of "nation" and "people," a religion of ritual and legalistic obligations. The Catholicism I came to know was different, for there I found a spirituality that enlivened me, gave me the enormous gift of knowing that I was one of those who was worthy of His death and resurrection, that I was of more value than the lilies of the field, that I was a child of God, and that my life was a gift that was a source of continual awe, wonder, and gratitude.

The Catholic Church, like the Orthodox Judaism I knew as a child, was upheld by ritual and highly liturgical celebrations. I felt comfortable in a faith-community invested with acts and symbols of deep meaning. Though I occasionally mourned not having known the Church Militant, I was aware that had it not been for the efforts of Pope John XXIII to open the windows of the Church to the world, I would not have been able to look in, enter, kneel in a pew and rest.

The Exodus story remains a personally powerful Biblical image, one I return to often in meditations. Exodus liberated us from slavery, but because of Exodus the law was accepted at Mt. Sinai.

While Israel was encamped here in front of the mountain, Moses went up to the mountain to God. Then the Lord called to him and said, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob; tell the Israelites: You have seen for yourselves how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself. Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. That is what you must tell the Israelites." (Exodus 19:3-7)

The chronology is important: slavery, Exodus, Mt. Sinai—and then the Golden Calf. The deliverance from Egypt took place without conditions, and only afterwards was the Law offered, after proof of God's sovereignty and power was made manifest. A verbal covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was formalized with the twelve tribes of Israel. Jewish tradition teaches that before the Covenant was offered at Sinai it had been offered to other peoples, all of whom rejected it. When accepted by the Israelites, they became, in their time and culture, a people apart, who chose to live a monotheistic faith. Once they accepted the Covenant they had the concomitant responsibility to live the Law in the world. That acceptance made them different—not superior, different. The responsibility of the Jew today is to live by faith in that promise given at the desert mountain. The tradition of "chosen people" is not the world's "why do Jews think they are better than anyone else?" but the universal religious witness to be a sign, to live in the world but not of it.

Exodus is a story of selfishness. Abraham had been prepared to sacrifice Isaac without question or hesitation. His descendants had known the bitterness of slavery and the unspeakable joy of liberation, their tears wiped dry, their groaning heard, but still they murmured in the desert, the manna and the light were given to them, and they survived. Yet so soon after accepting the Law, they built the Golden Calf (with the complicity of their high priest, a fact I offer to the countless anti-cleric Catholics who sit in Sunday pews).

Exodus is a parable for vocation, which was the great gift the Church gave me. In a musty used-book store I patronized in Washington, D.C., I found, in a book I'd bought, a holy card, and its words have haunted me since: "First give yourself to God and then to the work that God gives to you." Only by following vocation does a person achieve sanctity, and true identity comes from faithfulness to unique vocations. It is a circular process: who we are becomes known to us by the way we live in the world, by the specifics of our vocation.

Exodus is a parable for vocation, because both are founded on gratitude. It is difficult, at times, to be grateful. Too often I become anxious, forgetting that I have manna and a light to guide me in my wanderings. Too often pride, anger or selfishness push out gratitude, and on such days I feel a dullness, live as if minutes were to be plowed through with an aggressiveness of a bulldozer stealing coal from a mountain. Other days are like walking on water, when time is not to be filled but is as light as gentle rainstorms on parched dry fields: those are days of gratitude, not as an emotion, but as a prayer, and I exalt in this gift of life, in the fact of being in this world. This is where vocation starts, when my being utters the prayer of Mary, "God who is mighty has done great things for me" and "Who am I, that thou art mindful of me?" The prayer is the beginning, and I have yet to cultivate that quality of joyful obedience that shines with such radiance in Mary's life. (On some summer evenings, once the intense heat of the day has faded and the air less cloying with humidity, I walk at dusk, and sometimes say the Rosary. The heat reminds me of what she must have known in a desert village, and I think of Mary, hidden, anonymous, raising her child in ordinary family life—she who allowed grace to interrupt her life, to change her plans, and because she said "let it be done to me according to Your will" she is greeted and praised by countless ordinary and anonymous men and women, and she prays for us, now and at the hour of our death.)

It is ironic that I've never known what my vocation is, but I suspect that being an Outsider is part of it. Judaism and Catholicism both place a strong emphasis on community, on a shared Biblical and communal history,



on tradition and one's place within that, on one's relationship to a larger faith-community. Human beings need to know themselves as part of something greater and older than themselves, part of a rich, long tradition of faith whose fabric has been woven over centuries. Human beings need to be not insignificant but bearers of a legacy of enormous import and significance. This need is no less for an Outsider.

There are fewer acts of violence, fewer legal restrictions to anti-Semitism in the United States but it is difficult to be Jewish here, partly owing to assimilation (which can be blatant—like mine—or subtle, accepting cultural values while not publicly converting to another faith). Part of that difficulty comes from history: the world's perceptions of Jews have translated into pogroms, inquisitions, crusades, and culminated in the Holocaust, an event of horror that was not an aberration as much as an extension of all that came before. Since then some individuals and churches have explored the roots of the theology that leads to anti-Semitic violence, but it will be a long and painful reversal, for it is a hatred rooted in the distant past, in the years when the Jewish community gave birth to the early Christians, those who believed Jesus of Nazareth was Christ the Messiah. A difference of faith was hardened by the apologetics of St. Paul and strengthened when the early Christians went forth to preach to the Gentiles. A theological dispute created the belief that Christianity was superior, which meant Judaism was inferior, the first part of the story, a necessary but flawed chapter in salvation history. Central to the hatred is the mythology that the Jewish

community, not the Romans, not the Sanhedrin, was responsible for Jesus' death. **JEW AS CHRIST KILLER:** that accusation rings through the centuries, jeering taunt or prelude to violence. Jesus died, Pilate washed his hands, and the guilt has fallen on Jewish shoulders from that day onward.

The Orthodox Jew takes on the burden of observing religious law but must shoulder as well being Jewish in a hostile and alien world, with the necessary adjustment in personal behavior needed to cope with hostility, mockery and misunderstanding.

Some within the Jewish community perceive Judaism as a nationality or culture instead of faith and feel deeply rooted to their community, "peoplehood" and culture, a commitment that may supersede identification with the nation of one's birth. Others emphasize it as a faith, observe religious law and ritual, study holy texts, seek to live a pious life in the midst of daily, often mundane, tasks. Still others attempt to assimilate into secular culture (but the experience of European Jews shows that assimilation is a questionable protection at best: whether Yiddish was spoken in a Polish ghetto or a fluent, cultured German in Berlin, the blood was the same, as was the result).

I was raised in a small town with a large Jewish community. I was raised not only Jewish, but as an Orthodox Jew, with much attention to the observance of ritual, cultural heritage, and community.

Though it can happen, the intent of Jewish law is not the burden of scrupulosity. (I can still recall the intense dread I experienced when I ate, in all innocence, my first shrimp, given me by the Catholic neighboring family, who were themselves so religious that they would not have knowingly corrupted one so young. Once recovered from that guilt, I loved both seafood and Catholics.) The strict dietary laws—the interdiction of shellfish and pork, the separation of meat and dairy products—are not to be explained or understood, they are to be followed. The 613 laws observed by Orthodox Jews concern all aspects of human behavior and circumstance, their end to achieve a holistic rather than fragmented life. The law is a means to an end, the achievement of a life suffused with a sense of the holy, a perpetual awareness of the immanence of God. In the irony of the spiritual life, such obedience can lead to freedom. All life is seen as cohesive, an opportunity for prayer and expressions of gratitude.

Parallels exist between Orthodox Judaism and monasticism but also differences. Judaism rejects celibacy and isolation from the world, seeking moderation rather than self-denial as a good, and it is within the family that a thorough religious life is lived. Forced away from an ecclesiastical-structured faith following the destruction of the Temple and evolving during the Diaspora, the family became the center of ritual faith. But a monastic community is also a family,

one which also understands the potential of human aspiration to sanctity.

Further parallels occur between Judaism and Catholicism: both were shaped by years of immigration, created permanence and security in the midst of that trauma of coming to a land of strange language, custom and hostility. Both religious communities eased that transition, creating a familiar cultural environment, and through social and communal institutions offered a true and viable alternative to American culture. For a time. Both also suffered "upward mobility" and the countless human tragedies imbedded in that neat sociological phrase.

In my family, my grandparents were the immigrants, leaving Russia and Poland a decade before the Holocaust raged through those villages, forever destroying the life and ethos told in shabby walls of stark rural poverty.

Although they left when they did, I am a child of the Holocaust—not physically but spiritually and emotionally. I realized that when reading Helen Epstein's *Children of the Holocaust*. Herself the child of survivors, Epstein sought to identify the characteristics of children whose parents had survived the camps and to understand the legacy passed on—a birthright positive as well as negative. Above all else occurred a sense of new life, evidence of the power of love over death, the awesomeness of creation, an intensity and fierceness about living. "By all rights my life should have been over the day the selection was made at Auschwitz. These years since have been pure gift."

Pain was handed down as well: a relentless drive to become self-sufficient, exaggerated efforts to protect their children against harm, a deep mistrust of the non-Jewish world and anger at those who had not understood their suffering but had reduced their lives to an either/or assumption: either one resisted or went passively to be slaughtered—or worse, cooperated. To degrade suffering by such simplistic assumptions robs it of meaning, a pathetic effort to ameliorate the consciences of those who stood and let it happen, who refused to believe the stories and then the reality of the death camps, who would not allow the pain of others to touch their own fear and hate and humanity. Those who survived the camps are marked, uncomfortable mirrors to a world that wanted to forget, a world that understood that respectable and ordinary good citizen of the Reich who lived oblivious to the odors of burning bodies. (I first met a Holocaust survivor when I was ten, riding the bus to New York City to visit relatives. She was elderly, thin, and when she reached up to stow her luggage on the rack I saw the blue numbers seared on her wrinkled flesh. Even then I knew enough to be silent, not just in words, but in my core, to be silent in the presence of this woman who had suffered I did not know what, and survived I did not know how, but who shared her lunch with me, her pleasantries in broken English, and all those questions of meeting another in that space of silence.)

Less intense than Helen Epstein's, my childhood was painted on the same canvas, with a glaring litany of "only with Jews can you be safe and find acceptance, for *They* will always turn against us, against you." Not surprisingly, I find it difficult to trust. (The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon was an agonizing time for me. For all the hatred I felt toward Menachim Begin, for all the pain I knew in confronting the image of Jew as killer, as efficient soldier, I was fearful of a resultant anti-Semitism, similar to "white backlash." I was trapped in a circular pattern of reason, emotion and fear. I heard my own words spoken by fellow-pacifists but detected a glee in their words at being able to be righteously and justly anti-Semitic. My own earlier distinction between Jew and Israel as a nation-state was obliterated in the confusion of my anger and fear and sadness. I screamed, in wordless inner screams, "Why should Jews be expected to follow the Sermon on the Mount? Show me one 'Christian' nation which has embodied the Gospel call to vulnerability and dependence on justice rather than might? Why are Jews supposed to be super-human, different even in this, not allowed the excess of violence and hatred and the mad idolatry of self-defense that every other nation is allowed." Even then I knew that the excursion into Lebanon was not self-defense but imperialistic aggrandisement. And I was ashamed, as I silently screamed this tirade against Begin and myself and the headlines that screamed **WE NEVER THOUGHT THE CHILDREN OF THE HOLOCAUST WOULD BE KILLERS**. Why not, why not? Does suffering automatically teach compassion? sensitivity? gentleness? Can it not as well lead to anger? resentment? self-righteousness? a crippling fear? What does it mean to be a victim? Suffering happens, to individual and communities and nations, and the victim can be consumed by bitterness and desire for revenge or can be transformed to live in redemptive witness.)

Suffering, more often, leads to anger and isolation, and the isolation fosters the fear that began the cycle and continues it in endless pain. That original and interesting American Jew, Abbie Hoffman, once remarked, "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean the F.B.I. isn't following you." Hoffman is who he is because he is Jewish—in no way could he have been Baptist or Methodist and still been the Abbie Hoffman who screamed through the sixties.

It can be said as well: "just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean there are no anti-Semites." Like all forms of racism, anti-Semitism relies on caricature over-simplifying and mocking human complexity. Knowing them as caricature, I nevertheless present the two most common ways of being Jewish in America: the Super-Jew and the Self-Hating Jew.

The Super-Jew identifies only with people and institutions and culture that are Jewish, always on guard

against, even searching for, anti-Semitic insinuations, sensitive to the slightest change in the climate of public discussion, particularly regarding that litmus test, American support for the reigning Israeli government's policies.

The Self-Hating Jew is the descendent of those who changed their names, who grew ashamed of old traditions and those who embodied them—the long dark coats worn by old bearded men, the loud and passionate worship services in poor synagogues, the broken English that lapsed into the well-loved, expressive, comfortable folk language of Yiddish, the rituals and foods that accompanied feasts and holidays, that all-encompassing world of family and community. These are the fully assimilated Jews, with minimal (if any) contacts with Judaism, who respond with anger when reminded of their roots with a childish "I didn't ask to be born Jewish." That may be true. But religion, like race, nationality, sex, economic level and family is an "accident" of birth that imparts uniqueness, defines not the totality of existence but a place where one starts a journey to being fully human.

I have lived both these caricatures: raised in an atmosphere of the Super-Jew, in my years of passing I became a Self-Hating Jew, a label I assiduously denied because of its painful accuracy. I was a Jew who ate forbidden food, who gave up all public Jewish identity, who fasted on Good Friday instead of Yom Kippur, a Jew who knelt at the foot of the cross, who denied and destroyed who she was to gain acceptance in the eyes of the world.

She refused the negative label of Self-Hating Jew and called herself a Radical Catholic, a respectable, comfortable image. Denying any connection with the countless others who lived out the assimilation drama before, she mocked any accommodation to the values of modern American society.

She claimed to be a human being, not a Jew. Unable to understand that central, racial part of her identity, she could only limp through her days—limp, not like Jacob who earned his by wrestling with the angel through the long night, but because she did not wrestle. Trying to transcend her Judaism, she became trapped in a perverse self-righteousness. Jews, she argued, worry about Jews in Russia and Israel (a nation like all other nations), while she cared for all victims of injustice in this suffering and tortured world: Vietnamese and blacks and Chicanos and native Americans and Chileans fleeing Pinochet's murderous junta and migrants and poor whites and miners and textile workers and. . . Such words were traitorous ones of moral superiority and the utter blindness of pride.

I reject both these ways of being Jewish in the world, and now, clothed with the robes of the Outsider, I embark on a journey to seek a third way.

To wander is a Jewish calling, for we have not been settled since the beginning of the Diaspora. The history of Judaism has been altered since the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel, but for centuries we were nomads, forced to wander, never comfortably at home, a part, but not a part, of other nations. We were a people who suffered because we were denied that essential human relationship of working the land, of bringing food forth from the soil with our efforts, of being connected to the land with human labor.

Israel has given the world the image of Soldier Jew, but more significant (and usually overlooked) is the image of Farmer Jew. The earliest Zionist settlers immigrated to Palestine as an experiment, radical Socialists who saw the new land as an opportunity to flee not only political and religious persecution but the social oppression they knew in their homelands. They were Utopians who affirmed and also rejected—theirs was an almost fierce anti-intellectualism, extolling the benefits and health of manual labor, and in the society of the kibbutz that they created there was strict equality between women and men (which still exists in some kibbutz, with legality if not the passion for justice that inspired the earliest settlers), of a rebellion against the other-worldly, ascetic Eastern European Jewish community life.

American Jews are still Diaspora Jews, a Diaspora different since the Holocaust, different since establishment of the State of Israel. So it is right and Jewish for me to be in Exile. No longer thinking I will reach the Promised Land, I begin this journey through the desert, rejoice in the act of walking, in placing one foot before the other, gathering manna, watching for the light that guides me, and in a curious way, blessing the harshness of the sun, the endless vistas of sand, these gifts of the wilderness.

Each of the many orders in the Church has its own charism, and Judaism, too, is a garment woven of many strands: the wisdom of the Talmud, the joy of Hassidism, the mysticism of the Caballa, the tragedy of history, the devotion and generosity evoked in the experience of ordinary Jews as well as in the brilliant thinkers and writers, the great teachers and rabbis, the obscure and famous.

One Cabalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria, suggests that for the Creation to have occurred, God had to shrink Himself, reduce Himself to make room for the Creation. In his book *Godwrestling*, Arthur Waskow reflects on the hiddenness of God before Creation, and on its significance:

This is one of the most profound expressions in human thought of the dialectic between despair and joy. Imagine!—in order for that unutterably joyful event, the Creation, to occur, God's very Self had to contract, be withdrawn, be limited. For there to be loving dialogue, there must be two, and therefore there must be dividedness and alienation.

Waskow suggests that we again live in a time of God's hiddenness, with both good and bad resulting. The good he identifies as more vigorous human efforts to end war and injustice—even without God's help, these struggles are good. The bad, the evil, is that God's hiddenness evokes "not only decent Godless struggles but demonic outbursts that serve the gods of hatred and injustice. Is it then a divine contraction that lies at the root of the Holocaust?"

We live when the technology that led to Hiroshima can be put to good use, Waskow argues, in restoring a sense of human community, or that same technology can lead to the destruction of the human race. He speaks of Hiroshima and the Holocaust as signs, symbols of what might be:

... each in its uniqueness is a foretaste of possible nothingness. The Jewish people was not destroyed at Auschwitz; the human race was not even nearly destroyed at Hiroshima. But the threats are there now. The two are not meant to be compared but multiplied. Multiply Nazism by nuclear bombs—the result is the annihilation of any one people or of all the peoples. . . . Holocaust and Hiroshima come together to teach us that to destroy any one people it will be necessary to risk destroying all. . . . The Jewish people has been prophetic and proleptic for humankind before; God has warned us that if the Holocaust is not to be visited on all humanity, it is we, not God, who will have to grant that it is not so.

I have met the hibakusha, survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They speak simply of their experiences in the days of the bombings and of their suffering, both physical and psychological, in the years since: the A-bomb sickness that manifests itself in insidious ways, the lack of financial and medical support they need, the children born to women after the bomb, children who have since died of the sickness. Their stories move the listener, but more: as a group of people in the world they live redemptively. They say to the world: Look at us. We are survivors. Listen to our stories. No one else should have to suffer what we have. We know what you can only imagine. We have had our flesh torn and burned, our blood and marrow deformed, our skin marred by keloid scars. It is enough that it happened once. No more Hiroshimas. No more Nagasakis.

The hibakusha are a sign, wandering the earth, pilgrims offering their suffering to the world, their presence among us perhaps one reason why those weapons have never again been unleashed from the silos.

A Hassidic legend says that in every generation God raises up 36 just people, and because they live justly they offset the evil that is done in the world, staving off destruction. But these 36 people are not recognized: they are anonymous, perhaps even to themselves. I think of the hibakusha in that way, and their witness gives strength to my own.

Speaking of Hiroshima and Holocaust, as Waskow does, gives me intimations of that third way of being Jewish in the world: of being a sign, a witness, a wanderer who speaks of human cruelty, and of God, of His hiddenness and presence. The prophets tell us of a punishing as well as a giving side to the Covenant.

To be Jewish is to bear in one's life historical knowledge of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt as well as the joy when, with an "outstretched arm and a mighty hand," God delivered us from that bondage. Tradition teaches that during the Passover seder one eats the bitter herbs to remember the bitterness of slavery and one drinks the wine to remember the joy of liberation, and both are necessary to properly celebrate the Passover. But the cup of wine is not full: before drinking, ten drops are spilled, symbolic of the ten plagues, for even on that joyful night of remembrance there is symbolic expression of sorrow that human beings, even though they were the "enemy," were killed. It is said that when the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea, angels rejoiced and God silenced them with tears, weeping over His children who were killed.



I have as a model the hibakusha. I have as another model Jesus on the Cross. That is ironic, because the Cross has been used to justify the murder of Jews since He Himself died. I stand there nonetheless, at the foot of the cross, and there the Catholic and Jewish parts of my soul meet. To be Jewish is to enter that mystery of crucifixion and resurrection, of suffering, of witnessing to God's faithfulness even when He is hidden. To be Jewish is to be powerless. It is to be in exile, a person who wanders. Powerlessness can be a gift, but it is too complex and painful to contemplate, and most of us are like Peter who wanted to take up the sword and cut off the ear of the Roman guard, most of us find the cross still a scandal and a folly. We refuse to look at the cross, because it is difficult to believe that God can transform the powerlessness of the cross into the power that comes when we give Him our lives in total abandonment and allow ourselves to be used as His instruments.

The Suffering Servant passages of *Isaiah* have been read by Christian eyes as foretelling the coming of Jesus as Christ, as Messiah. But if left to themselves, they as well talk about the people Israel, not the religious establishment of two thousand years ago or today, not those who engage in the idolatry of political and military might, but the *anawhim*, the faithful remnant.

For a decade I attempted to imitate Christ as a Catholic, but now I embark on an attempt to imitate Him as a Jew. Perhaps I will be mocked, perhaps some will scorn me, contemptuous of what appears theological heresy, angry that I have lied by "passing." Ah, yes, but He too understood what it was to be mocked and

scorned, He understands the sufferings of all of us: the Jew in the Soviet Union who worships in secret, passing on prayers to his children, the Palestinians in the camps, the Jew in Israel who builds a settlement in a foolish effort at "security," the prisoner on death row, the victims of violence, of murder and rape and economic injustice, the abused child, the parents warring with children and children with parents, the Vietnamese boat people in crowded Asian camps, the miner with black lung, and the sick and dying in hospitals. He understands all the sufferings, and each act is another stroke of the lash on His bloodied back, each act the crushing pain of the nails pounded into His hands, each act the suffocating pain of a dying breath, each act that cry of abandonment, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" To each He says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

I cannot say that yet, for I am vengeful and unforgiving for far less, rarely allow the pain I feel to be transformed from humiliation to humility. But I think at such times of Peter, in whom I see much of my own hastiness in attempting to walk on water, the foolishness of wanting to build tents to hold forever a moment of transfiguration, the tragedy of denying Him three times, of falling asleep and not watching through the night. Jesus told Peter how he would die. "I tell you solemnly, when you were younger, you went where you wanted to go. Now that you are older they will bind you hand and foot and take you where you do not want to go. But that too shall be for the greater glory of God." As shall all else. □

THE POSSIBILITY OF PREACHING

Thomas W. Currie

Parish ministers are inevitably flattered and surprised when invited to reflect theologically about the parish ministry. Understand the great temptation to a pastor to write about what he was trained to do and has been doing. The temptation is to say, "Now I am going to tell you what it's really like out there and what you *really* ought to be doing at the Seminary." I have tried to resist the temptation. Lest I be accused of sending unguided missiles, I have adopted a new motto, which is a variation on the Texas Highway Department's "Drive Friendly": it reads "Shoot Friendly." What follows are friendly shots, fired at random somewhat but aimed primarily at parish ministry in the Reformed tradition, which I believe the most free, worthy, and happy calling of the church, especially since that calling finds focus in a community of the Word sustained by preaching, teaching and pastoral care.

I begin with a citation from Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* about theology. The citation is from II/1, which describes the attributes of God, specifically God's glory. As so often in Barth, one thing leads to another, and he begins to speak of the glory of theology, employing a term from Anselm of Canterbury to describe theology's *pulchritudo*. He writes:

To find the sciences distasteful is the mark of the Philistine. It is an extreme form of Philistinism to find, or to be able to find, theology distasteful. The theologian who has no joy in his work is not a theologian at all. Sulky faces, morose thoughts and boring ways of speaking are intolerable in this science. May God deliver us from what the Catholic Church reckons one of the seven sins of the monk—*taedium*—in respect of the great spiritual truths which theology has to do. But we must know, of course, that it is only God who can keep us from it.

One could substitute "preaching" for "theology" and Barth's words would read as well. What strikes me is not just that the reformed preacher is engaged in the happiest free enterprise but that the beauty of it, its *pulchritudo*,

its delight, is in the Lord Himself, the One whom, Barth reminds us, is alone able to keep us from the monkish sin of *taedium*. And yet, *taedium*, and its cousin, *accidie*, are not just monkish sins; the reformed minister also must fight sloth and despair. Indeed, sometimes these sins are the chief enemies to glorifying and enjoying God at all, much less forever, as the catechism dictates. I am concerned with the lack of joy and confidence of the church in its proclamation and by contrast, the grimness with which we deal with the sin of *taedium*. Do not misunderstand; I am not suggesting a course in "total joy." I suggest a connection between a tentative church on the one hand and grim fatigue and boredom on the other. That connection is *technique*, and its influence is pervasive.

By technique, I do not mean the various skills a pastor learns, either in the seminary or in the parish, for dealing with the multitude of tasks which he is called to perform. In the reformed tradition, significance is given to certain skills: listening, speaking, and administration, to name a few. Yet these skills and whatever gifts the minister brings to the task are not ends in themselves; they are for the ministry of the church, that is, to help it listen, speak and serve better. As I am using "technique," it can be a skill—exegesis or homiletics, for example—underlying which is an ideology, psychology, or philosophy that seeks to serve the church by offering a key, a cipher, a language that would "make all things new," that would open up a way to God *unmediated* by Jesus Christ. In other words, insofar as technique operates without decisive recourse to Jesus Christ, it is akin to Barth's notion of "natural theology," and even more, Bonhoeffer's "secular methodism."

I realize that as soon as I have said "unmediated by Jesus Christ," I have used a code word that could itself be called a key or a cipher. If so, I am glad. For the crucial question facing the parish minister today in his preaching is this: how does one proclaim the Good News? If theology itself can become technique, if Pharaoh's magicians can do the same trick as well or better than the servants of God, what then? Is preaching possible? How can we be certain that in our preaching we are not just piling technique upon technique and cloaking our clever "truths" in our winning personalities and calling it *Good News*? As a *practical* matter, the work of exegesis and

theology is designed to set boundaries, but these skills can become ciphers or keys of their own—so that if they tell us what not to preach, we seem left to their mercy to tell us what we can say, or even to advise we say nothing at all.

Actually, saying nothing at all as an alternative should appeal to us more than it does, not because silence is non-technical. It isn't. But perhaps silence conveys the emptiness of our resources in trying to describe the glory of God. How to speak is not the problem. How to listen is not the problem. We have learned so well "communication skills," to repeat almost liturgically, "what I hear you saying is. . ." that one yearns for *less* listening, *less* communication and more straight talk. But straight talk, like the simplicity of preaching which the Book of Church Order admonishes, is hard to find. We have forgotten the foundation of preaching, the purpose for preaching. The many preaching techniques from which to choose either hide or obscure the question of *why* we should speak at all.

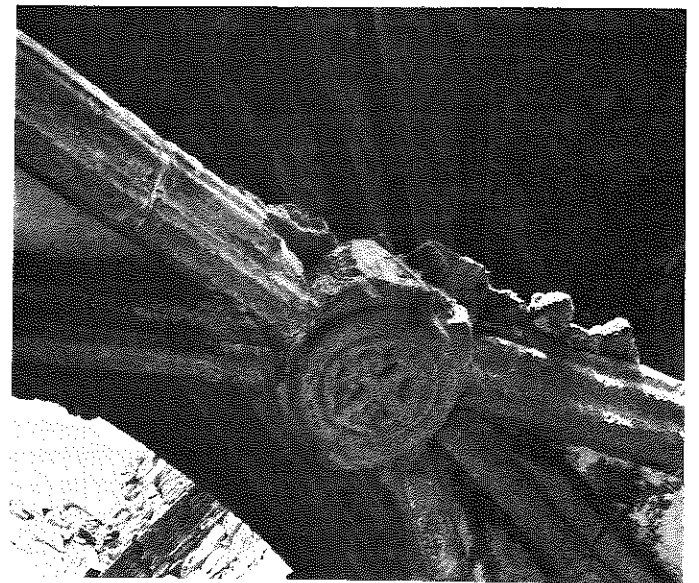
That preaching is a questionable enterprise is hardly news. I observe with dismay that the experts now record preaching is "in." When I was in seminary it was "out." Being "out" at least had the advantage of forcing us called to preach to examine what we were doing, to muster a reason for haranguing the people of God. Admittedly, some reasons were bizarre and best forgotten, but there was a healthy suspicion of technique. That preaching is "in" now dismays not because I have an alternative but because I wonder if this transition from "out" to "in" reflects the fact that a real crisis of understanding has passed, or merely a change of mood that is enamored with the technique of preaching. I suspect the latter. In any case, the possibility that preaching has no ground to stand on, that it is at once the most crucial and yet most questionable mark of the church—this, I think, needs to be emphasized as a first principle. What makes preaching so questionable?

My first thesis is that our preaching is called into question by the fact that the preaching of Jesus is actually proclaimed and heard in the church today, in and among the local congregation. Preaching is not a questionable enterprise because we preachers or our auditors are especially aware of our sinfulness, or because there are cultural and societal problems that must be addressed first. Rather, preaching is questionable because its reality, its own *pulchritudo*, if you will, is in Luther's words "such a truly splendid and magnificent thing" that

it lays its own foundation in the life and lives of a congregation, breaking open our words and coming to speech in the flesh. What this means is that our words are inevitably wounded, our techniques discarded, our language opened up so that its true and utter impotence is exposed, and hence its true power to signify beyond itself is secured.

The real questions begin for the preacher not with how to construct out of the raw material of the Bible a compelling, twentieth-century address—there are techniques for that, some quite clever; the real question begins when the preacher finds himself confronted, threatened, wounded by the word he thought to manipulate, with no ground—least of all the ground of technique—to stand on. Job's friends were technicians, in part because they were concerned with the issue of how to put Job in touch with the reality of God. However, Job's problem was just that: he *was* in touch with the living God, so his own questions were infinitely deeper and more unnerving because Job believed. His very faith forced him beyond both skepticism and jejune theodicy—both easily remedied by technique—to the authentic questions asked in our own day rarely in the pulpit but agonizingly in the lives of those, for example, who lived through the Holocaust.

As I read these accounts of God's people, I am struck not only by the unrelenting questions asked—out of faith, not apart from it—but even more by their impatience with the techniques we use to forget or trivialize these questions into mindless chatter. Those for whom preaching is not questionable, who have not wrestled with the Word and, like Jacob, found themselves disjointed, so that they limp—these preachers will always raise questions ideally suited to technique. Their "radical" questions will only disguise an all-too-comfortable mastery of the word, as they busily create a market for their wares—whether guilt or success or Marxist utopia.



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Of such folk, William Styron's heroine, Sophie, in *Sophie's Choice*, spoke well. This Polish Catholic survivor of Auschwitz surfaces in New York after the war and is taken in by a group of left-leaning intellectuals who wear her almost as a badge of their purity. One day she finds herself sitting on a beach facing Long Island Sound, surrounded by her friends, each breathlessly describing faults as illuminated by their various analysts. In the midst of this Sophie contemplates suicide. "Why?" she is asked. She replies, "I am surrounded by such unearned unhappiness."

"Unearned unhappiness" and technique fit hand in glove. We have become, in Joseph Epstein's phrase, "connoisseurs of grievance". Here is *taedium* in the contemporary church. What is exceptional here is not fatigue. Fatigue, after all, can be good for the soul as well as the body. A reformed pastor who does not suffer fatigue is neither reformed nor a pastor. But that it should be so easily remedied and in such a boring, predictable way! St. John of the Cross at least had a "dark night of the soul." We instead are told that if we "prioritize" or "hear where we're coming from" or perhaps "raise our consciousness," we shall have no more than a dark afternoon or two. The preacher becomes a "poseur," affecting a posture enabling him to be flexible enough to be taken as nobody's fool but thoughtful enough to be "concerned." The ludicrous figure of Rev. Mackerel (Holy, for short) found in the pages of Peter DeVries' novels in the exemplar of the preacher as technician. Hip, holy, and usually high, Rev. Mackerel has achieved notoriety for his oft-quoted prayer at the moment of catastrophe: "May the good Lord protect us from such terrible acts of God."

Most fatiguing is not the task of ministry and its frustrations but the spiritually devastating cultivation of technique. This makes the reformed pastor, called to preach Good News, know with Kierkegaard that he or she is being trampled by geese. The sheer silliness of it all is depressing: trying to lay bare the claim of the Gospel in a church bent on taking its spiritual temperature, guilty with its manifold failings and yet much more interested in discovering techniques for dealing with a guilt than being cut to the bone by it. Such a church can neither laugh nor inspire. It can only chatter. It misses the seriousness of the Gospel and the divine comedy. To be sure, the church is uncertain of itself, its mastery of the liturgy, of ecclesiastical politics and above all of the "right" positions on the social and political issues. Its mastery of all of this is simply too fragile to tamper with.

Independence of thought is not highly prized here. Far more important is scoring points, manifesting, rather easily really, one's "real concern" for others, but rarely by putting that concern to any theological test. Item: recently in my presbytery, the examinations committee heard a young woman answer the question "Who is God?" with the breathless "God is a rainbow," an answer thought a charming (if somewhat naive)

affirmation of faith. Item: in our presbytery, we spent most of one of our meetings setting goals, which ranged from addressing the problem of world hunger to increasing staff at presbytery level. Wedged in were such jewels as "being better people," "loving each other more," "being more sincere with each other"—aims all laudable. Mild boredom turned to panic, at least with me, when these goals were taken with puritan-like seriousness. A Kafkaesque silliness of almost metaphysical proportions, an Abbott and Costello "Who's on first?" routine, this time with Calvinistic sternness, seemed to unfold. Warily, I turned to my elder and sighed, and not for the first time asked, "How did we get here?" Always a step ahead of me, he replied, "How do we get out of here?"

Your judgment is as good as mine, probably better. My own suspicion is that before things get worse, in the words of Kurt Vonnegut, they will get worse. In any case, "How did we get here?" is beyond my competence to discern. What concerns me is that here we are and what that portends for preaching.

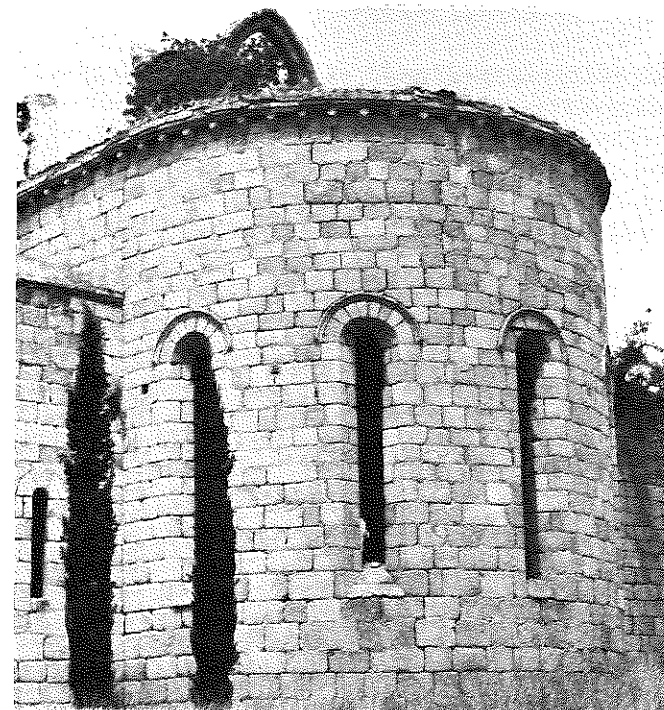
If the Word is proclaimed in the church, and therefore calls into question all our techniques to master it, and thereby avoid it; if pursuit of technique is infinitely more fatiguing, if less demanding, than the struggle with the Word, then what is lacking is not a commitment to social change, or willingness to accept a new view of the world, but simple obedience—precisely in the parish as minister of Word and Sacrament. If Calvin was right that knowledge of God is born of obedience and if he meant not another works-righteousness but the obedience of Jesus Christ, then our obedience as servants of this Word as preachers must with fear and trembling be offered up—to use Paul's no-nonsense language—as a living sacrifice that the Crucified will turn to his own end, obedience that subjects our words to the judgment and redemption of Christ.

It is not fashionable to speak this way, for fear of over-dramatizing what is to most a bloodless affair. But here, if nowhere else, the blood is on the floor, the body is broken. If we have nothing to say about Him whom the Creed, in summing up His whole life says only that He suffered, then we have nothing to say. It is here that the preacher learns the possibility of preaching. Jesus' words on the cross—"it is finished"—apply also to us. Our clever techniques are finished. Finished are our earnest questions as to the possibility of preaching. It is finished. What is possible to say, what is possible even to ask, arises from the killing and making alive of God's Word in the flesh.

That this Word kills and makes alive is the only possibility for preaching today. That means we do not slay the Philistines with our "prophetic" words: but we confess that all our currency has been devalued beyond comprehension, that here the only possibility of speech is Jesus' proclamation of Himself as the crucified and risen Christ. He has emptied us so he will fill us with his spirit.

That silence, emptiness, not-knowing might also constitute preaching is worth remembering. To be sure, such contemplative virtues can themselves become techniques. And there is always the danger that we will be more interested in preaching about our silence, emptiness, and incomprehension than about Him whose word in overcoming silence reveals it, in filling us discloses our emptiness, in giving Himself to be known, reveals His own mystery.

Yet silence must be risked, just as speaking must, not because we give proof to our own good intentions but because the very fullness of the Word, its beauty and power make beggars of us, as Luther said. Dark nights of the soul are not to be entered into casually. Faced with the dark night of the soul on the cross and the words for us in His cry of dereliction, we do well to keep silent. Before the fullness of that emptiness, not to speak at all is better than to speak too soon.



Jurgen Moltmann has attempted to rehabilitate the mystical tradition for reformed theology—a project for which I do not share his enthusiasm. But, he makes helpful observations important for preaching. Moltmann notes the revival of interest in things mystical, even in societies that set little store by the contemplative life. "What is not understandable," he observes, "is that meditation exercises are recommended to nervous activists and over-wrought managers as a valuable means of recovering balance, and yoga techniques retailed as ways of improving performance." Moltmann adds: "But what for the mystics are positive virtues are for the modern man pain and sickness—alienation, solitude, silence, separation, inner emptiness, exposure, poverty, not-knowing and so on. . . . What the Monks yearned after in order to find God, modern man flees as if from the devil."

Moltmann takes modern man a little too seriously, I think—primarily to identify the monk's cell with the political prisoner's and the mystical with liberation theology—but he is right in his perception that we fear silence, real emptiness, not-knowing, as we fear the devil and that we refuse to stop looking for a technique to save us.

Moltmann neglects the possibility, however, that such "mystical virtues" can themselves become the ultimate technique. Meditation on the passion of Christ, contemplation as the enjoyment of God, are here transformed into techniques for getting ahead.

One is tempted to say, "Only now has there been a recognition of the tremendous potential for self-realization in the techniques of the hermits and contemplatives of the desert: if only St. Anthony had known about jogging." Moltmann's insights are true that in addressing us, God's Word does shut our mouths. Here is silence. Emptiness, silence begins not before but after God speaks. We are addressed, not as pious individuals, not as contemplative seekers but as servants of that Word among the people of God. To us the Word is addressed as one of them. The Word has questions; its strangeness offends; and our techniques cannot assimilate His strangeness to easy speech. Here what is required is silence, not as a technique but as a response.

Ironically, however, one cannot keep silent. As the text is applied to us we are given to the text. Because Jesus Christ, true God and true man, sits in power at the right hand of the Father, we are given to speak the truth about God and ourselves—and here not in an accommodating way, as if God had never become incarnate and therefore needed the protection of such carefully calibrated distinctions as Finite/Infinite, Mutable/Immutable and the like. Now we speak language wholly appropriate to

the very mode of God's being God, that is human language that has been judged and redeemed in the flesh and raised in power to speak with authority. Preaching is not a matter of perpetuating an institution, or even displaying exegetical or homiletical skill. It is not a matter of mastering doctrinal orthodoxy. It is rather *good* news of great joy, joy that is also to *us* who preach. Joy that includes the silence of abandonment but is not abandoned to it; it rejoices in the very earthiness of God's language, finding there its own tongue, its own possibility, its own authority. Here, the joy of God overflows and displays itself, rejoicing not only in being Father, Son and Holy Spirit but in revealing Himself, opening the eyes of the blind, giving voice to the dumb, hearing to the deaf. Before the joy of God, whose freedom is His self-giving, who can be silent? His all-sufficiency is sufficient also for us. He has not willed to remain silent or in solitude. He has placed us in the shameful position of trying to muster from within ourselves a basis for speaking. Polanus is right: *gloria hominis*, even the glory of our preaching, *est deus*.

I take that to mean that, not on our own do we turn with joy to the vocation of preaching. Exegesis becomes a mode of listening to God's self-declaration; dogmatics represents a possibility of hearing again the echo of that song that refuses to be silent. Above all, we seize the time to trust the sufficiency, that is, the glory of God.

After all, the psalmist does not begin by singing, "Bless all that is within me". He does not begin with his faith or lack of it, with a new interpretation or style, an old discipline or method—that is the way of technique. Rather, he sings, "Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name."

With this Holy Name true preaching begins. We reject the quest for a secret technique. Before we have spoken or remained silent He has made a name for Himself. With this name we begin, and then "all that is within me" finds its proper voice. For then "all that is within me is for the blessing of the Lord; all that is within me for the blessing of His holy name". That is why here, especially here, our help is only in the name of the Lord.

Preaching is possible. But this possibility comes at the beginning, given the reality of the God who calls us to preach. Unlike techniques, whose problem is to construct a basis for commerce between God and His human creatures, preaching begins with that question behind it. Technique's choices are so infinite—a new hermeneutic, a feeling, an intuition, a sense of guilt, or finitude, something that is part of "all that is within me".

Where God Himself has established commerce, where His holy name is laid bare on the Cross, there the relevant questions arise, the props are knocked away; there we discover both our wealth and our poverty. Preaching begins.

I close with a citation from Luther which offended me in seminary but which I now appreciate more and more. He writes:

A preacher must not say the Lord's Prayer, nor ask forgiveness of sins when he has preached (if he is a true preacher) but must confess and exult with Jeremiah: 'Lord, thou knowest that what has gone forth from my mouth is right and pleasing to thee.' He must say. . . 'In this sermon, I am a confessed apostle and prophet of Jesus Christ. It is neither necessary nor good to ask for forgiveness of sins, as though the teaching were false. For it is not my word but God's which He neither will nor can forgive me, and for which He must always praise me saying: "You have taught right for I have spoken through you and the Word is mine." Whoever cannot boast thus of his preaching repudiates preaching; for he expressly denies and slanders God.

Such *hilaritas* is the opposite of *taedium*; and is itself the musical accompaniment of the Word of God. □



WJS

JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE COSMOS

William J. Schafer

I am now of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the South; he that kills me some six or seven dozen Sagans at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, "Fie upon this quiet life! I want work."

The editor of *Katallagete* made an extraordinarily perceptive remark as he assigned me to comment on Walker Percy's *Lost in the Cosmos* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983, \$14.95): "Percy surely can write novels young people like and respond to. I don't know how he does it, but my students really get into his books."

True. Perhaps more than any seriously-intentioned novelist since J.D. Salinger in the 1950's and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., in the 1960's, Walker Percy has a sure and uncanny insight into ordinary people and their lives and an appeal to that sadly neglected but priceless entity, the Common Reader. In a period (1960-80) when fiction writers formed a flying circus to swoop in ever-tightening spirals of esotericism, esthetic self-consciousness and introspective obfuscation (*vide* Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, Joseph McElroy, Rudolph Wurlitzer, William O. Gass, etc., etc.), about to disappear up their own tailpipes with a *pop!*, Percy was writing genuine novels—absorbing, dramatically convincing fictions of everyday lives refracted through a remarkable sensibility.

From the publication of *The Moviegoer* (1961), Percy has followed a powerful line of thought and feeling about the quantity and quality of anxiety and emptiness in our lives. Or to use the terminology of Kierkegaard, a prime font of Percy's *ethos*, the peculiar *Americanness* of dread and despair. His deftly-crafted, remarkably original works (*The Last Gentleman*, 1966; *Love in the Ruins*, 1971; *Lancelot*, 1977; *The Second Coming*, 1980) have *vivre* over an abyss of dread and catastrophe, a subtle dread—identity, sexuality, separation from God. With a sensitive ear for speech, for the ground-level *clichés* and shibboleths of pop culture, and an ability to evoke complex, evolving internal lives of modest characters, Percy has shown us ourselves in our most secret

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moments—i.e., when we are in public and believe we are therefore invisible in the crowd.

Beginning with a local particularity—New Orleans, Louisiana, the states of the Old Confederacy—Percy is hip to the ephemeral foibles of the Pepsi Generation, the intellectual currents (or oozings) from the cultural marketplaces (movies, TV, big-bucks bookmanship) and our individual connections with the mass images born of a mass society. His novels focus on the low-key adventures of bright young men who discover they have no home in this world—Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer*, Will Barrett in *The Last Gentleman* and *The Second Coming*, Lancelot Andrewes Lamar in *Lancelot*. His characters are often doctors or scientists or borderline technologists. They receive intimations of mortality, flirt ironically with suicide, alternate between sentimental romanticism and Descartian desuetude and struggle to stay alive from day to day in the modern world.

Percy's fiction is notable for its chipper verve, its subtle comedy of manners, its exactness in detail, played off against the most sobering events and ideas. It is jesting in the teeth of disaster, whistling in the dark, a nimble feat of funambulism, walking a fine wire of wit and *joie de vivre* over an abyss of dread and catastrophe, a subtle mind held in eschatological suspense over the plains of Armageddon. Percy's finer tone, his skillful synthesis of emotions, is as significant as Percy's plots, characters or thematic materials. He is a barometer of moods, trends, icons in our culture, which may account for his appeal to young readers, who are themselves sensitive plants, twitching to every nuance of style, fashion, trend, experiencing pleasurable little future shocks like sophomore science students playing with a magneto.

Lost in the Cosmos is a meditation in the tradition of the Renaissance commonplace book/compendium, the pastiche-potpourri style that spawned such grand philosophical entertainers as Montaigne, Robert Burton, Sir Thomas Browne, Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne—a long tradition of irony, wit and comedy that managed magically to synthesize skepticism, stoicism and fideistic Christianity in a dialectical suspension. The idea of the dialectic brings in the heir to the tradition, and Percy's spiritual mentor, Soren Kierkegaard. Percy's book evokes the daring, nimble, playful Kierkegaard, the fecund inventor of forms of discourse, the ironic borrower of an age's follies for his own private use and

amusement. Percy calls *Lost in the Cosmos* "The Last Self-Help Book," and it incorporates and burlesques the pop polls and quizzes, advice columns, talk shows, radio-TV call-ins, do-it-yourself questionnaires and therapeutic catechisms of our time.

Occasionally, *Lost in the Cosmos* becomes formally tedious or over-obvious, when the self-help-quiz format buckles under the weight of Percy's intellectual and spiritual concerns. But the ebullience of this intellectual variety act carries the reader headlong. The potpourri/pastiche qualities are uneven, but Percy's intelligence is a consistent motive force. Even more than in his novels, a sense of Percy's personal character shines through the maelstrom of second-rate symbols he has borrowed from the culture.

Percy's old reliable novelistic skills take over most in two lengthy sequences—first, a brilliant send-up of the Phil Donahue Show, with the *dramatis personae* including a San Francisco homosexual, a swinger, a pregnant fourteen-year-old and Dr. Joyce Friday, a sex therapist or "psyche jockey." The show is disrupted by an invasion by John Calvin, Col. John Pelham, artilleryman, C.S.A., and a "cosmic stranger," who announces:

Of all the species . . . you are the only one which is by nature sentimental, murderous, self-hating, and self-destructive.

You are two superpowers here. The other is hopeless, has already succumbed, and is a death society. It is a living death and an agent for the propagation of death.

You are scarcely better—there is a glimmer of hope for you—but that is no interest to me. (*Lost in Cosmos*, pp. 54-55)

The second *bravura* passage ends the book in a science fiction tale spinning off from Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, illustrating "the self marooned in the cosmos" through a brilliant post-apocalypse vision.

The argument of *Lost in the Cosmos* develops around familiar Percy preoccupations—love, death, sex and violence in our society, the immanence of the end of the world, the necessity for belief ("I believe *because* it is absurd!"), our common failure to be happy, to be our selves in the truest sense. The book forms a disquisition on the Self as we understand it: ". . . the self in the twentieth century is a voracious nought which expands like the feeding vacuole of an amoeba seeking to nourish and inform its own nothingness by ingesting new objects in the world but, like a vacuole, only succeeds in emptying them out." (*Lost in Cosmos*, p. 21)

Percy gives us multiple-choice definitions of various kinds of modern consciousness of self, and in this set is his version of "The Christian self (and, to a degree, the Judaic and Islamic self)":

The self sees itself as a creature, created by God, estranged from God by an aboriginal catastrophe, and now reconciled with him. Before the reconciliation, the self is, as Paul told the Ephesians, a stranger to every covenant, with no promise to hope for, with the world about you and no God. But now the self becomes a son of God, a member of the family of selves, and is conscious of itself as a creature of God embarked upon a pilgrimage in this life and destined for happiness and reunion with God in a later life. (*Lost in Cosmos*, p. 11)

Then, in describing our contemporary obsessions with sex as a "demoniac" urge (from Kierkegaard), Percy offers the mood of our society from its technological-materialistic perspective:

The peculiar predicament of the present-day self surely came to pass as a consequence of the disappointment of the high expectations of the self as it entered the age of science and technology. Dazzled by the overwhelming credentials of science, the beauty and elegance of the scientific method, the triumph of modern medicine over physical ailments, and the technological transformation of the very world itself, the self finds itself in the end disappointed by the failure of science and technique in those very sectors of life which had been its main source of ordinary satisfaction in past ages. (*Lost in Cosmos*, pp. 178-79)

The book might also be subtitled "Worldviews in Collision," as these passages show: Percy, the man of science (M.D.) deftly summarizes the erratic course of "scientism" in the past two hundred years, ending with Carl Sagan and his *gee-whiz!* approach to ideas. Percy's fleet irony here keeps him poised between the combatants in the most primitive arena of "two cultures" debate, as he notes: "what is deplorable is that these serious issues involving God and the nature of man should be co-opted by the present disputants, a popularizer like Sagan and fundamentalists who believe God created the world six thousand years ago. It's enough to give both science and Christianity a bad name" (*Lost in Cosmos*, p. 202).

In addition to flaying "scientism" and all the maculated fads of social science and pop philosophy, Percy offers a Camus-like argument on the necessity for considering suicide as a serious human option (cf. Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*), comments on the "quality of life" in our culture and its common denominator, depression-cum-boredom. He presents another philosophical skit involving D.H. Lawrence, a nuclear physicist, a priest and a gaggle of tourists in New Mexico, all in hot pursuit of the specter of self-transcendence.

The conclusion Percy reaches is that:

The earth-self observing the Cosmos and trying to understand the Cosmos by scientific principles from which its self is excluded is, beyond doubt, the strangest phenomenon in all of the Cosmos, far stranger than the Ring Nebula in Lyra.

It, the self, is in fact the only alien in the entire Cosmos. (*Lost in Cosmos*, p. 253)

Toward the end of the little science fiction apologue that concludes *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy's brilliance as a powerful novelist erupts, as he describes in casual exactitude the return of a band of interstellar travelers to a war-devastated Earth:

There was no one and nothing to be seen except the rusty shards of old steel maintenance sheds from the twenty-first century.

They stepped out into the sweet, heavy desert air. The problem was walking—but not for the children! Perhaps they were like the newborn of the Arctic tern who fly to the Dry Tortugas, never having been there before, yet land and know it for home.

Despite Dr. Jane Smith's careful program of exercise and calcium maintenance, the adults were limber-legged as sailors and blind as bats in the dazzling Utah sun.

The children ran and fell and jumped and fell like the Beatles on a soccer field. (*Lost in Cosmos*, p. 240)

After the sometimes dense polemic of the book, this passage is an abrupt reassertion of Percy's powers as an imaginative artist. It points back to the series of important fictions that built the rostrum from which Percy lectures.

Percy's novels have followed a strong, consistent line of evolution, a direction that is probably demeaned by calling it something as crude as "native American Kierkegaardism," but that must do for a gnomic phrase. Binx Bolling, the uncertain, likeable, ambivalent central figure in *The Moviegoer*, after a series of emotional and spiritual crises, confesses:

Now in the thirty-first year of my dark pilgrimage on this earth and knowing less than I ever knew before, having learned only to recognize merde when I see it, having inherited no more from my father than a good nose for merde, for every species of shit that flew—my only talent—smelling merde from every quarter, living in fact in the very century of merde, the great shithouse of scientific humanism where needs are satisfied, everyone becomes an anyone, a warm and creative person, and prospers like a dung beetle, and one hundred percent of people are humanists and ninety-eight percent believe in God, and men are dead, dead, dead; and the malaise has settled like a fall-out and what people really fear is not that the bomb will fall but that the bomb will not fall. . . . (*Moviegoer*, pp. 208-209)

Binx's later avatar, Will Barrett, spends his life in a form of vicarious existence slightly different from Binx's addictive movie-going. Will watches people through a powerful, expensive telescope, but he is curious about them, wants to know them up close but to retain his distance from them. Binx and Will Barrett are both selves adrift in the cosmos, but Will's cause of self-dissociation is even more profound. He is tended by Sutter Vaught, a

magic double or alter ego, a doctor (to Will's engineer) who attempts to "cure" the soul-sickness in Barrett. Will reviews some of Vaught's diagnostic notes and realizes his own situation:

Where he probably goes wrong, mused the engineer sleepily, is in the extremity of his alternatives: God and not-God, getting under women's dresses and blowing your brains out. Whereas in fact my problem is how to live from one ordinary minute to the next on a Wednesday afternoon.

Has this not been the case with all "religious" people? (*Last Gentleman*, p. 277)

Vaught is a strange psychoanalyst-cum-philosopher, who eschews our culture's pervasive faith in therapeutics in favor of meditative self-knowledge. He views Barrett's case as profound self-dissociation:

So you say to him: Look, Barrett, your trouble is due not to a disorder of your organism but to the human condition, that you do well to be afraid and you do well to forget everything which does not pertain to your salvation. (*Last Gentleman*, p. 276)

And Vaught views our culture as one obsessed with pornography—sexual license as an opiate to drug us against our gnawing self-doubts and to obliterate the presence of dread:

Main Street, U.S.A.—a million-dollar segregated church on one corner, a drugstore with dirty magazines on the other, a lewd movie on the third, and on the fourth a B-girl bar with condom dispenser in the gents' room. Delay-your-climax cream. Even our official decency is a lewd sort of decency. Watch a soap opera on TV where everyone is decent (and also sad, you will notice, as sad as lewdness is sad; I am the only American who is both lewd and merry). Beyond any question, these people who sit and talk so sorrowfully and decently are fumbling with each other under the table. There is no other alternative for them. (*Last Gentleman*, p. 230)

These characteristic comments from Sutter Vaught's journals are echoed in *Lost in the Cosmos*, and they link with Kierkegaard's preoccupations in *The Concept of Dread*, where SK defines "dread" as "a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy" (SK's italics, p. 38), and defines the human condition as: "Man is a synthesis of the soulish and the bodily. But a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third factor. This third factor is the spirit" (p. 39). SK then describes dread by illustration: "He cannot flee from dread, for he loves it; really he does not love it, for he flees from it. Innocence has reached its apex. It is ignorance, but not an animal brutality, but an ignorance which is qualified by spirit, but which precisely is dread, because its ignorance is about nothing" (p. 40). This is the state at which Percy's protagonists arrive, the situation of Will Barrett to which Sutter Vaught wishes to minister.

Later, Kierkegaard describes the utility of dread, its function as an unlikely pathway to salvation:

Dread is the possibility of freedom. Only this dread is by the aid of faith absolutely educative, laying bare as it does all finite aims and discovering all their deceptions. . . . He who is educated by dread is educated by possibility, and only the man who is educated by possibility is educated in accordance with his infinity. (*Concept of Dread*, pp. 139-40)

This is the pilgrimage upon which Binx Bolling and Will Barrett are projected. They have met despair, of the varieties catalogued in *Lost in the Cosmos*, and struggle to find their true selves, which Kierkegaard saw as that synthesis: soulish/bodily/spirit. Kierkegaard also rendered a succinct statement of Percy's concerns with the self in *The Sickness Unto Death*, when he categorized "Despair over the earthly or something earthly":

In Christendom he too is a Christian, goes to church every Sunday, hears and understands the parson, yea, they understand one another; he dies; the parson introduces him into eternity for the price of \$10—but a self he was not, and a self he did not become.

This form of despair is: despair at not willing to be oneself; or still lower, despair at not willing to be a self; or lowest of all, despair at willing to be another than himself, wishing for a new self. (p. 186)

We see here the sources of Percy's concepts both in his fleshed, dramatized characters and in the discourse of *Lost in the Cosmos*. Over his career, Percy has extended and developed this Kierkegaardian sense of character in search of itself into ever subtler forms.

The continuation of Will Barrett's story, *The Second Coming*, picks up a second crisis in his life, a madness and series of trials out of which Will emerges with a further revelation:

Everybody has given up. Everybody thinks that there are only two things: war which is a kind of life in death, and peace which is a kind of death in life. But what if there should be a third thing, life?

Death in the guise of Christianity is not going to prevail over me. If Christ brought life, why do the churches smell of death?

Death in the guise of old Christendom in Carolina is not going to prevail over me. The old churches are houses of death.

Death in the guise of God and America and the happy life of home and family and friends is not going to prevail over me. . . .

Death in the guise of belief is not going to prevail over me, for believers now believe anything and everything and do not love the truth, are in fact in despair of the truth, and that is death.

Death in the guise of unbelief is not going to prevail over me, for unbelievers believe nothing, not because truth does not exist but because they have already chosen not to believe, and would not believe, cannot believe, even if the living truth stood before them, and that is death. (*Second Coming*, pp. 212-13)

This fierce Pauline litany is an insistence on life over death, a feeling at the hub of Percy's fiction, a rebellion against the computerized, mass-produced, plastic-packaged death-in-life of homogenized mid-twentieth century made-in-U.S.A. culture and its facile acceptance of what Binx Bolling succinctly identified as "merde."

These observations, couched in dramatic terms, with fully developed characters, settings and actions, are ultimately more convincing than the personal views in *Lost in the Cosmos*. Percy has a special gift for creating and sustaining characters who are unique and intriguing yet represent social types we have all met and observed—or perhaps *been*. His characters are seekers, pilgrims who travel down a strange (yet perfectly familiar) road, toward an unknown (yet comprehensible) destination. In his novels, Percy gives us these journeys in full-color 3-D, with all the details and sensory data creating an integral cosmos for us, as Binx Bolling defines "the search":

What is the nature of the search? you ask.

Really it is very simple, at least for a fellow like me; so simple that it is easily overlooked.

The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life. This morning, for example, I felt as if I had come to myself on a strange island. And what does such a castaway do? Why, he pokes around the neighborhood and he doesn't miss a trick.

To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair. (*Moviegoer*, pp. 17-18)

In *Lost in the Cosmos*, while we are onto something with Percy, we face a more schematic form—notes, jottings, ironic self-queries, diagrams and tiny chalk-talks, rather a road-map than a journey. It is a rare and valuable road-map, however, like Percy's collection of essays (*The Message in the Bottle*, 1975), showing us where we have been in two easy dimensions. It also introduces us more directly to the old cartographer himself, the genial presence behind the fictions, the Prospero who has peopled his provinces of our cosmos.

Editions cited (page numbers in parenthesis) are: *The Moviegoer* (New York: Popular Library, 1962); *The Last Gentleman* (New York: Signet, 1966); *The Second Coming* (New York: Pocket Books, 1981). Kierkegaard: *The Concept of Dread* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1944); *The Sickness Unto Death* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1954).

ACADEME'S LOST INNOCENCE

Ralph Hjelm

Innocence and its loss may seem a strange metaphor to use to comment on an institutional community. But while it may be technically improper to speak this way, the image graphically shapes features of a community nowadays being challenged to "come of age."

My approach to innocence has not been stirred by musing on ancient myths of a primordial state before "the fall of humanity" or the problem of how innocence is possible for persons who are free. Neither does my subject derive from a belief that innocence is available by proper management, societal arrangements or the correct diet. I write from close experience in the academy: what happens when we notice that confidence is weakened by doubt, when visions of certainty are disfigured, when hope is lost in the passage of time, when innocence is corrupted by experience? This is not one more exasperating homily on the fashionable theme of how things have never been worse academically, but a consideration of how lost our innocence is as we view three specific current and serious issues: first, our educational *strategies* and whether we are justified in feeling confident about them; second, *dogmatism*s now so prevalent, and whether they yield when confronted with a good liberal arts education, or whether the academy itself engages in dogmatist tactics; and third, the *nuclear threat* and whether the modern academy can go on as before with the future of this planet in doubt. Simply put: *What do we do, how do we do it, and will we make it?* Attending to these issues can rout childish illusions of simplicity, comfort, or innocence.

The intensity of my convictions about this was heightened by reading Dylan Thomas. This hard-living, turbulent artist brooded and exulted in the dark places of human extremity, finding there a solace and wisdom anything but innocent. Rejecting traditional anthropo-

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morphic doctrines that "Gods can be said to thump the clouds," he still knew that "light breaks where no sun shines," enjoined himself and others to "rage against the dying of the light" and clutched dear the hope that "death shall have no dominion." I believe his brief poem, "Was There a Time" is a bright, clear comment on life as he knew it. Written fifty years ago, just after the funeral of a friend, it quietly questions whether we can still dream of a pristine and innocent simplicity unalterable by change or unthreatened by death:

Was there a time when dancers with their fiddles
In children's circuses could stay their troubles?
There was a time they could cry over books,
But time has set its maggot on their track.
Under the arc of the sky they are unsafe.
What's never known is safest in this life.
Under the sky signs they who have no arms
Have cleanest hands, and, as the heartless ghost
Alone's unhurt, so the blind man sees best.
(*Collected Poems*, New York: New Directions, 1939)

That invokes what lost innocence entails clearer than historical description, conceptual analysis or cultural commentary. It moves me to examine the complex seriousness of our humanity and our academy in the light of my three issues.

First, our teaching and learning. That seems clear and innocent enough. Beginning with Cicero, who first spoke and wrote of the liberal arts (that is, those kinds of learning free men need and deserve), a long, confident tradition evolved. When early medieval luminaries catalogued these liberal arts as seven in number, innocence began. Systems developed and flourished called "scholastic," nourished in tribal communities of masters and students called "colleges," both sanctified by the comforting and awesome power of the church. Many of those bastions of academic certitude can still be located on any detailed map of Britain, the western Continent and, say some, the eastern United States. They are sanctified no longer by the church, rather by cozy academic conventions and great accumulations of self-esteem that have grown with the wealth and dignity of old age. But any academy on any landscape is not much different, shaped and ruled by the same confident innocence, seemingly untouched by risk or uncertainty or

the impulse to look in and out, confessing (and perhaps laughing at) its pretensions.

I recently read Mark Vonnegut's *The Eden Express*, a book about going crazy. The author writes as a graduating senior (a religion major, incidentally) at Swarthmore College, beginning with the commencement ceremony. Vonnegut, who is not paying much attention to the proceedings, recites his own commencement address he has written for his classmates. The end of his speech goes like this:

Well, as I was saying, your bitterness is not entirely out of line. For one thing, no one has the faintest idea about what you should do next. But lest you be too bitter, let me point out that knowing a college education is a pile of shit is no small lesson. There are many people who don't know it. In fact, probably most people don't know it. There is surely no better place to learn this lesson than at college. In any event, you can console yourselves by knowing that you won't waste time and make fools of yourselves later in life thinking how different it would have been if only you had gone to college. Now that you have your degree, you can say what a pile of shit college is and no one can accuse you of sour grapes. (*The Eden Express*, New York: Bantam, 1975, p. 4)

That is not deathless prose, so you can respond to these pungent comments about liberal education by calling it typical late-60s rhetoric, when criticism was confused with hostility, or believe the callow author was just being "cool." But there is a point in noticing a hint of madness. We who spend time in the history of ideas know that madness often clarifies vision: much light shines through cracked minds, brightening the scenery in strange ways. We ask, why should we listen to someone, say at the end of a gruelling (and expensive) college career, that it was all . . . *worthless*? That's the chattering of an ingrate. It's unsettling. But being unsettled can be valuable, and in some traditions, essential. In the East, for example, a Zen master was asked by a monk, seeking enlightenment, "What is Buddha?" and the master answered "Dried dung." That is enlightenment. In the Buddhist tradition this is not irreverence but a statement, like a body blow, that shocks the questioner out of the ease and comfort of his or her narrowness, and those confident, traditional, and laid-back doctrines of enlightenment. So Vonnegut's unspoken commencement speech is a banal, marginal comment to an old tradition, a snappish protest to uncriticized innocence in the conventional circles of liberal learning. And it provokes a brace of remarks

First, the importance of uneasiness and risk in the life of the academy. Not the risk by students of poor grades or failure or the risk by faculty of slovenly research or uninspired teaching or the risk by administration of bad management or dehumanizing policies. We know far profounder and subtler risks in the

academy: the risk that in learning horizons will be uncomfortably reshaped; that what in an old-fashioned vocabulary were called "abiding values" are really innocuous clichés; that what we once thought beyond debate needs refinement by scorching criticism. And one strange feature of the academy is its traditional, pervasive use of the routine and the orderly to barricade the uncomfortable, the unsettling or the risky.

Consider a certain caricature. How seriously one should take it is arguable, but caricatures speak something of the truth. Thus, one of the commonest portrayals of the college is worth noticing—that the college is the decorous keeper of the traditional, the guardian of what we consider certain. This romantic image of the academy as the institution of unshakable security is the message of every campus photograph I have ever seen and every "Alma Mater" I have ever heard or tried to sing.

None of us, unless we are anarchists, would argue for a college without structure or routine. But without belaboring the point, like Vonnegut with his cheeky mutterings, or taking an iconoclastic view of life like the Zen master, I suggest that by complex ways the secure tradition of the academy can threaten its mission whenever certainty becomes preferable to insecurity, management to criticism, proclaiming to questioning, privileged high achievement to lively engagement. According to proper usage, the word for that is "bourgeois," which means the preference for living in safety and comfort behind the walls. Those with this preference point to the etymology of words like "scholastic," "scholar" and "school" to support it. The Greek "*scholē*" means "leisure" or "time free from interruption," and so somehow in their hands the academy turns out to be wherever without distraction one can "pull it all together," "get on top of a subject" or "master a field." So with simple confidence the academy is remodelled into a retreat where routine makes discomfort or risk unnecessary and where mastery is an inevitable delight.

This is not what ought to happen. We can reflect on the importance of being mastered, awakened or unsettled by some insight or doctrine or scene from our heritage, past or present. We know excitement when with a class we are challenged to assess some scene or development or discovery, the enormity of its bearing on us and our need to be bothered and unsettled by it. From my own adventures, I return to such scenes as the one by an unknown poet portraying God shouting as though from a cyclone to that ravaged questioner named Job who has come to understand that his humanity is not defined by the roles and cadences of religion or the confidences of an ordered life. Or to Plato's account of Socrates about to die in an Athenian jail, having claimed that philosophy is the art of learning how to die. Or to what we know of Anselm of Canterbury's luminous insight in which the shaking of the foundations of his mind by a certain kind

of knowing led him to affirm that God necessarily exists. Or to David Hume, empiricist, making his case for a radical scepticism that will make it impossible for great ideas and words like "causality" and "truth" and "God" to resonate any longer. Scenes like these are overwhelming and unsettling, especially to teachers who will never have resources or imagination adequate to the responsibility of interpreting them.

Close to this matter of risk and our challenge to enliven it is the matter of innocent seriousness with which we take ourselves in the academy. Innocence, as I speak of it, means the naivete that pays no heed to our artlessness, our pint-size perspectives, or our oafish ways. So fascinated are we by our comprehension of the ordinary and the immense, that laughter is unseemly if not impossible. And Judge Learned Hand goes unappreciated in his statement that the spirit of a free and humane society is the spirit that is not too sure it is right. Radical (that is, essential) seriousness seems the sharpest symptom of our pretentiousness. Think of the high affinities among orthodoxies that look and sound serious . . . and *sinister*. Think of the truth in the popular description of naively innocent people as "up tight."

Perhaps the fall of Adam was the fall into *seriousness*, as Kierkegaard supposed. The only way to expose this seriousness which is our finitude, he said, is by irony, and the only way to unmask this arrogance, which is our fallenness, is by *humor*. The question is, can there be any human claim to truth without laughter? Surely not. Humor is not only an equalizer: it is a civilizer and educator. In medieval palaces, the jester was necessary, lest the ruler become a despot. So academies need at least the spirit of the jester, lest its members claim not too little but too much. Northrop Frye calls this by which we learn our pretension, and what saves us from it, "comic grace." And if we think of humor here as an abstract corrective only, perhaps we should connect humor as we speak of it and the archaic notion of "humor," the juices that make us human beings. A tradition from Pagliacci to Charlie Chaplin and Woody Allen has made this clear in humorous artistry. A printed tradition has made this clear in words, none better in recent times than James Thurber. A striking passage occurs in his last collection of essays, *Lanterns and Lances*. He speaks of humor bursting through stuffiness as he reacts to someone's oh-so-serious remark: "We are not going to hide our heads in the sand like kangaroos." "That", says Thurber, "is just what my harassed understanding and tortured spirit needed. I was, it was

not too much to say, saved by that twisted and inspired simile, and whenever I think I hear the men coming with the stretcher or the subpoena, I remember those kangaroos with their heads in the sand, and I am ready to face anything again." (*Lanterns and Lances*, New York: Harper, 1955, p. 67) How corrective, how gracious humor can be and it can save the academy innocently gone pretentious.

Consider the question of the philosophy student: "But did Thomas Aquinas ever laugh?" A sharp, worthy question. The Angelic Doctor must have been amused *sometime* about *something*, but it is hard to imagine what it was. For certain, it was not about himself or what he wrote. How about Kant? Imagine him for some reason, personal or philosophical, roaring with laughter, frolics and dancing like Zorba the Greek? And Marx? He certainly made prickly jibes at his contemporaries, but not at himself. (Perhaps it was because of his boils and stomach cramps.) And then there was that powerfully influential threesome: John Calvin, John Milton and Jonathan Edwards. No jollity here, and we know why. For reputed, arguable cosmic and theological reasons, laughter was not necessary nor appropriate. So the question is a good one. For many reasons, personal, historical or intellectual, Aquinas and Marx, Spinoza and Bunyan, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger did not laugh. This leads us to the real point: they did not laugh and perhaps should have. But we can laugh and certainly should.

The second issue that alters the academy's innocence, put simply, is dogmatism, new and old, and the academy's coping with it. The issue is as old as Socrates and St. Paul. Both believed that neither traditional education nor traditional religion can go uncriticized. Their turning the light of inquiry on unexamined intellectual and religious superstitions is the ancient model of our community of liberal learning. Losing sight of this model allows dogmatism to become our number-one academic crippler and killer. Called narrowness, unimaginativeness, or simply tunnel-vision, its causes seem too complex to define. Remedies are not easily prescribed and the prognosis after treatment is at best guarded. These dogmatizing powers are not just in or near college campuses. Like St. Paul's "principalities and powers" they see to have an irresistible force as they manipulate our minds and bodies in ways that are dangerous partly because we have learned to live with them.

In liberal arts colleges, the nagging question is, Can this crippler be controlled? Quickly saying yes is naive, even when we are surrounded by the rich resources of a distinguished college. We have noticed that degree recipients in that rite of passage called commencement

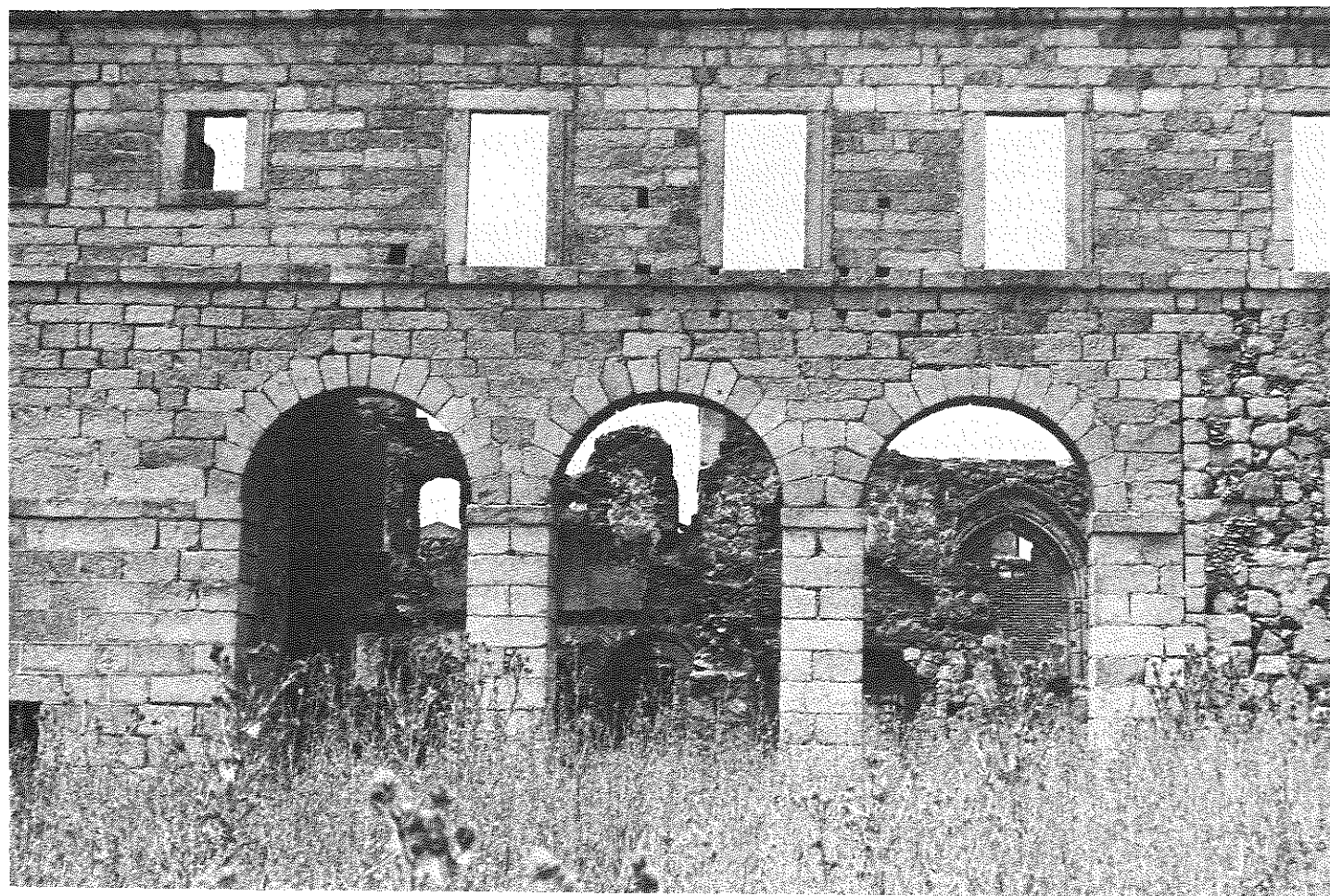
day often seem as afflicted with tunnel vision as they were on registration day. Ways of expression may be more chic, data richer, but the basic perspective is often barely changed. Educators in cynical middle age who view these college trained primitives are sure the situation is getting worse.

Dogmatist human beings are not unintelligent, unambitious, or inarticulate. They are folk who cannot (seemingly will not) question, examine, criticize. They are profoundly illiterate. Educational psychologists and sociologists have much to tell us, but for humanist teachers, this dogmatic illiteracy is too native and intimate a feature of our humanity to be dispassionately defined or dealt with and at times too much an epidemic to be easily treated. No wonder that early church fathers saw ignorance and pride as marks of a primordial fall, their way of saying that dogmatism is an assumed feature of being human.

Put the issue this way: Who has not been piqued by the question: Why and how do we make up our minds and change our minds? How can we sense the torpor of a mind in captivity and then appreciate the liberating trauma that marks its change? In a meditation on what he calls "Humane Literacy," George Steiner describes the deep-down transformations that take place in reading and making up our minds:

To read well is to take great risks. It is to make vulnerable our identity, our self-possession. In the early stages of epilepsy there occurs a characteristic dream: Dostoevsky tells of it. One is somehow lifted free of one's own body; looking back, one sees oneself and feels a sudden, maddening fear; another presence is entering into one's own person, and there is no avenue of return. Feeling this fear, the mind gropes to a sharp awakening. So it should be when we take in hand a major work of literature or philosophy, or imagination, or doctrine. It may come to possess us so completely that we go, for a spell, in fear of ourselves and in imperfect recognition. He who has read Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and can look into his mirror unflinching may technically be able to read print, but is illiterate in the only sense that matters. (*Language and Silence*, New York: Atheneum, 1967, p. 67)

Dogmatists are not straight-faced believers in such nonsense as square circles or things that exist and do not exist at the same time or pious members of the Flat Earth Society. They are commoner types, clever *cognoscenti*, academic neighbors with finely wrought theories about many things, usually about one thing in particular, who won't or can't engage in any analysis of foundations or the archeology of ideas, who do not question authorities or sources and imperiously dismiss alternatives. They are brutish dogmatists of the academy (fundamentalists of all minds). They display and defend their claims like watchful guides in a gallery.



There are the *naturalists* and related kin who claim that all that is amounts to conditioned objects in empty spaces. For centuries they have envisioned the world in two unequal parts, one of hard knowing and the other of soft interpreting or valuing, *Hard facts, soft values*. . . With a macho certainty that usually means in one of many technical philosophical ways, that the former count, the latter do not. Two generations ago, the great doxology of naturalistic dogmatism was Bertrand Russell's "A Free Man's Worship." Only one of the many sides to the career of this genius, he spoke—or sang—his stout naturalistic affirmations with the passion of a Christian preacher:

Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day. (*Mysticism and Life*, New York: Doubleday, 1937, p. 54)

There are the *behaviorists* in psychology who spend their efforts denying that there is a psyche or that we are free, inspired by J. B. Watson fifty years ago, who claimed that all thought is nothing other than the mechanical movement of the larynx, making human distinctiveness and superiority nothing more than the complex mechanism which is the human voice. The truth of this or any other claim apparently is one more minute wiggling of the larynx. Its contemporary variant is the determinism of B. F. Skinner's theory of operant conditioning, which draws grand designs and human conclusions from experimental studies of pigeons. Psychologist colleagues, fine fellows, do nothing except sniff quietly when I insist that I am not a pigeon and that not for one minute do I believe that our personal and social existence is or should be like the antiseptic arrangements of Skinner's *Walden Two*.

There are the *political dogmatists*, an eloquent and persuasive lot, impressive in hallways and in seminars for the way they clinically describe esoteric political phenomena by statistics, demography and institutional history. More informally, they are often of two types: On the right, libertarians who strike the imperialist pose, and with flag-draped piety claim the trouble with the rest of the world is that it is not like us. On the left, those who, like Rodney Dangerfield, claim they get no respect. Preoccupied with economic analyses and solutions of the human predicament and the unlimited redemptive possibilities in radical social change, they are deaf to the question about today's revolutionaries being tomorrow's tyrants. Or as the political mystic, Simone Weil, argued in her studies of the oppression of her fellow French workers, the opiate of the people seems not to be religion but revolution.

Then there are the *religious dogmatists*, especially the magisterial leaders of today's right-wing renaissance. Present over the years in various shapes and sizes, they

seem primitivists convinced that they are the sole inhabitants of an island of unqualified virtue, never failing to speak the clean simplicities of truth to a confused world. Or they seem members of the reductionist tradition that proposes crude, prosaic expositions of the great visions of religious belief and the subtle venturings of the human spirit. The hallmarks of this tradition are: its harsh, wooden use of a doctrine of biblical inerrancy; its sanctifying of reactionary politics that would make our nation a theocracy; its elitist religious isolationism, vanity, and often facile enthusiasm; its combative and philistine style; and most of all its intolerant suspicion of free and honest criticism, which has already led to the burning of books. This religious movement, with its siege and fortress mentality, is an angry and divisive presence, ruthlessly correct, hissing its oracular message to anxious congregations.

So the list of dogmatisms in all its variety goes. We could continue.

These remarks about dogmatisms or the various types of fundamentalism have been flippant enough to be a caricature. And caricatures speak messages that border on dogmatisms. But my intention is only to give bite to this issue. Most of us would say that the dogmatist arrogance is an inborn feature of our humanity, often frustrating, maddening and occasionally frightening. But it is also a part of the mysterious genius of everyone who claims to have learned, aspires to learn more and will defend this learning. St. Augustine said that knowing anything starts with assent, but this is enlivened by searching, "a searching that makes the heart deep." How can we affirm this in our day?

Think of how we try to relate to dogmatisms. As educators we use pedagogical skills that have become ours through various and subtle ways, we are not sure how or when. But as we use them, we consider many things: contexts in which issues have been born, developed and died or taken new shape. We look, dissect and frequently decipher. We evaluate impacts, consider what has counted, and then consider how *different* things are. But mostly we discover that we are interpreters. Rarely are we prophets. Our teaching is authorized by prophets who have preceded and accompanied us. We can name them and their interpreters, and then we can reflect on that miracle by which God enlivens their minds in us. As best we can, we have learned to view these skills with a reverence that shows itself in humaneness which is concern, respect and alertness to the strangeness and discomfort that comes of making up the mind and changing the mind—ours, or another's. All this is complex and intimate, and there is no guarantee that it will not be debased or perverted when we as teachers stoop to polemical trickery and pedantry, or patronize and intimidate, throw sand in the eyes of others, strangle curiosity, shift to avoid tough questions, or retreat just because it's easier to run away.

Wise and experienced teachers could sketch out what happens when dogmatism that is only sincere is exposed, when anger that brutalizes and alienates is made manageable and the searching for authenticity begins. When this happens the academy is doing its greatest work. In one of his last works, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling brilliantly examined this theme in our culture and literature. His closing argument claims that our efforts to transcend what he calls "our imprisoning falsehoods" should be a vision like unto madness, like unto divinity, in which we know a liberating authenticity as though each of us were a Christ. But this is always to be lived out with a concern and a sincerity that requires of us "undertakings to intercede, of being a sacrifice, of reasoning with rabbis, of making sermons, of having disciples, of going to weddings and to funerals, of beginning something and at a certain point remarking that it is finished." (*Sincerity and Authenticity*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 172)

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The behaviorist, through the great literature of those who affirmed the mystery and freedom of the human spirit, can be challenged by alternatives to naturalistic determinism and physicalism. Human beings are natural, are in nature, but have the free capacity to reflect on it and so transcend it. Great persons of our past who knew and celebrated this are legion.

The political dialectical materialist can learn of rich perspectives that transcend rigid doctrines of economic analysis and social denunciation inscribed in nineteenth century holy writ. Hebrew prophets two-and-a-half millennia ago spoke unforgettably about the dynamics of history, including the contradictions between the power of the privileged and the struggles of the oppressed, along with the awful possibilities that institutions (even, and particularly, sacred ones) can become petrified instruments of ignorance and cruelty. Ever since, thoughtful and active citizens seeking peace and justice have been in their debt not just in their protesting, but in their probing into the larger, transcendent mysteries of people-in-community. From those ancient times to ours a cloud of prophetic witnesses have engaged themselves in political strategy, also affirming that history presents no final resolutions to the terrors that threaten us. The adventure of learning this seems endless.

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analysis of the richness of religious traditions, windows and doors can be opened. Imagine discovering, for example, that religion at the very least in its greatest formulations has aimed at articulating the meaning in several senses of liberation, even from the sacred canons and doctrines that enunciate it. Imagine discovering the alternatives to what Charles Davis in *The Temptations of Religion* calls "the lust for certitude." Religion can be the occasion for dreadful complacency, an instrument for bludgeoning those called the faithless, a monument to human self-indulgence as much an idol as those attacked by Biblical prophets. The zealous religious dogmatist can be nourished and directed by those insights that excite us to attend to divine mystery within and beyond, to the turbulence of human struggles, to the dark nights of people's souls, to the immediacy of grace, the power of human concern and the excitement of seeking, to the importance of doubting and the liveliness of theological imagining.

In the presence of any dogmatism, whether understood as the content of one's belief or as the nature of the one believing, the academy through its heritages and interpreters can give remarkable life to the minds of any who say they *seek* as well as *know*.

Now the third and final issue, literally the final issue of all time: *the nuclear threat*. From our glossary of macabre language it is a familiar term. That these smooth words should be voiced with such ease is an audible sign of our innocence. It is a stabbing irony that this phrase should be spoken or analyzed or mused on so routinely in academic communities whose mission is to probe and pursue issues, the manageable and the complex, the immediate and ultimate, the mild and the terrifying, those which bring satisfaction, and those which bring tears or rage. Put starkly those three English words, *the nuclear threat*, feebly but graphically name the ultimate limit not only of the academy but every human and natural association. Those three words name what for all of us is quite beyond meaning and words: universal and total catastrophe. Think of the customary and traditional ways of framing the final polarities: right and wrong, good and evil, light and darkness, life and death. But now we are forced to frame in words another polarity that goes beyond all others capable of conception: *existence and extinction*. Jonathan Schell in *The Fate of the Earth* speaks to this point when he considers the unthinkable of annihilation—of history, of nature as we know it, of the ecosystem, and of ourselves:

How are we, who are a part of human life, to step back from life and see it whole, in order to assess the meaning of its disappearance? . . . Death cuts off life; extinction cuts off birth.

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. . . a human future that can never become a human present. For who will suffer this loss, which we somehow regard as supreme? For, the living will not suffer it; we will be dead. Nor will the unborn shed any tears over their lost chance to exist; to do so they would have to exist already. . . . Although extinction might appear to be the largest misfortune that mankind could ever suffer, it doesn't seem to happen to anybody, and one is left wondering where its impact is to be registered, and by whom.

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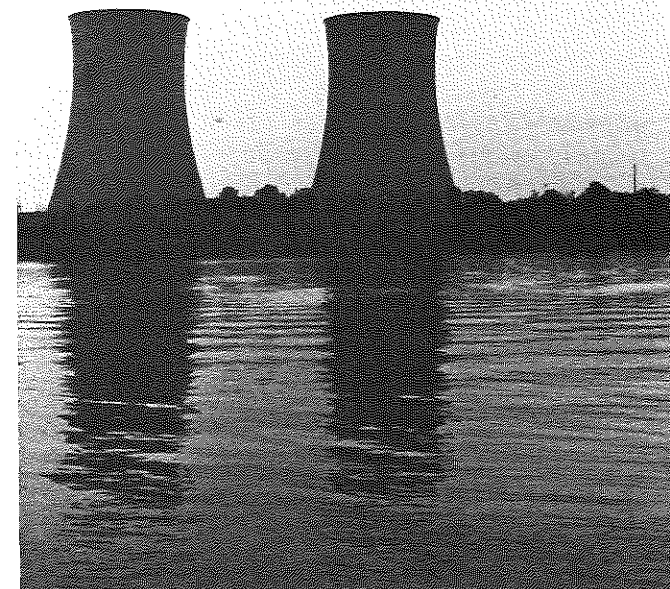
None of our standards have any meaning or application unless one first assumes the existence of . . . mankind. Anyone who prizes the usefulness of things assumes the existence of human beings to whom things can be useful; anyone who loves justice assumes the existence of a society whose parts can be brought into relationships that are just; anyone who loves beauty and truth assumes the existence of minds to which the beautiful and the true can manifest themselves; anyone who loves goodness assumes the existence of creatures who are capable of exhibiting it and being nourished by it; and anyone who wishes to promote the common good assumes the existence of a community whose divergent aims it can harmonize. These standards of worth, and any others that one might think of, are useful only in relating things that are in life to one another, and are inadequate as measures of life itself.

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Why is that? Is it because we really believe that some good fortune will keep this from happening to this planet, called for centuries in many cultures "mother earth"? Is it because we really believe that our unquestioned American virtue will keep this technological hell from incinerating us, but will be a massive, just punishment on the kingdom of evil that reigns elsewhere? Is it because our inaction is a sign of our faith that God will only allow to happen that which is best, in spite of our behavior? Or is it (and this is a curious possibility) that there really is a stupefying inertia and fatigue that covers our anxiety and



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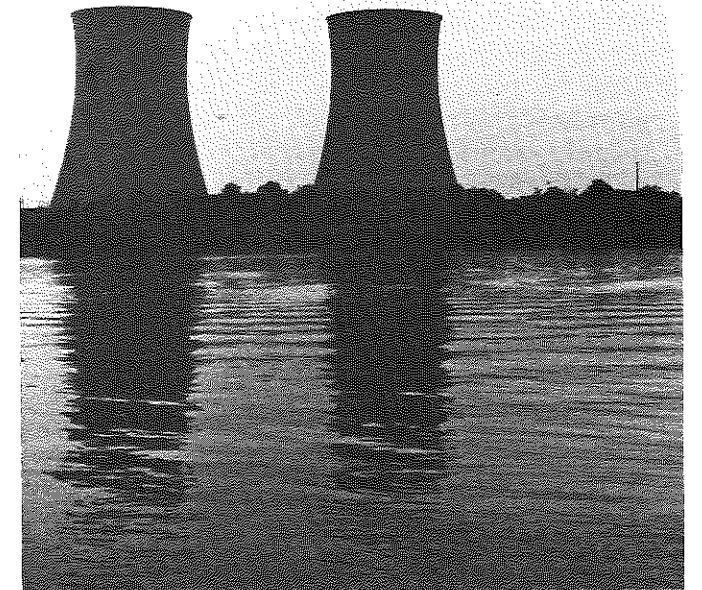
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Those of us whose lives have been graced by the company of scholar colleagues from Europe forty years ago can never forget their moving commentary on the birth of tyranny near academies that were indifferent or sleeping. Nazism, they tell us, came not from the Gobi Desert or the rain forests of the Amazon, but from the centers of European civilization. The crying of the tortured was within earshot of the universities; the butchery of protestors and the burning of their books went on near the theaters and museums; those who listened to Bach and Mozart and read Goethe and Schiller led the Gestapo. Places of learning, artistry, gentility and even piety often allowed or fostered the greatest savagery of modern times. This parallel is crude and arguable, but it provokes the question: Will the academy be indifferent or asleep while arrogant powers plot not tyranny but annihilation?

For anyone who ponders on this in a *theological* (or an *ultimate*) context, it quickly becomes clear that for the Western Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), this is not a new issue. Two things need to be said: First, whoever has even a cursory acquaintance with the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament or the Koran knows that the Western religions from their earliest lore to their latest refinement have proclaimed creativity and responsibility as central motifs in the understanding of

divinity and humanity. God as characterized through Torah, through Christ or through the revealed Koran is the holy source of ultimate power. Humanity as obedient, faithful or submissive possesses power as well, ambiguously capable of creativity or death and most things in between. Vividly, all three religions see mankind's greatest temptation not in weakness but in strength—with all its awful possibilities. The poet who wrote the Eighth Psalm spoke powerfully in words both moving and ironic of the terrible responsibility of people in this world: "Thou hast made him little less than God; thou hast given him dominion over the works of his hands. . . ." Second, these religions converge in their common use of apocalyptic—that strange, nightmarish idiom by which ancient visionaries, beginning in the second century B.C.E. looked out and found no sure sign of order or value in their world—only the monstrous, the grotesque and the deadly. History seemed a drama of the absurd. The only point to what they saw and experienced was ultimate and transcendent meaning—graphically characterized as final redemption, healing and the purging of the world of darkness, demons, and fiery power. These apocalyptic poets brilliantly used a mode of expression that unnerves our confidence in conceptual thinking, our fascination with the predictable, our reliance on the techniques of preservation. This apocalyptic vision is of a nightmare, but also of an ultimate divinely bestowed justice.

There is a startling difference between what we learn in the evening news and what we read in ancient apocalyptic of Western religions. Is not the difference between the biblical scene of Armageddon, the slaying of the beast, and the nuclear threat of today that the former symbolizes the ultimacy of God's victory and the rule over evil, while the latter is the calamitous possibility rooted in our irresponsibility? Ancient apocalyptic poets envisioned the renewal of the world, by divine authority, not the annihilation of it by human power. We seem bent on earthly annihilation, making renewal inconceivable.

The genius of our religious heritage, traditions and our ancient communities with their theological visions affirms that there is a final justice and a victory of divine goodness. Would anyone not affirm as much? No matter how great the terror, ultimate meaning prevails. Our nature and history is not all there is to it. Our use of the word "holocaust" suggests this. The word, meaning "burnt offering," defined by at least its ancient usage as a "sacrifice," implies a ceremonial act of burning for some higher good. But as we formulate policies of incineration, chant shrill and self-righteous threats that inch us closer to the final nuclear holocaust, where is the good, the meaning, the purpose of such a terrifying hell? That it is a sign of divine sovereignty to terrify and chasten? That it is a purging of this cosmos of evil, a judgment as in the story of the days of Noah, only this time by fire-storms rather than flood? That this

catastrophe is a reminder of a need for a renewed faith in Christ the redeemer of history who will not suffer our annihilation? Or that this threat is a God-given challenge for virtuous America to muster its political and military might against the day when the good shall confront the evil in the coming Armageddon. In one symbolic form or another, particularly from some traditionalist theologies and right-wing literalists, explanations like these and shouts of confidence in current armament policies are widespread and commonplace. But can ancient apocalyptic visions divert us from the fact that if this annihilation of our humanly and earthly future occurs, the responsibility will be ours?

Dealing with the implications of this fearsome responsibility is quite simply beyond us. What concepts or symbols from our tradition (or any tradition) can carry this freight? It is a vexing challenge not only to theologians but to scholars, teachers and students in and out of the academy. During the second World War, Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke of humanity's "coming of age." What he meant was that the well-known and often-repeated Christian and Jewish symbols and doctrines of divine providence give little direction or a sense of comprehending or shelter for our vulnerability, as they once did. They are outmoded because they have become so familiar, so smooth. Anxieties have outrun traditions. Ancient symbols are not only open to misunderstanding, they can be misleading as we use them to sanctify policies not only about the nuclear crisis but other life-and-death issues. So theologians and all who think in ultimate terms about this situation are catapulted into a maturity that allows no escape from a terrifying prospect by denying it or reshaping it with the help of ancient or modern visions.

This, our good earth, may fall upon darkness and silence despite our outcries and our reasoning. Nothing comes of our raging at demons such as the Trident submarine, any three or four of which can bring the end of the world. One day we will have thirty of them. Nothing comes of informed descriptions of nuclear fire storms, the virus of the earth's last epidemic, when the living will envy the dead. Or from another perspective, nothing comes of asking the meaning of the goodness of creation when it is within our power to destroy it, or the presence of God in history when we can technically end it, or the ultimacy of justice when society might not survive to strive for it. What comes of any of these questions or outcries when the pronouncements of those in power daily grow more bellicose, when the threat to annihilate civilization is the basis of international policy, when the arrogantly self-righteous mock at dialogue for justice and peace?

If this seems a unique issue for anxious idealists or the theological community, which always seems to fret over ancient and arcane symbols, consider the same issue bearing on any quarter of the academy. The academy too is enjoined to "come of age." Its life and work is no

less threatened and no less in need of admitting its loss of innocence in the face of this, the most-final issue. How can educators, researchers and students say that the academic vision, generated by historical understanding, intellectual imagination and the power of reason, is above or beyond our anxiety at contemplating our own incineration? On what grounds can academicians nowadays (any less than communities of physicians and nuclear scientists) be innocently routine about it, sensing no imperatives? What does it mean to be brought to maturity by this threat as we study, teach and criticize our science and technology, our history, our literature ancient and modern, our art, our political and economic institutions and strategies, our values and understandings of ourselves and our world?

If the academy is in the ancient tradition of commitment to the examination of every past, present and possible future of our common humanity, we are past the time when we can indifferently inherit and

transmit. Only in innocent childhood is confidence more important than concern. Is not the task of the academy and each of its components to deconstruct and reconstruct, not just what we teach and learn, but how we teach and learn in the face of the devastation we seem bent on bringing to all we know and value?

I would like to believe that in considering these issues our vulnerability is made plain, our childish innocence recognized, and our need for maturity made imperative. We know this comes slowly, with personal and communal distress. It is as though

. . . What's never known is safest in this life.
Under the sky signs they who have no arms
Have cleanest hands, and, as the heartless ghost
Alone's unhurt, so the blind man sees best. □



Many photographs in this issue are of the twelfth-century Cistercian Valdeiglesias monastery located on the outskirts of San Martín de Valdeiglesias, a small town some forty miles west of Madrid, Spain. It is owned by Mariano García Benito who, together with his friends, has devoted himself to restoring it.

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