

*RUNNING
WITH THE
HOUNDS*



JOSEPH SITTLER

CONVERSATION WITH CAMPUS MINISTRY



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June, 1977

My vocation is to teach theology, and my vocation is to try to expand and expound possible meanings of biblical images which shall be congruent with a not-earth-centered notion of the cosmos. This is not Mrs. Svenson's job. It is not my job, maybe, as pastor of Mrs. Svenson; but I am not just that. If the church sticks me with this job, then confound it, I have got to run where the hounds are. So I would defend the legitimacy of theological speculation as necessary obedience to the momentum of thought. I am not expounding this as what I say to Mrs. Svenson, but I am talking about you who are also running with the hounds.

Comments, p. 121

Contents

Joseph Sittler: A Tribute	Donald F. Hetzler	1
On Krister Stendahl's <i>Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles</i>		4
Biblical Interpretation Today		12
Christology and Grace		31
A Little Discourse on Style		102
Eternal Life		111
The New Situation in Ethics		125
Afterword	Melvin D. George	143



The Author

Joseph Sittler was born in Upper Sandusky, Ohio, on September 26, 1904. He is a graduate of Wittenberg University (1927) and Hamma Divinity School (1930). He has been awarded honorary doctorates from many schools and universities, including Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Unitarian institutions.

He was pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church, Cleveland Heights, Ohio (1930-43). He lectured in theology at Oberlin College (1942) prior to coming to Maywood, Illinois, in 1943 to teach systematic theology at the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary (now the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago). From 1957 until his retirement in 1973, he was professor of theology at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. Following his retirement he continued to lecture at LSTC and at many conferences across the church.

Along with his leadership in many theological organizations, he was a member of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (1958-696) and a delegate to several conferences of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. His sermon at a WCC meeting in new Dehli in 1961 is considered one of the theological landmarks of contemporary Christianity. His lectureships have included the Lyman Beecher (Yale, 1959), the William Belden Noble (Harvard, 1959), the Grey (Duke, 1963), and the Earl (Pacific School of Religion, 1968). He presented the inaugural Kauper lecture at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 1984, on behalf of Lutheran Campus Ministry.

Joseph Sittler is the theologian who, according to Martin E. Marty, “anticipated today’s concern for nature, created order, and ecology.” These concerns are reflected in his many writings, which include: *The Doctrine of the World* (1948), *The Structure of Christian Ethics* (1958), *The Ecology of Faith* (1961), *The Care of the Earth* (1964), *The Anguish of Preaching* (1967), and *Essays on Nature and Grace* (1972).

Sittler died 12/28/1987 and is buried with his wife (Helen) Jeanne Sittler († 1/4/1991) in the columbarium at Augustana Lutheran Church in Chicago, which is situated appropriately between LSTC and the University of Chicago.

On June 12-17, 1977, Joseph Sittler gave the following speeches and in conversation made the following comments at the first week of the Center for the Study of Campus Ministry (CSCM) Summer Seminar, "Theology and Ministry for Campus Ministers" at Valparaiso University. Since he was unable to read, Sittler spoke virtually without notes; even most quotations are from memory and in most cases have been printed here as he remembered them. The speeches and remarks here have been taken from cassette recordings and edited for publication by Phil Schroeder, CSCM director. The spoken style has been largely and intentionally preserved.

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Reprint Editor, Galen Hora

JOSEPH SITTLER



A TRIBUTE

Once in a while you meet a person whose generous friendliness gives one the feeling of long-time friendship from the very outset. Joe Sittler is one of those people. Even rarer are those friends whose life-purpose is so congruent with one's own that, even after lengthy separations, the conversation springs afresh where it left off—only enriched by the experiences of the intervening time. Joe Sittler is one of those friends.

Nothing could be more fitting than a tribute to this man from campus ministry folk. Joseph Sittler is easily among the first three or four people whose presence can be counted on to generate excitement among campus work staff. Over a long span of years he has been a friend, a model and a mentor. It is entirely appropriate to record gratitude to him in this printed record of a memorable week he spent with some privileged campus ministers in the summer of '77.

Not many of us have been privileged to be “his students” in the customary meaning of that term. Yet we have been “his students” as we have welcomed him to staff and student gatherings and as we have been stimulated by the wisdom of his essays and sermons. He has made lasting and significant influence on Lutheran campus ministry and its people.

One gloriously golden weekend in the autumn of 1948 I visited a college friend who was enrolled at the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary at Maywood. It was my first glimpse of a theological school.

It was also an introduction (before I was ready to admit it) to a world I was to enter myself later on, partly because of what took place on that October Saturday.

There was a knock at the door of my friend's room. A tall, gangly fellow appeared clad in a T-shirt and paint-stained jeans. The most memorable feature of all was his wide, incredibly joyous grin. I was introduced to Professor Joseph Sittler. I was incredulous. A professor who called on students in the dorm? And for the purpose of meeting a student's visitor from the outside world? A theologian in such informal dress?

I stumbled over my awe and my surprise for a few awkward minutes. Professor Sittler was too gracious to notice. And then the conversation took flight: mutual regard for a professor both of us had studied under, Shakespeare, my studies in art history, his experience in Florence, the relationship of the arts to the faith, the encouragement of my future in ministerial studies. . . .

Later he graciously responded to an invitation to speak to all fifteen members of the Lutheran Student Association at the University of Chicago. He talked to us as we sat around the table after one of those, you know, student suppers. It was luminous.

These episodes are mentioned in order to suggest that in them Joe Sittler demonstrated several virtues common to campus ministry: a genuine concern for students—and for his students' friends; an uncondescending sense of collegiality; a gift of counseling based on a willingness to share and to give; a willingness to be available—even to the point of calling on students!

Other people tell similar stories, I am sure, to illustrate his guiding influence and to exemplify ways in which they learned from him something of the conduct of the Christian in the academic world.

I think his personal impact and inspiration has been his most important gift to us. But, of course, we have gained a great deal more. He has invited people to learn that academic discourse can also be doxological and that precision in language is a holy obligation. The vigor and imagination contained in his speech and his writing demonstrates—in an inimitable way—how the medium should be appropriate to the message. He has shown the loving care with which the Word as well as the earth should be treated in thought, speech, and action. Overleaping usual homiletical doggerel, he reintroduces us to the beauty of strong images of great poetry.

Most of all, however, it is his manner: the terse expression in word and action of a sober humility mixed with high hilarity before the awesome truth of God's provision for us in all that Jesus Christ means.

It is appropriate to pay tribute to him as a teacher, a counselor, a model, a friend. While other communities may claim Joe Sittler as their own legitimately and more intimately than we, this tribute is entered in the record to assert that generations of us in campus ministry, too, claim him and love him.

Donald F. Hetzler

Executive Secretary of Associated Church Press Director of National Lutheran Campus Ministry (1968-1976)

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- (1) Forgive the anachronistic use of the first person plural pronoun in this preface. I do hope to be numbered among campus ministry staff when the topic is, as now, retrospective.
 - (2) Maywood 1962; Kenosha 1970; Chicago 1976; Pacific Lutheran (LSAA) 1958; St. John's, Collegeville (LSM) 1977.

ON KRISTER STENDAHL'S PAUL AMONG JEWS AND GENTILES

Dr. Sittler requested that all participants read and come ready to discuss Krister Stendahl's book, Paul Among Jews and Gentiles (Fortress Press, 1976), which he made the basis of some of his remarks. The paragraphs below, not spoken all at once, indicate his assessment of the book's significance and are a point of departure for his subsequent remarks, "Biblical Interpretation Today. "

Now Stendahl's argument is that Augustine and, more pointedly, Luther cite the Apostle Paul and the extant New Testament witness to the preaching and teaching of Paul as the certification, the validation of the truth that the *ordo salutis* must begin with a sense of sin, lostness, wretchedness, guilt, that this is the opening—in other words, that one must be knocked down by a sense of self-deprecation, guilt, and lostness before God before he can be open to the word of grace. It dawned upon Stendahl, he says, that what Lutheran dogmatics called the *ordo salutis*—the order of salvation or the sequence by which the outsider becomes an insider, by which the sinner becomes a forgiven sinner, that sequence or progress whereby one moves in the God-relationship from privacy in evil to an understanding and reception of grace—is one, particularly in Lutheran theology, that was deeply formed all the way from Augustine through Luther to contemporary times by a certain interpretation of Paul. And the Pauline language, notions, theology, statements, as these came into Western Christendom, Stendahl believes were transformed by what he calls “the introspective conscience of the West.”

As a developing New Testament scholar, which is his primary field, Krister began as early as the 1950's, he said, when he was doing his doctoral work at Uppsala, to work particularly in Paul (although his doctoral dissertation is really on the Gospel of Matthew—it is a published book, *The School of Matthew*). He asked: “Is it proper to make Paul the great New Testament expositor of the Western understanding of the role of the defiled and the bitter self accusatory conscience?” And the more he studied Paul, the more clearly it came to him that that is a fundamental blunder in interpretation. It was in 1962 when he first brought this issue to

light with the essay, “St. Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West.” That essay in this book (Paul Among Jews and Gentiles) first appeared in the Harvard Theological Review in 1962. And it dropped like a pebble in the middle of the Pacific. A few Harvard alumni read it, and some of the rest of us came across it and read it and were troubled by it; but the dimensions of its complication had not yet hit us.

To load back upon Paul the whole Western understanding of the conscience is a misunderstanding.

So his main argument is that to load back upon Paul of Tarsus the whole Western understanding of the conscience is a total misunderstanding of St. Paul. It is, in terms of the Jewish tradition, quite an impossible translation. Paul, to use Stendahl’s words, had a very robust conscience. On the evidence, the data in Paul’s letters, you cannot find any place in Paul’s letters that he is a groveling, guilt-laden, interior sinner before God; he did not regard himself in that way. Paul’s conversion, to bring it down to a very specific instance, is thoroughly Westernized in our understanding, Stendahl argues. If you look at the data as it is talked about quite lengthily in the Acts and in other places in the New Testament, the use of our Western word “conversion” to interpret Paul’s experience, his encounter with Christ, causes us to misread the nature of that encounter. Paul’s “conversion,” says Stendahl, ought rather to be called his “calling”- not a conversion in our sense of a tumultuous, traumatic, interior sense of deep moral guilt having been crossed by the amazing grace whereby one is converted and, to use the language of the Pentecostals, you admit Jesus to your life, he becomes your Lord and Savior, you now are born again. That was not the kind of encounter Paul had. What Paul had on the way to Damascus was some kind of encounter with the risen Christ whereby he saw that the God of

Paul saw that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was more generous than as a Pharisee he had ever supposed.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was more generous than as a Pharisee he had ever supposed. The staggering disclosure to him was that the God around whom he had drawn a circle had smashed through that circle and that his grace was intended for all. . . .

It seems to me that if Stendahl’s argument is right, as indeed I think it is, then the old traditional *ordo salutis* with which all of us have

grown up (that one must come through the knowledge of guilt, the morally authenticated knowledge of worthlessness; one can only hear the word of grace if that be the prolegomenon to it) is a highly suspect theological formation. Now it is not in every case wrong. There have been many for whom that has been an *ordo* that was indeed salutary. But to make it the absolute programmatic structure of a whole Christian theology is a blunder; we must broaden our spectrum of the God-relationship and not make that the absolute precondition of it. . . .

Now I say it is often hard for Lutherans to see that because we are children of the tradition which began with a man's fierce question, "How shall I find a gracious God?" When that question is the entrance into understanding the Christian faith, it tends to demand an answer equivalent to the question, the kind of answer which has the contours of the demand. And it seems to me that the development of Lutheran piety and hymnody bears evidence to the imperial primacy of that kind of thinking as characteristic of our church. We are not wrong, but neither are we adequately right. Christian possibility is not absolutely confined within a certain dogmatic and liturgical tradition. And that is why at the perilous age of 72 and at the end of a long period as a preacher and teacher, I find myself in an ironical situation of being at the same time more theologically excited than I have ever been in my life and less able to do the kind of work needed to allay my excitement, to gain some new insights which will help me reorder my theology on a broader, more catholic, and more responsible biblical basis—and I find no contradiction between broad, catholic, and biblical

. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage": that was Paul's confession of faith as a Jew. And here comes this crazy sect who say this God has acted in a way beyond Israel's experience or record or revelation, her prophets, her law; for a good Jew, this had to be put down. Therefore, Paul says, "I am the chief of sinners because I really fell for that and I persecuted the Church of Christ because I underestimated God—he is up to something fresh and new here and I would not credit him with being God in a fresh and bigger way than a Jew understands him." But Paul never repudiates Judaism. In a sense, Paul's epistles open up the meaning of God for Israel in fresh and new and bigger terms than he as a Jew ever understood. That is why he uses that exaggerated language of the second Adam. You know what "Adam" means for a Jew—that is as big as you can get. Or take "a new creation." "I am the Lord thy God, I created

the heaven and earth”—that is all the creation there is. Paul confronts this vision of Christ; and he says, “He does it again, he creates something all over again.”

I think Paul the Jew we have made into the kind of Jew which in Romans 9-11 he does not turn out to be. He is horrified by the suggestion that the old covenant of God is repudiated: “Does God repudiate his covenant with his ancient people? God forbid! No! He’s not a covenant-breaker.” So when he said the law is set aside, he doesn’t mean it is of no account; in fact, he concretely says the opposite. But he says

Christian possibility is not absolutely confined within a certain dogmatic and liturgical tradition.

something else has occurred whereby God offers another access to his grace apart from the law. He does not say the law was never a form of God’s grace, but he says “apart from the law”; and that is what he has to say in order to save the church from enclosure within the Jewish community. . . .

Yes, the law is fulfilled. That does not mean it is done with now; but it means that that about God of which the law is pedagogue, teacher, agent is now fulfilled with a new creative substance, an event in which all that is meant is now realized afresh. You see, Paul does not repudiate the law; he uses the word “fulfilled,” filled up—but “filled up” doesn’t mean “repudiated” or “of no account.” It means “realized”: that which God intended for all and for which he created his guiding people as a light for the Gentiles to be ultimately brought within the scope of God’s grace according to the prophet is now realized by this second Adam, this new man in the new garden starting a new inning. You see, the figure of the second Adam is a very powerful metaphor for Jesus. I cannot think of anyone that could be more powerful within the limits of Jewish language than “a second Adam.” That certainly means God wills to be God for his people in a larger, fresher way than ever before. That is what knocked Paul off his horse. . . .

What is the function of that veil before their eyes? It prevents them from seeing the generosity of God, who wants also others into his covenant. The veil is not a moral default but an ethnic, nationalistic one, the kind of religious pride which keeps God as a member of their club, as it were. And there the figure is very good: the veil is that which obscures the clear outlines of the plan of God. . . .

Just a couple of comments, I hope for clarification. First, when Stendahl says, “Get back to the original Paul,” he does not mean a documentary study, that there are original Pauls that are not reflected in the Epistles; all we know about him is there. I think he means by “the original Paul” this: get back to the occasion that constituted Paul’s calling; there is the beginning point. Paul did encounter the risen Christ, and it utterly transformed his thought. That is the original Paul. The implications of that encounter, of the unsuspected and stunning generosity of God toward all people, that is the original impact. Now the occasion or surrounding context of it was the Judaizing insistence that all Gentiles must come under the law; that was a particular historical occasion that was a necessary preoccupation for Paul in his time and place. So by “the original Paul” he means: ponder the occasion in which the grace of God in Christ is absolute liberation – that is the transforming event. How he worked that out in his time was a unique situation that, to be sure, has continuing importance; but it is not the only way in which the God-relationship through Christ has reached the Gentile world, as he evidences in Antioch and Rome. There are other ways in which the Gospel came there and sustained a community. So his argument is one that is almost a commonplace of New Testament study now, that there is no such thing as a New Testament theology, that there are elaborations of the encounter with Christ which use several vocabularies, man categories, find different language to put the thing in. That does not diminish the importance of Paul, who wrote two thirds of the New Testament; but in a sense that may be accidental, too. So it is a unique way of understanding the Christian faith, and in a sense the rise of the Empire and the questions raised for human destiny by Roman law as well as Jewish law, Roman order, Roman state—this all made Paul particularly appropriate to the third, fourth, and fifth centuries. But for the first two centuries, as the evidence is, Paul was really outside the walls. Clement, Justin Martyr, Polycarp have very little knowledge of Paul and refer to him very little; and yet they were Christian apologists of great importance.

God wills to be God for his people in a larger fresher way than ever before.

You know justification is a particularly Lutheran and also Calvinist notion: that the very principle over which everything is to be understood is justification by grace through faith. I think that is true, but we do not have to understand that justification, which means being right with God,

just through the mechanism of a conflict with the law. There are other ways of being alienated from God or having an inadequate understanding of God, and these are overcome in many ways. The Johannine way is one. So that is not an attack on the doctrine of justification; it simply discloses the occasion of its Pauline elaboration so as to place it historically in relative relationship to making sinners right with God in other ways.



COMMENTS

APPREHENSIONS ABOUT THE WEEK

I want to begin now by expressing certain apprehensions about this week. In fact, I come here full of apprehensions, and these apprehensions are so demanding that I was very morose last week about the whole week because I was not sure I could bring it off. I cannot read because of a visual problem. I have to depend on readers, lectures, tapes, and most of all my still pretty effective memory. My degeneration so far is restricted to my eyes, I hope. But the fact that I cannot bring a lot of stuff means that I have to worry about the ability to recall what I have in my head from a good many years. And that is not an easy thing to have to confront for a whole week.

The second one is that you people live really on the frontier of the contemporary mind. The university is a microcosm in which whatever big things are happening in the world have their repercussions. And at the age of 72, I am not sure that my antennae are as sensitive as yours perforce must be, operating in that place all the time. So I may not be able to catch the nuances of the kind of problems you want to bring to me; and if unable to do that, an ever-so-well-stocked memory may not be totally effective in giving you an appropriate reply to what you ask me. So if I misfire, I'll just have to be excused.

GRACE AND FORGIVENESS: CIRCUMFERENCE AND CENTER

If you ask the ordinary Lutheran, "Where do you confront this grace of God", I think ninety percent of the answers would be "in the forgiveness of sins." Now they are not wrong. That is primal powerful, the central fact of the God-relationship: that God receives sinners. But for the ordinary Lutheran the center of it becomes this whole circumference of it. The reality of grace is confined within the second article of the Creed, whereas in the great catholic tradition grace comes in creation, in redemption, in sanctification or the unfolding and maturation of the Christian life.

You know, if Sartre writes a play, *No Exit*, which play is a kind of symbol of the interior life of our culture in which we feel trapped, then it is not sin but inadequate meaningful possibilities for life which is our weakness, our problematic. And the gospel has to be fit into the contours of the human problem of *No Exit* or nausea

or meaninglessness or futility. Certainly the interior problematic is always there, but the shape it takes is always changing; and justification by grace through faith must be machined to intersect those culturally formed occasions....

When we have recovered what seems to be the thrust, this liberating and redemptive force of Paul's encounter with Christ, how shall that be explicated to a culture for whom the problem of law is not the problem? You get up and preach a thumping sermon about "you are not to live according to the law"; and as Paul Holmer says, "I hear Lutheran preachers get up and roar away that you are not to try to justify yourself by your works, and I look around and I don't see anybody trying." A lot of our preaching, I'm afraid, is staying within the terms of the text so responsibly that this text never escapes to do its proper business with our terms, our situation.

GRACE AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament Jew lived by grace, too. He knew he was justified by grace, too. Read the Psalms. As I have written someplace, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ; but they were not invented by him. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was a gracious God.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION TODAY

Today I would like to put this particular theological arc that is represented in Stendahl's essay into what I see as a much larger movement in the field of biblical interpretation. This will have meaning for you, I hope, quite apart from your immediate response to this particular essay. What Stendahl is doing here is the result of a whole family of disciplines which are flowing together and renovating the way in which we stand within the Scripture and try to transmit the substance of the episodes, the statements, the parables, the reports, the poems, the songs of adoration; any of the genre within the Scripture, we are seeing more clearly than ever before, are not fully dealt with when we merely reenact the producing situation.

Until now pretty generally we have understood the task of the sermon to be a responsible reenactment of the situation that produced the text. Sometimes it is important to the understanding to talk about the place, like the synagogue in the lesson that we read this morning. It is an extraordinary thing that a Roman occupier and the chief officer of the occupying detail would have built for the people in this place a schoolhouse, a synagogue. A good deal of the force of the story depends on making clear for people how unusual this action was because the unusualness of the situation is background to the stunning effect of the act that Jesus did. So we reenact in great detail and as responsibly as we can the situation out of which the text came.

But I think we are beginning to see that that is prolegomenon to the preaching of the text. That is simply opening the door for the force of the text to emerge from the past into the present. I think you probably all agree with that—that is what we must do. But when we try to pull the text out of the past which enfolds it or produced it, whether we name the name of Rudolph Bultmann or not, we usually try to actualize the text by an internalization of the objective report. To use Bultmann's words, we take the objective statements of the gospel and find their internal equivalents.

Take, for instance, the story of blind Bartimaeus. I heard a sermon on that this past season; it occurs, I think, as one of the Lenten texts. The pastor responsibly told the story about the blind man who was healed of his blindness by Jesus. And then, although he did not use the words, he wanted to say to his hearers, "What does this mean?" And he ended up by saying that just as Jesus gave sight to this blind man, so he

illuminates us. He talked about the inward vision, the ability in the presence of Jesus to understand ourselves as we previously have not. In other words, he translated the biblical word about “sight” into “insight,” insight or hindsight or foresight. He took the substantial force of the text and found an internal, psychological, personalistic, sociological equivalent. He said, “That is what the text means.” Do you remember? Bultmann said, “The task of preaching, the task of the sermon is to do an act of translation so that in the world of our own self-understanding

The text does not say that Bartimaeus received new insight.

we are transformed before the possibility the text proclaims.” Now, to be sure, there are texts in which that seems to be the purpose: a call to reflection. Then you complete the reflection by your illustration or analysis or proposal, and you have done well with the text. But when you have done that, the mystery of the text is not thereby exhausted. The text does not say that Bartimaeus received new insight or that he had more foresight or hindsight or vision. It says he was blind and then he saw.

The text really is a miracle story. Do you deal adequately with a miracle when you modify the miracle into an internal possibility? You see, this is where the biblical literalists have got us hung up. They really have something, the literalists who say, “What did the man say?” What the text says is that the man could not see and in the presence of Jesus he got his sight. Now that does not say anything about insight. It does not eliminate it as a possibility for spiritual interpretation, nurture; but there is something to the fact that the biblical writers knew as well as we do that this is an ophthalmological stunt. We cannot simply say, “Well, they were naive and they were used to people going around restoring detached retinas.” They were not. The place was full of people who had ophthalmological problems (I am particularly sensitive to this text). They know that you do not just say words or make a salve out of saliva. That is not what they do at the clinic. Sight is not normally restored that way; it is not normally restored at all. The sheer bluntness of the text says he got what he did not have, something that was impossible was now possible, something that was not there was suddenly there. If we use a text in such a way as to drain off the astonishment that really secures the perpetuity of that text in the Christian community, the remembering of it, the retelling of it, the honor in which the Church held it, then we are not adequately dealing with the text. Now what are the other options? Let us leave that for a moment and go at this problem another way.


I have been fascinated for the past half dozen years by the work of Prof. Paul Ricoeur, who is a French Reformed churchman, theologian, philosopher, and particularly a philosopher of language. Ricoeur's regular post is at the University of Paris, but he has spent one or two quarters every year at the University of Chicago over the past eight years. Let me try to condense in a few statements what Ricoeur is saying. He is fascinated, as Gadamer and Heidegger and Levi-Strauss and others have been and are, by the interpretation of ancient texts: how do we understand a written text from another time? And he has used some high fighting words. He has said, for instance, that when a notion, an idea, an insight becomes a written text, it escapes the intentionality of the writer and takes upon itself a life of its own so that it may come to life for whoever can read in a way which the writer no longer controls.

Now let me use an illustration for that, how an image or idea takes on a life of its own when it is solidified, rigidified in a written text. My favorite illustration, because it has an imaginative quality comparable to the biblical literature, is a text from Shakespeare. You recall the play in which an old father, who is a protagonist in the play, dies; and in lamenting the death of her father, the young woman in the play interrupts the action of the drama and sings one of those charming Shakespeare songs. The song which she sings is:

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made.
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.*

(The Tempest, 1, 2, 396ff)

Now suppose you are doing an exposition of that play; and the student pops up and says, "What does that mean?" In a certain sense you are utterly stumped because we cannot recover, we have no documents in this instance to recover what Shakespeare meant by putting that little song in the play at that time. We may speculate; the moment is a moment following the death of a loved father. "Full fathom five thy father lies"—the reference to the dead father of the girl is clear. But then those wonderful images: "Nothing of him that doth fade but doth suffer a



When an idea becomes a written text, it escapes the intentionality of the writer and takes upon itself a life of its own.

sea-change into something rich and strange. . . . Of his bones are coral made, those are pearls that were his eyes.” Those of you who live near the sea, who have seen something long submerged brought up, know the action of the chemistry of the sea upon sunken things. They become encrusted, transformed. A wooden ship will have decayed, and the very shape and veins and structure of the wood will have been filled with deposits often of very bright and glistening chemicals so that “those are pearls that were his eyes.” In the harbor of Stockholm, wasn’t it, some years ago they found a sunken old ship and brought it up and it was no longer wood but completely rock in the form of the ship? The deposits of minerals had occupied the evacuated space of the timbers, and it was a fantastic sea-change. One can speculate about that.

Shakespeare in his century lived in a period when what Dilthey calls the pathos of historical life was becoming a theme in European culture. That is, history changes everything; time in its unfolding gets a hold of every past event and transforms it, symbolizes it, clusters meanings around it, gives it legendary significance like the romance of “The Song of Roland,” the French epic, or Beowulf, or all past events. Time divests events of their original constitution, often of their original facticity; and the evacuated space is refilled by the deposits of new events, memory, contemporary life so that, to take certain of our national occasions, we really cannot thoroughly reenact the first Fourth of July, the day upon which the Constitution was really declared, or the Fourth of July at Gettysburg in 1863. All the past flows into the matrix of a one time and becomes a new thing. Now what did Shakespeare mean by that? I say, we cannot fully know. The images invite our mind to suppose a number of things, but these suppositions cannot with absolute certainty be hung on Shakespeare. How could a mind four hundred years ago reflect about that text in the way we do? We know enough about historical growth, change, enrichment to know he probably did not.

Now think of interpreting the Bible that way. A hundred and fifty years ago, Schleiermacher issued what has become a kind of dictum for biblical study. He said, “It is the task of the exegete to reenact the mind of the writer so that we know him, understand him better than he understood himself.” Now in a sense that is what we try to do in exegesis. For instance, we take the text from Paul in the Philippian letter, “I wish to go

to Rome, I greatly desire to stay with you, it is likely that if I go to Rome that is probably the end of me; but whether I live or whether I die, so what, it is not a great matter.” See, we can interpret that text because in a way we know from our knowledge of the Pauline world and the Roman world exactly the nature of the risk that he ran. We know that he was not talking nonsense. And we may reenact in part, but we cannot get inside Paul’s mind and absolutely recover all that he meant.

So that is what Ricoeur is pointing to when he says, “When a text becomes a written text, it escapes the intentionality of the writer.” When you write a letter, when you have sealed it and put it in the mailbox, it literally has escaped your intentionality. Your intentionality with greater or less force will accompany the letter, confront the reader of it. But how often have you heard someone respond to a letter in such a way that their interpretation of what you wrote is not only not what you meant but maybe almost contradictory to what you meant. They have heard you; that is, the hearing ear does an act of investiture with the written text; they invest that written text. And the more private and intimate a letter is, the greater is the risk of that. So Ricoeur points to that escape that takes place.

Then he says further, “The meaning and force of a text does not lie only back of the text or within the text or under the text or around the text; it lies out in front of the text.” He adds that dimension with other striking phrases. He says, “When a text becomes a written text, it takes off and establishes a trajectory.” It is the duty of the exegete or the

It is the duty of the interpreter to follow the directionality of the text.

interpreter of a written text to follow the directionality of the text. That is, your duty is not fulfilled just when you reenact the missile on the base; but when the missile goes off and is projected forward into history, it projects a certain trajectory. And he makes clear the importance of that when he says you are to ask not only what the text says but what the text is about.

Now that sounds so simple, but let me use an illustration of how important the distinction is between what a text says and what it is about. And I shall allude here to a famous text in Colossians which, when I used it on a certain occasion, was at the moment both releasing in its effect and also radically misunderstood. On that occasion I took the text from the first chapter of Colossians: “He is the image of the invisible God, and in

him all things cohere, all things hang together; he is that from which all things come and toward which all things move”—that famous Christological hymn is Colossians 1:15-18. And my concern with that text was not just what the man says. Now that must be my first concern: to listen, to know what the words say, what the syntax is, what the referents of the text are. I studied that text carefully; and the exegetes whom I studied point out as follows: that this is very peculiar Pauline language. There is only one other place in Paul where he uses Christological language in quite that way. Second, it was significantly written to the Colossians, who were a hotbed of the Gnostic heresy. And this language recapitulates Gnostic language about gnosis; the principium or the logos of this divine knowledge which the Gnostics hoped to gain by a series of steps had to do with the interior structural logos of history, the self, society, the absolute principle of all things. They thought they had it in gnosis. Paul steals that language right out from under their shirt and uses it as a Christological doxology. And it has been pointed out that therefore we must understand that this is Pauline language of a peculiar kind because he is using Gnostic terminology.

When I point that out, so what? I am not through with the text when I have said that. That is what the text says, and it is in itself a remarkable claim. It is talking about Christ as the logos in a non-Johannine way but still with a very enormous vocabulary: all that has been, all that forms things, the creative principle of all things, that which is the directionality of all life and towards which all things tend, the unifying reality of all natural and historical energies is nothing less than the reality of God in Christ—that is what he says. Now that is what he says, but what is the text about? The text is a way of speaking to the ancient question of the one and the many. In and through and under all the many forms and directions of life, is there a unity, something that binds all reality together? Is what the physicist searches for (the ultimate particle or the ultimate form of energy) or what the biologist searches for (the ultimate mystery of life) - is there such a thing? Are we bound forever to multiplicity? Or is there a general field theory, as Einstein put it, which would be amenable to all the fields of phenomena and define an equation that would explicate what is going on everywhere in anything, in all times and in all places? This was the ancient dream of the scientific enterprise, to find the one in the many or through the many or under the many or out in front of many.

Now that is what the text is about. You do not do justice to the text when you simply say, “Speaking to the Gnostics, Paul stole their language so that he could find a familiar way to declare Christ,” which is

what he did. But what the text is about has now escaped the intentionality of Paul at that moment. Paul knew nothing about the evolutionary principle or the evolution of species. Paul was not a modern man behind whom, as behind us, lay the enormous drama of the history of mortal life upon this globe. Paul lived in a relatively parochial situation and moved into the larger Roman and Hellenistic world. But still, look at all the historical life that has rolled over the dam since Paul lived and that is the mystery of history to us.

So when I once declared that text in a sermon or a speech, New Testament scholars popped up like popcorn all over the place and started saying: “That is a misuse of the text. Paul did not mean what Joe Sittler proposed the text as possibly meaning. He could not possibly have meant that.” And to their rejoinder I said: “You are perfectly right. I do not think Paul (or whoever wrote the Colossians—it may not have been Paul) had that in mind at all. I do not think that was the intentionality of the writer, but that is what the text is about!” The text is the probing for a Christological worldview, for an effort to understand the manifestation of God the Creator in the historical event of God the Redeemer in Jesus Christ in such a way that he sings of a meaning of Christ which swings far beyond the Jesus-people or Jesus as a comforter for my private anxiety or a kind of automatic prayer-answerer or “Jesus loves me, this I know, For the Bible tells me so.” These are all true things; but what the text is about is an enormous trajectory, and the form of that trajectory is like the sunken ship. The effort of the mind to ask after the ultimate meaning of Christ is in the text, and the centuries have washed away the Gnostic reply and the old astrologers of the past and

The text is about a Christological question which is more interesting now than it was in Paul's time.

the old physicists like Anaximander and Thales. But the question remains; and what the text is about is a Christological question which is as important now, in fact, more interesting now than it was Paul's time.

So what I am saying is that the kind of biblical study which motivates, urges on, and produces a study like this or many other studies is a biblical study for which exegesis is but one step. And the step which is now bugging the biblical community and really has them in a bewildered furor is the task of hermeneutics: by what principles, by what guide under what kind of discipline shall the interpretation of the written texts proceed?

You know this is very explosive stuff at this moment in the life of the Lutheran Church. There are those in the Lutheran Church who, confronting the present and with even greater fright the future, find that the only sure way is to thump the table with the bound volume and return to a sub-Lutheran position of verbal inspiration, absolute infallibility, and by the vehemence of their declaration beat off the facts. That is one way to go. And for quite a long while I think it is going to be a pretty effective way—but an effective way for reasons that do not give us much joy because it is effective in virtue of the fact that people would rather have simplistic, inadequate truth than complicated efforts to grope for deeper truth. The simple answer will always be effective for many—the absolute authority, even if it be an authority which the meanings of *dabar* and *logos* repudiate as inadequate, even if that authority is laid aside and we reduce the authority of the Christian faith to a book which was not produced until the faith had already been well spread.

Put it another way. To reduce the meaning of the Word of God to the witness of the Church in the Scriptures is a radical reduction of the meaning of the Word of God. The Scriptures are uniquely related to and are a unique, incomparable testimony to the Word of God so that we can say, “We read in the Word of God,” and speak truly. But the notion of the Word by which the heavens were made, the Word that became flesh, precedes the testimony to it having become flesh. The Word is always a living encounter with the awesome reality of God himself conjoined with the urgency to speak or to write—that is *dabar*, that is also *ho logos*. So in truth, in the dynamism of Luther’s understanding of the Word, as I see it, we cannot go that way theologically, though we may have certain episodes in our history when out of sheer fright we take that way and climb into a kind of bomb shelter and pull the doors down and damn the people on the outside. But I do not think that is a rational move, let alone a biblical one.

So what is happening is an effort to go from a profound understanding of the livingness, the fruitfulness, the vitality of the present Word of God behind, in, through, under the text and to work with the written text in such a way that it intersects each new time with its vitality and its truth. Now, this quest, it seems to me, whether you have articulated it in this way or in your own way, engenders this kind of reprobating over and over again of the Scripture. I think that Stendahl engaged in this out of a very concrete experience with young people beset and tormented with guilt and anxiety. That moved him into an examination again of the biblical language about sin, forgiveness, justification.

The moment one talks about the hermeneutical problem in this way, using what concrete illustrations I have, we become aware of the larger problem (larger not in weight but in the scope of reference) of language itself. Why has the problem of language, the meaning of words, what one might even call the awesome mystery of language—why has that arisen in the last ten years with a new force? I assume you will agree with me that it has. Let me give the history of that as I see it.

In about 1942, what is now called logical analysis of language or linguistic analysis or linguistic formal logic made its first trumping programmatic appearance in the book by Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*. And what Ayer argued was that we have now come to a time when we are free from the mythic or the legendary or the romantic or the subjective necessity to use language in older ways; language must now be concretely designative, he said. He said that if the validity of a statement cannot be established, then it is meaningless language. If I say, “God is love,” that is an expostulation, a linguistic manifestation of a confidence or a belief or a hope; but the validity of that statement cannot be established. There is no way in which one can get the data, secure it, and make it negotiable from one person to another in such a way as to establish that. So this is expostulation; it is subjective revelatory language, disclosive language. But the truth of it cannot be established. Therefore, in his *Language, Truth, and Logic* he argues that the only meaningful language is language which is capable of validation.

That book—not by itself, but it was helpful—evoked an enormous literature and set off the whole movement of philosophy into what is now virtually linguistic analysis. At university after university that I know of, there are no other philosophers. The whole department is full of analysts and logicians or linguistic students. They are studying the verifiability of statements: what kind of statements are capable of verification, and which are not? Or to put it the way McIntire does, “If nothing could count against the statement, then it is a meaningless statement.” If I say, “God is love,” and you will admit nothing that would count to question that statement, then you are not making a sensible statement. If I say, “God is the Creator, he created me, and he permits me to have a fatal illness or to get hit by a truck in my fortieth year or permits my child to get leukemia,” do you permit that to enter into your God-notion in such a way that it could count against the statement, “God is love”? If you say, “No,” then it is meaningless talk. You are not admitting data.

Finally, after the whole explosion of language analysis, in a sense these monsters ate each other up. And now there is arriving on the scene a group of thinkers who call themselves common-sense philosophers or humanistic philosophers. They are pointing out the plain fact that though the language analysis may be right, in a certain sense, about meaningless sentences, how much force in the formation of decisions and in the solidification of commitment this “meaningless language” actually plays! Or to use the memorable statement of Amos Wilder in his book, *The Language of the Scriptures*, “If a statement is declared meaningless but is also undismissable, it must be important.” I love that one. If the statement is obviously meaningless in the terms of the logicians but is also undismissable, then it must be important.

From that point he goes into a discussion of the sheer ductility of language, the ability language has to evoke levels of recollection, affection, revulsion, or distaste, the miracle of language whereby associations leap out to cluster around a word. Now this really is not capable of absolute analysis so that when you get through with the analysis, all the meaning is then openly on the table without any mysterious remainder. It is like the senses that we have. The other day I had to go to Marshall Fields to pick up a wedding gift; and on the way up I passed that first counter inside the store on State Street which is cosmetics, and they are always squirting this stuff at you. And suddenly I had a whiff of something that I had not encountered for fifty years. A certain girl named Eleanor wore that when we had borrowed her brother’s big brown Buick and went off for a hamburger near Plymouth, Ohio. And she is now long gone, and her brother is gone, and I am sure the Buick’s gone, and I am damned-near gone. But after fifty years that scent took me right back to the brown Buick and Eleanor and all the rest of it, which was considerable.

I think you have all had that experience, a chance sniff or a reenacted word or a line that you have not heard since you were in the eighth grade. There is something in the associational, in what we call the infinite retrievability of the past. It is in the senses, in the chemistry, in the cerebrum somehow; it makes computers look simple. For that miracle of linguistic accumulation and ductility and sheer ingenuity to be reduced to purely designative language is a great impoverishment. If my doctor writes a prescription to the pharmacist (in language that only a pharmacist can understand), that is designative language. Each sentence points to a material, recognizable, exact thing. And I am glad my pharmacist is not a poet! I do not want him to make pounds out of grains.

With purely designative language the doctor tells him what to do, and he does it. And I am supposed to take it according to the same designative language: three times a day, not four, not two. Now that is the ordinary use of language.

There is a use of language which is evocative.

But there is also a use of language which is evocative, which not only points in a certain direction but is evocative in exact relationship to the vagueness of the pointing. The vagueness of the poetic image or the referents may be the power of it. Take the New Testament phrase, "he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." The phrase, "the imagination of their hearts," goes through Greek back to a Hebrew word that is used to mean what Kierkegaard calls "the dreaming innocence of men," in which innocence, so far as action is concerned, they dream of the most incredible or horrendous possible thing. They do not do it, but they dream of the possible. This is "the imagination"; and men's hearts are full of imaginings, both good and bad.

And the proud, in their imaginings, become world-strutters, world-owners, a kind of demigod. And the Magnificat says, "He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." Now it says something about the flatness and the dullness of our time that the modern translation is, "He has scattered the proud in their conceit." You know, that is really banal, it is almost obscene: to take a vast image like "the imagination of the heart" and then to fasten onto one of those imaginings, conceitedness or conceits, little fancies, and to use that because it is more idiomatic. You know, if the idiomatic is divinized, rhetoric is destroyed. Much of the richness of language will really be impoverished if we continue this silly thing that only the perfectly clear is important.

COMMENTS

MEANING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Some years ago I was in Jerusalem at a meeting of a Lutheran World Federation Commission on Education. A former student of mine, an Arab student we had at Maywood, had a little parish in Ramallah. I wanted to get away and see him, and I had no way to get up to Ramallah except on the Arab bus which ran whenever the Arabs felt like it; so I rented a car outside the Damascus gate to drive about twelve miles up the dusty road to Ramallah, and within two miles on that road the thing began to miss and choke and sputter. I drove into a gasoline station; and the attendant was a sabra, a young Jewish boy who had grown up there. And I said: "The thing is missing and clogged up; it just may be the air intake. Will you have a look?" He took off the distributor, wiped it out, and said, "Step on it!" It started right off. He said, "Tsedeq." That is, it is righteous when it does what it is made to do, what it was intended to do. Righteousness means to get rid of the gunk which is standing in the way of what God intended. . . .

I followed this up with Coert Rylaarsdam, my colleague in Old Testament. He said in modern Hebrew now, if you go into a hardware store in Tel Aviv and want to buy a new axe handle, when you find one that fits into the hand and feels right in the hand, the Hebrew word you would use is *tsedeq*. It is right to be according to one's intended nature or to find a tool that fits the job; that is the meaning of righteousness, rightness. Now you read the Psalms from that standpoint; and you will find the word, "righteousness," coming alive.

Vindication is not just a legal writ; but it is a certification that your God-relationship is not destroyed by weakness, error, failure. But the word has to do with the relations between God and man, the God who approves what you are up to, knowing that you do it as a human. We sometimes forget the wonderfully humane words of the Eucharistic Prayer, "not as we ought but as we are able." We are not obeying God like one God obeying another, with perfection. We are answering God's calling to us not as we ought (because we are creatures) but as we are able. But be sure that "able" includes the capacity to respond to that call. Sin is the smothering or the repudiation of that.

INTROSPECTIVE CONSCIENCE AND WOMEN

I think women could understand more quickly than men Paul's way of talking about sin and grace because I think the introspective conscience has never filled the whole space of the female mind the way it has the male mind. The great artists and unwrappers of the details of the introspective conscience—Augustine, Dante, Montaigne, Goethe, Dostoevsky—have been men. Women, I think, are more practical than men (now that's a mad statement to begin with). I think they are more practical in that they instinctively or somehow understand that the human problematic is not just the torment in the guts; they go beyond that.

My father had his first parish out in the lumber camps of the State of Washington— ganz Deutsch, the whole thing was in German— and the nicest, finest girl in his congregation (she was 14 years old) turned up pregnant. Father came home and was roaring and snorting around about what a horrible thing this was. And my mother said: “Joseph, shut up; it's such a little baby.” In a sense, the whole of the girl's person, her possibility was not identical with the fact that she got herself pregnant. Mother did not want that problem blown out of proportion or to have a total damnation imposed upon the girl, and I thought that was a remark which indicates something deeply female: “it's such a little baby.” It's a baby, and that's fine; but it's not the whole of the universe. I think women understand righteousness, the right in a kind of formal harmony and proper relationship to the world, in a larger way.

ASHAMED OR DELIGHTED

Last fall I was going to preach in a church where I was invited “on the run.” I had a sermon on the text. But they were using that little leaflet, “Celebration.” And as I read that thing, I got so angry at what I saw that I ditched my sermon and preached on the “opening sentence.” It said: “Oh Lord, we enter into thy holy place this morning conscious of all those things of which we are ashamed.” And I thought, “Oh Lord, is this the only way to enter the house of God?” So I read them that passage that they had in their hand and said, “Why could we not equally well say, ‘Oh

Lord, we enter into thy holy place this morning astounded by all those things in which we are delighted,” and really cut loose for about twenty minutes on that. After the service five women—no men—came to see me to say, “I’ve been waiting all my Lutheran life for somebody to suggest that there is more to church than going every Sunday to a kind of dry-cleaning operation of ‘all those things of which we are ashamed.’” It was interesting that it was women who responded to a positive interpretation of life as a theatre of grace. Luther said, “I sometimes rush to the altar and receive the sacrament without confession as a way of making clear to myself that whether or not I feel a certain way about it has nothing to do with God’s act of grace for me.”

ST. PAUL ON WOMEN

I think Paul has had a bad press for a long time because the situation in which he spoke has been so badly understood that we pulled the raw statement out of any contextual illumination and used it as a kind of epigram: “Let the women shut up in church.” Now there is nothing like that at the end of the Roman, that warm, intimate, affectionate ending when he talks to men and women alike: “Send regards to so-and-so, remember me to Rufus and his mother and mine” (a very beautiful way of saying how he regarded this woman as his own mother). Is that the kind of person who would say, “Put their hair up, shut them up, they are really second class citizens in a male-dominated culture, and I don't want to hear any more about it”? That is bad exegesis, too; it is not consistent.


If you re-enact the role of the first century, before the fall of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish community, if you see Paul talking to an embattled little congregation in Rome or Corinth or Thessalonica and understand what might be the pastoral concern back of these strange statements about women and then gain some clear documentary knowledge of the role of women in those societies and the kind of ethos which a woman was obliged to obey in order not to be misunderstood, then you begin to see that Paul is speaking pastorally to protect the women in the congregation from misunderstanding of what they were up to when they went to these house-meetings or whatever.

A woman whose hair was unbound on the streets of a first century Roman city announced her profession openly, and Paul did not want that to be misunderstood. And for a woman in a public place to raise her voice so that she could be heard publicly was simply not in the ethos of the Roman femininity. That does not mean that they were enslaved. We know from Roman history the role that many women played in the state, in the decision-making councils; there are very powerful women in the Roman story. But they did not talk in public. Now I am not defending that; I am simply saying that was the case. Paul was the only man in the Greco-Roman world who said, “As before God, neither male nor female.” That is an absolute statement which no one else had made.

LAW AND GOSPEL

We have heard it so long that we gulp it without a critical hesitation: that rightly to divide the law and the gospel is the way you define a good Lutheran theologian. And I am convinced that is precisely wrong, that this Lutheran opposition between law and gospel or the continuing solidification of the doctrine of the two kingdoms, which in Luther's expression had a certain occasion which made it appropriate—to continue Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms into contemporary life is to stultify theology in the sixteenth-century occasion when it was right and try to stamp out contemporary dough in the same old forms. And it won't work. And I can say this the more boldly because I have had a lifelong fight with other Lutheran theologians who make a career out of it. I am convinced that we only end up with what is not only a dichotomy but opposition between law and gospel because we misread the Old Testament as radically as Stendahl says we misread Paul.

I would think a good exercise for some of you tonight would be to start with the Psalms and open yourselves without any sophistication and ask, “What kind of language does the Psalmist use when he talks about the law?” “Oh, how I love thy law. It is a river of ever-renewed freshness. It is a fountain of living water. I meditate upon thy law day and night.” Does this sound like a code of ethics or a coercive guide telling you what to eat, what to drink, how far you can go? This beautiful, lyrical, affectionate, holy language about the



law should suggest to the mind that even the four gospels do not talk about the gospel that way because they are reporting the teaching of Jesus over against a Sadducean and a Pharisaical pedagogizing of the law, making it absolute instructions of a catechetical kind. Now confound it, if we only would let the Old Testament speak to us about the law in its own way! “Oh, how I love thy law, I meditate on it day and night, it is like bathing in a fresh river or finding water in the middle of a desert, cool running water.” By Torah the Old Testament means the infinite loving kindness of God, too; Torah tells of the loving kindness, the patience, the covenant-making faithfulness which can be counted upon (our faithfulness comes and goes but his does not, he has given his word, he will not change)—that is Torah, too. The word “law” is simply a lousy translation for Torah. If the English word “law” meant the structure of all things as God intends them, then we would have something close to Torah.

And that is why I have so violently argued that grace is a quality of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob which is constitutive of Israel as much, as centrally as of the Church. And the particularity of the Church of Jesus Christ is in the verb, “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” It is this materialization, incandescence, incarnation, personal presence of God in Christ which is constitutive of the Church. That is the unique thing about this new covenant community. That is why the image of the first Adam and the second Adam is so effective in Paul’s preaching. . . .

The law/gospel distinction—that is, the separation of the reference of these two words—is not to be repudiated or just washed out. They have their role because there is an ordering function in life and there is also a Dionysiac element in life—the new, the unheard of, the spontaneous, the fresh. These are built into the structure of things. And the law/gospel terminology is, I think, indefinitely useful to address life that has that character in which we are always in a tension between order and spontaneity, the particularity of every situation that calls for a fresh response and the accumulation of human experiences that permits us to lay down governments and rules and order, as if people were in some sense alike; at the same time, we know that no two are alike. So the tension built into the nature of things requires a double-entry bookkeeping in life, and law and gospel are accents within this; but they are not absolute distinctions. . . .

What I am really proposing is that the circumstance within which Luther necessarily made a clear distinction between law and gospel was in order to secure the freedom of God in his grace as over against the sacerdotal imprisonment of the grace of God within the sacramental system. That seems to be the ecclesiastical sociological situation in which Luther picked up and used this very efficient club. It had to be done. I think no other use of language could have done it. But does that mean that that situation is now hardened into a distinction without modulation which we use from then on, now that we have quite another situation? The Roman Church is not the Roman Church of the sixteenth century; the understanding of the sacraments in Roman Catholic theology is no longer that of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; the understanding of the people of God is not the same as that of the Tridentine theologians. We have a quite new, open situation in which Luther's argument with the church ought not to be simply repeated every Reformation Day as if the ballgame were being played in that park.

THEOLOGY AND PREACHING

I never chose to be a theologian. I was a preacher, and I was invited to assume a theological job and did; but theology to me was always theology for the sake of clear preaching. But if it could not somehow be translated into proclamation or proposal or invitation, then I could not be interested in it. On the other hand, preaching was always theological. The two belong together. So at the end of my life I always read and evaluate theology for preaching. When I analyze why I am a little troubled with a preacher or want to urge him on and think of alternate ways to say what he is saying, I try to ask, "What is really the problem?" Then I begin to see that the problem is that he is using old formulations with a kind of simple confidence that they are still doing business with his hearers. The business they are doing is certifying that he is an okay guy because "we have heard all these noises for a long time and he must be okay because he makes them too." So that is a way a congregation approves of the preacher by not really hearing him. They hear familiar noises in a certain sequence; and they think, "He's okay, we'll keep him around, he's a good pastor." . . .


When a word like justification, atonement, sacrifice, or propitiation has to be explained, it already has lost a good deal of its punch. It is like symbols in church windows. They build a new church and put in Christian symbols; then they take the people around and explain what the symbols mean. Well, when symbols were invented, they did not have to be explained; that is why they are effective symbols directly. A symbol that has to be explained has lost symbolic power; a word that has to be explained over and over and over, ever more carefully, is not the thing I want. Avoiding the normal language—that is not an act of repudiation; in fact, it is an act of obedience, in a sense. . . .

I have a simple-minded question I ask when I read the propers for the Sunday: what is going on here? That gets you back of the report, the facts of the episode which you have read a hundred times. Ask the fundamental question: what is going on here? It is as if you find one of your children suddenly departing from accustomed ways and doing things he or she has not done before or exercising a discipline that has not characterized him or her (that is even more astounding). And then a parent says: “There is something going on here. Something is going on here of which this is but the outward semblance.” I think that is the way one ought to read a text, not just the text of the Scripture but any significant text. . . .

Comment: My problem is that when I try to get away from the language that has been trivialized and to talk to the gospel in plain English, then it does not sound gospel.

Ah, you are probably the only one who will worry about that. If you are confident it is and if you can tell by the signals you get back from the people that the God you are talking about they understand to be a God of grace and also of judgment who is not to be played with, that the Church is a community of believers and not just an organization, then you will know that it is real and not phony meat that you are peddling. . . .

If you were an ambassador to Ethiopia, it would be useful to learn the language. And if I am an ambassador to the secular world whose mind is formed by certain conceptualities of reality, then I do not throw a strange thing at their head but I try to say: Jesus is the answer to the question that you would put this way or the search



you are conducting this way. I try to fit the contour of my proclamation into the contours of the age. Now that is not in a sense helping God (though, you know, helping God is not a bad career); it is not helping God in the sense that without my help he could not be God, But apparently he wants my help: “you are to go into all the world and preach the gospel.” Well, I can preach it simply out of my simple trust; but I also do have the question of “what does that mean.”

The moment somebody asks me, “What does it mean,” I already have to be a theologian, don’t I? I have to try to find a conceptualization, an image, a symbol, an analogy, a zipper to bring these things together, not to prove my point but to make clear what my point is. See, a theologian does not prove anything; he simply makes clear what the claim of the Christian faith is. So theology is an act of proposal always on-going because it is like shooting in one of these county-fair things where the ducks keep moving; the target at which you are shooting is always in motion. That is why no past theology is ever completely adequate. The Church has got to unfold, unpack, describe, explain, make intelligible its message to a people who do not belong to the community that produced the vocabulary in which the gospels are written... You see, Luther could talk about grace to sinners, to people who never doubted from the long teaching in Western Catholic culture that they were sinners in the hands of a God who was a God of judgment and they had better watch it. He did not have to create the problem before he declared the answer. Now we are living in a time of such rapid change that we have to create the curve of receptivity before we lay in the curve of redemption.

CHRISTOLOGY AND GRACE

We move now into reflection upon a problem even more fundamental than the one we have been engaged with until now. I want to ask the question about the relation of the Son to the Father, how do we understand the mission and message of Jesus, how do we answer the problem of the second Person of the Trinity. This question has been on the margin of our discussion of Paul, and I want to rush in on that question with perhaps more enthusiasm than knowledge. But I must take a little time to introduce it; I have a couple introductory things to say.

First of all, I am always a little embarrassed when I am introduced as a systematic theologian, particularly as an eminent one, because I am neither. I am too good a theologian to think I am a great one, and my way of reflection is too impressionistic to deserve the adjective “systematic.” A blessed young Catholic woman at the Louvain, whose name is Moira Creede, has just written her doctoral dissertation, called “Logos and Lord: A Study of the Cosmic Christology of Joseph Sittler.” That blessed girl wrote five hundred pages, and I read her dissertation (or had it read to me); and it was a most amazing experience. She knows me better than I know myself. She has followed some of my undeveloped thoughts and unfolded them so beautifully in ways that I had not suspected were possible, and in fact they were not for me; but she did it. My wife read me the first chapter and was so convulsed with laughter over one sentence that she could not continue. Her first chapter is on the theological style, and she says: “With both feet firmly planted in mid-air, he takes off in several directions.” That is probably so. But I justify that as a way of being a theologian, though not a good way of being a systematic theologian.

I justify that by an analogy. My grandmother once instructed me when I was quite young about how to clean a spot out of a textile. She said, “When you have a spot you have to remove, do not start rubbing on the spot. Start out at the edge and work in from all around because if you rub on the spot, you will get the spot out and leave a ring around it. So you work from the outside in.” If I have a theological method, that is it: to walk around the question or the issue or the problem and see it as carefully as I can from several perspectives and then hope that the outcome is useful. Often it is, and often it is not.

And that is why—a second comment—it was no accident, when I went to the university faculty, that my title was “constructive theology.”

Now “constructive” in the Chicago mores means—it does not mean the opposite of “destructive theology”—that a person is defined not as one who sees his role as the transmission of a tradition only or who is a historian of the past who leads the students through the accumulation and development of doctrine and then transmits the catholic faith in whatever permutations and combinations students want to absorb it. But a constructive theologian is one who is trusted to have known the past with a fair degree of responsibility but is always poking away and probing at the margins of where the theological tradition in all its vast accumulation intersects the contemporary mind and contemporary feeling and—more than that—always questions the adequacy of past categories to deal with current experience.

That is the way I open the christological discussion. We all know something of the categories in which the question, “Who is Jesus who is called Christ, who is he in relation to the Father;” has been put. And that question necessarily engendered the Church’s teaching on the Holy Trinity. When I ask that question, I want to go at it now from a number of different positions, in which the concatenation of one with the other may not be altogether luminous; but I promise you I shall try to land them on their feet after some hours.

THE EARLIEST CHRISTOLOGY

Let us begin, then, at a quite arbitrary place. Reflect with me upon how the earliest christology of the Church occurred. The earliest Gospel is certainly not earlier than 60, maybe as late as 80. There are thirty years there from the death of Jesus to the earliest writings. The earliest writings were not the Gospels. The earliest documents of the Christian community were the Pauline letters. Paul lived and wrote and died before the earliest Gospel was circulated. Now we must ask: as we look at this early literature (the Pauline literature), the letter to the Hebrews, the Johannine literature (that is certainly quite late), and then the Synoptics, in what kind of language is Jesus talked about? What are the episodes, the symbols, the images, the figures of speech, the analogies that are used to say who is he, what is going on in him and through him?

C. H. Dodd, in his little book, *According To The Scripture*, makes a study of what he calls the *testimonia*. *Testimonia* was the early church word to indicate the use of Old Testament words, ideas, and images that are used in the New Testament. Dodd rifles the whole Old Testament

and looks up every Old Testament reference that is made in the New Testament that has a christological meaning, and there are about 116 of them. These were early gathered into a book of the *testimonia* in the second century. Dodd says (and this is a memorable statement), “The earliest building blocks for the Church’s christology were quarried out of the hope of Israel.”

The main blocks in that structure are clear: “he is the Son of David . . . he is the Son of God . . . he is the Son of Man.” The Son of Man: I will not jump up and down on that; but you all know the enormous literature on the Danielic and apocalyptic figure of the coming Son of Man who is a figure born in Jewish apocalyptic in the four centuries before Christ, this mighty one who should come who will demonstrate the power and the judgment of God upon his creation. That Son of Man was a powerful figure in which was released the sheer heat and awesome fanatical hope that Israel had, that the God of their fathers would act for their liberation and their vindication. That was one of the images that was expressive of and that solidified the hope of Israel. The Son of Man, the Lord (in Greek, *kurios*), and fundamentally the Messiah, the

“The earliest building blocks for the Church’s christology were quarried out of the hope of Israel.”

anointed one, the expected one, the one who should come: all these are building-blocks which were already in the quarry of Israel’s hope and faith. When the Church then began to construct an intellectual, conceptual house to say who is this one who came, taught, was crucified, and was risen, they started to build that conceptual house out of these building-blocks. Notice that these building blocks were not just ideas; they were profoundly charged symbols, particularly the Son of Man and Messiah.

Here we have to take a little side-trip. There is an unusual statement in Paul in which he makes a longer statement than the occasion would seem to require. He says “He is raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.” Now why does he not say, “God raised him up”? He does say that sometimes. But here he uses the phrase which in Hebrew is very eloquent, but it is hard for us to get the force of it. “He is raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.” The word “glory” (*doxa* in Greek, *kabodh* in Hebrew) means that luminousness which lights up everything when God is clearly present and at work in a situation. When the young Isaiah went into the temple and beheld the glory, the *kabodh* Yahweh,

the glory is never defined. It is simply the indubitable, unassailable presence and action of God. It is an epiphany, a theophany. The word “glory”—“his glory fills the world”—means that the presence of life rather than death is a manifestation of the glory of God. Hopkins uses it time and again in his poetry: “Glory be to God for dappled things,” etc. He is using the word technically. He beholds the presence of the glory; and the glory is simply the sign of the ineffable which meets us through the effable, the material, the ordinary—the extraordinary allure that comes to us via the ordinary. “He beheld the glory, and he put his face to the ground lest the incandescence of the ungraspable glory might burn him up” is a common Old Testament expression with the prophets. It is probably the most powerful term of sheer religiousness in the Semitic vocabulary. Jesus is raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. Now play that over against the prologue to John’s Gospel that light came into the world and darkness could not put it out in John is the *kabodh* in the Synoptics or in the Old Testament.

So when these people try to explain Jesus, who is out in front of the experience of Israel, by the language of expectation from behind, you get the method of the earliest christology. They use the language of hope and expectation to invest the new event with meaning comprehensive enough to explain the vigor of that hope and the release that that hope experiences in Jesus. How do we, now, in the light of contemporary biblical studies, look at that development of the earliest christology? And how do we assess its adequacy to propose the lordship of Jesus into a culture which is not formed by Israel’s faith or for which these old words about the glory, the Son of David, the Son of Man, the one who should come, and the Messiah are not normal speech? We did not grow up in that tradition.

I did a course last summer in the graduate school with Wilhelm Linss, and he called it a critical investigation of the terminology used for Jesus in the Synoptics. He made a catalog of all these terms; and then bringing the best critical studies to bear upon them, he came up with the astounding summary that Jesus never accepted any of these titles for himself, that the language with which the Synoptics invested him was never a language that Jesus used to announce his intention, his purpose, his reality, his self-consciousness. Now this is really a stunner. It means that modern New Testament studies have disclosed the fact that Jesus was impatient with these titles.

This also means that for a contemporary student of New Testament studies the figure of Jesus becomes ever more mysterious. Some of you

remember reading Schweitzer's Quest of the Historical Jesus; and you remember that really haunting last paragraph of the last chapter in which he says, "He comes among us as one unknown." We cannot with any satisfaction to our own mind lock him into categories. He slips from under and escapes. And I find in the seventy-second year of my life I do not know who he was, I do not know what Jesus intended, I do not know clearly how he understood himself because the Gospels are not exposures of the introspective conscience of Jesus. Jesus literally never talked about himself. He does not disclose himself; his identity is not given to us in an autobiography or even a biography written for that purpose. The Gospels are not written for that purpose. Even if they had more autobiographical, intimate information about Jesus' self-consciousness, they do not choose to tell it. They are proclamatory documents of a kingdom; they are not stories about Jesus in his own insides.

The historical Jesus is not available. He comes to us only through the message about him, which the Synoptics and Fourth Gospel and Paul's letters are. Willi Marxsen has one sentence in his book, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*: "There were no witnesses of the resurrection, there were only witnesses to the resurrection." What happened Easter morning is not the interest of the Gospels or anything else in the New Testament. Reginald Fuller, in that fine book, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, by good historical analysis shows that the stories of the rolled-away stone and the empty tomb and the guard's place all come later than the primary level, which is simply "He is risen." So even the Gospels do not claim to be witnesses of the resurrection, only witnesses to it. We can talk about the indubitable event: there was such a man. No first-rate scholar any longer does what David Friedrich Strauss tried to do in 1834 and says: "It is very, very doubtful that he ever existed." That he existed is no longer a doubtful matter. The phenomenology of such an event in the history of the ancient Near East and in Roman history is much too clear. But who he is, what he thought about himself, how he understood his role and his mission—these are not directly available.

Now you add to that clear result of historical critical studies the fact that Jesus himself seems restless and not content to be invested with these garments woven out of Israel's hope which they threw around his shoulders; he shakes them off. Let me use several illustrations. In the Passion story, it says, "Are you the Son of God?" Jesus says, "You say that." It is not, "Thou hast said," a statement of acquiescence, but something more puzzling than that: "I did not say that, that is not how I announce myself; you said that, or it has been said of me."

Take another. Willi Marxsen again has done a wonderful study on the phrase, “the Son of Man”; and he shows that there is very little congruity between the reported teaching of Jesus and the figure of the Son of Man in the Daniel apocalyptic. Jesus apparently had no interest in that kind of thing. But the writers of the Gospels apparently did, and it may be that the Son-of-Man passages on the lips of Jesus are put there. When it says, “The Son of Man hath not where to lay his head,” he is not identifying himself with the Son of Man of Daniel’s expectation, of Israel’s hope; he is simply talking of himself. And in Hebrew that is quite possible; he is saying, “I myself have not where to lay my head.” Nothing is lost by that interpretation, and much confusion is spared because the Son of Man is not the kind of thing that apparently happened in the occurrence of Jesus of Nazareth. “Who do men say that I am?” Notice that they gave very big answers to that question: “you are Elijah; you are that prophet, John; you are the Christ, that is, *messias* in Hebrew; you are the coming one, the anointed of God; you are the Christ.” Jesus goes on to speak, so we suppose, as though Peter gave the right answer. Then Jesus talks about what will be the outcome of his ministry, and there again the word “Son of Man” is used. He may have said simply, “And I must suffer many things.” But the writers in the Gospels are concerned always to hook him back into these figures of expectancy. “I will certainly have to suffer, die, and so forth.” And then Peter, who supposedly gave the right answer, comes: “Oh, no, this won’t happen to you.” How do you account for the powerful protest of Jesus against that statement, “Get you behind me, Satan!”? What was so satanic about that? We usually say: “He did not trust Jesus; he wanted to correct him.” I think that is a quite human error. I do not think it is that in Peter’s response which has to be repudiated. It is the whole of the preceding conversation in which his disciples tried to invest him from behind with their understanding of “Son of Man,” “kingdom,” “he that should come,” “Messiah”; and he impatiently shrugs it off. Jesus will not permit himself to be fit into the tailored suits of Israel’s hope; he breaks out of them. He is always restless within these ill-fitting garments.

Son of David: he not only makes nothing of it in his own speech; but when it is used of him, he denigrates it. In our Christmas tradition we wrap him in swaddling clothes from behind, from Israel, whereas Jesus apparently was never content with that. And when he finds someone using that language too vehemently, like the woman who, hearing him preach, said in a flood of maternal affection, “How happy your mother must be to have a boy like you,” angrily he answers, “Yea, rather

they that hear the word of God and keep it.” Jesus was violently anti-christocentric: “The words which I say are not mine. . . that mission upon which I am called is not mine but his that sent me. . . I do the will, the work of him that sent me . . . the work that I do is the Father’s work.” Jesus is radically theocentric always.

THE EARLY CENTURIES

Where did the Church in its christology go next? When the theater for the Church’s declaration that Jesus is the Christ ceased to be an audience trained in the hope of Israel and the sagas and the stories of the prophets, when the audience for their declaration became other than the Jewish world, when they moved into the world of Hellenism and the Roman world and the world on Cyprus, Crete, Asia Minor (which is a vast mixture of many kinds of things), they could no longer use simply the language of Israel’s hope. They had to find a conceptuality that would be intelligible to their audience; and that is why the christological developments from the second, third, and fourth centuries became highly philosophical. They simply could not go to a Greek running a restaurant on Crete and say to him, “This is the Son of David.” “David, David who?” “Son of Man? Son of who? How’s that again?” Or “Messiah? I never heard of it.” What they had to do, to put it in shorthand, was to find a conceptuality of sufficient dimensions to propose that in this one the ultimate understanding of God and man and the world was available in a new way. That is a job! One can only stand in amazement and astonishment before the christological accomplishments of the first four centuries.

. . . a conceptuality of sufficient dimensions to propose that in this one the ultimate understanding of God and man and the world is available in a new way.

It is the habit of many people who have my role as constructive theologian for our time to look down their contemporary noses at those accomplishments of the Gregorys and Clement and Tertullian, and Augustine and the others; they had this all wrapped up in prepositional, philosophical language. They had not other options, and the magnificence of their achievement within the language used to be admired before it was criticized. And I am fairly staggered in admiration when I read, for instance, St. Augustine on the Holy Trinity or Gregory of Nyssa, the Nazianzus, or Cyprian. What I want to say is that we must

grow beyond through admiration, and any growth that does not begin with admiration of our fathers is sophomoric and will end up by being unjust and lacking in depth.

What these people had to do was to look around in the world—and you see the beginnings of it in Paul’s epistles— to look around in the existing vocabulary of the life-world of the first and second and third centuries and find a large conceptuality. I shall not hold forth on this subject not only because we have no time but frankly because it is not my field, I am not competent. I am competent enough to admire it and love it, but I cannot lecture on it as an authority. But let me put it in simple, but I hope responsible, terms. Already by the first century the Hellenic philosophical tradition was a very rich and supple one. They already had a vocabulary to specify the goal of man’s intellectual, rational speech. They were looking for the *arche*, the fundamental principle or energy or structure or pattern; it can mean all of these things, and there were philosophers who used it in all those meanings—Thales, for instance. There is a wonderful sentence in old Thales; five hundred years before Christ Thales says: “It is my task in reflection to look upon all things and ask, ‘Whence do things come, to what purpose do they exist, and to what end do they move?’” Things come into existence, suffer, and return again to that fountain of all life from which they came.”

So the Greek philosopher had already set the problem of the one and the many: is there some one central energy, source, fountain, creative point from whence all things come? Is it possible to organize multiplicity into an intelligible world, not just a various, fragmented world? That is the philosophical effort; that is the love of wisdom, *philosophia*. And they had invented a vocabulary: the *arche*, the *hypostasis*, the fundamental energy or pattern. I love the word “energy” because Greek thought was not abstract in this sense; they were physicists, too. They saw that somehow this understanding of the one must not only explain the world as history but it must explain geological, geographical, biological, mathematical, natural life. When they were looking for one, they were looking for a big one; they were looking for a general field theory that would include the whole business.

The word that said it most clearly is *logos*. What is the *logos* of reality? What is that which holds all things together, from which all things come, toward which all things tend, which is the interior *principium* or *arche* or *logos* of all things? Jewish Christians knew Jesus to be the Lord; *ho kurios* is the first Christian confession: Jesus Christ is

Lord. But that earliest confession cannot be nailed down to a clear content because the word “Lord” was used in many ways. You would use it to mean “Sir”, the lord of the vineyard. It could mean the duke or the

He is who he is because he does what he does, or he does what he does because he is who he is.

baron or the king. Even a woman in certain societies talked to her husband as “my lord.” In Shakespeare’s time, “my lord” certainly had no divinity attached to it, not even any male chauvinism. So “the Lord” has a very broad meaning.

When they said “Jesus is Lord.” what did they mean? Within the New Testament itself there are, on the main, two ways of trying to understand Christ, who he is. I can put them epigrammatically this way: he is who he is because he does what he does, or he does what he does because he is who he is. Now the second is Johannine: he is Lord from all eternity . . . in the beginning was the Word, *ho logos*, the Word by which all things were made . . . this Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Here is already a powerful, engendering unity which is the source of all within. Nothing less than that has appeared in the flesh, and the darkness tried to put it out and could not. John came before him and testified to him. The light shined in darkness. Grace and truth came by him. This is the *logos*. That is one way: he does what he does because he is who he is. That is, he is ontologically one with the Father and therefore does the works of God. The miracle stories are told to point to that.

Or put it the other way: he is called the Son of God, one with the Father, or Immanuel, God with us, because he does what he does. There is a haunting sentence: “He is made the Son of God by the things which he suffers.” That is, he becomes; his life is a kind of accomplishment of the reality of God within the human situation. We beheld the fullness of the Father and the glory of God in this one, says Paul. Now again, notice the Jewish and Greek language combined. The *pleroma*, the fullness of the Godhead, is combined with the Semitic word, the glory, the *kabodh*: we beheld the glory of the Father in this one. That is not a simple intellectual construct; it is a blend of many ways of thinking.

So you have these two christological positions within the New Testament. One is an ontic christology: the substance or essence of God is reenacted, is actually present here in Christ; he is of one substance, *hypostasis*, with the Father—that is the way Nicea put it. The other says

that he became the Son. The Son, in that context, would mean the transparency to the Father. He became that through, by virtue of the things that he suffered so that he is made Christ and Lord in the Philippians lesson; or God has raised him, has appointed him Lord. Did he win this position by the accomplishment of his life? Or did he, as in the Fourth Gospel, come from the bosom of the Father and move untroubled by temptations and doubts serenely to his appointed end? The Synoptics are quite different. The Synoptics do not have this serene, untroubled, cool Christ, who is simply God in history disguised in the figure of Mary's son.

The Synoptics have a quite different way: he is troubled, he is tempted, he sweats in the garden, he suffers, he bleeds. So these two christologies have a tradition within the Synoptics and within the New Testament literature itself. Paul can use both languages and indeed does.

By the middle of the fourth century, it was necessary for the Church, for the early Christian communities around the Mediterranean, to make a clear statement. There was a multiplicity of testimonies to Christ, understandings of him, ways of worshiping him, and apparently diverse liturgies, Gregory Dix to the contrary notwithstanding; it never was as simple a liturgical tradition as Gregory Dix points to. At Nicea, largely because of pressure from the Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Church had to stand up and be counted; and she had to solve some internal problems within her community as to what kind of consensus statement to make to the world.

You know what the Nicene settlement came up with. And against this background I hope you hear it with fresh interest again as we recall, "And I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things, visible and invisible . . . God from God, light from light, true God from true God." Now each of these little phrases has a target out there, very explicit to them, not always clear to us. "Light from light": the world of the fourth century was full of Mazda-worshippers, this Eastern cult of the light; and so they took a poke at them and said, "If you want to know what the ultimate light that lights every one is, he is here; it is the Christ we confess"—therefore, "light from light." "True God from true God, begotten, not made": the fathers used the word "uncreated." Things that are made are created; he is an uncreated grace, that is, a pure, unique event from God—that is what they meant by "begotten." Or they say later on, "he proceeds from the Father"; that is, the procession of the Son from the Father is a right way to say that when the Father becomes

God in an historical situation, he proceeds from pure ontological essence into an historical manifestation. That is the doctrine of the procession. And then the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

All of this language interestingly in the early Church is sung, and that is not simply a note on musicology. It says that that kind of theology is meant as doxological, not as prepositional. In prepositional form it was a doxological kind of theology that used these propositions in order to express adoration and praise and mystery. They did not say they were solving the mystery of the relation between the Father and the Son and the Spirit; they said they were proposing and declaring their faith within the mystery. I think it is important for us to remember that the Nicene Creed is not a philosophical treatise delivered to the philosophers, saying: “There you have it, we are all through with that—next question, please.” It was a hymn of the Church’s faith expressed in philosophical language so that the world which was not Semitic and did not know the whole Abraham-Isaac-Jacob bit would understand what is the size of the claim they were making for this one they called Lord.

This will not diminish our conviction that we must go further and try to find a conceptuality appropriate to our time, even doxologically appropriate, as theirs was for their time. We must not simply assume theirs will carry the mail for us; I do not think it will carry it any longer. That does not mean the Church does not say it. You see, you sing the song of remembrance even while you are cracking your brain to find a new way. That characterizes the intellectual beauty of the Christian Church:

You sing the song of remembrance even while you are cracking your brain to find a new way.

she never forgets and she is always working. She never lays anything aside as wrong though she may lay things aside as no longer adequate or appropriate or fitting or intelligible.

For instance—I gladly fall into all these temptations to digress because in the long run they are not digressions if any of you have ever read Irenaeus, which knowing the state of seminary education when you were there you probably did not, old Irenaeus had a wonderful way of putting images together which was a popular way of preaching in his time. He has a great sermon on “The Two Eves.” He says, “Eve in the first garden sought her own will and raised her head proudly before God. But the second Eve, Mary, said, ‘Be it unto me according to thy

will.’ So the second Eve redeems the fault of the first.” He calls Mary the second Eve, and in patristic literature that often happened. He says, “Mary, the second Eve, recapitulates, reenacts, lives through again the broken record (we would say) of the first Eve; only she does it right: ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord . . . my soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.’ The first Eve argued with God her Savior, the second Eve rejoices in him. She bows her head; the first held her head proudly up.” Interestingly, W. H. Auden, I think it is in the *Christmas Oratorio*, picks up this old figure of Irenaeus and has a whole stanza in his poem about Mary, the second Eve; he picks up the old figure and puts it into modern language.

Irenaeus said: “Now comes a new-created, begotten of the Father, the second adam, man; he recapitulates the fault of the first man and thus restores all mankind to God’s intention.” He sees the work of Christ as a reenactment of man’s whole story from the first Adam up to the time of Christ. Christ plays over the whole drama but obeys the will of the Father throughout and thus restores mankind in the corporate second Adam to his proper God-relationship.

TWO CHRISTOLOGIES

I propose that there were two dominant New Testament strands, a christology of essence and a christology of function. A theology of essence says what the traditional doctrine of the incarnation declares: that this Word, eternally begotten of the Father, becomes flesh and you have, as it were, the reality of God actually present in a human life, fate, and destiny. When, for instance, the woman at an occasion of a raising from the dead cried out, “Immanuel, God is with us,” did she mean that the reality of God was actually present and did that deed or that the power of God through the agent of a human performed that deed? You can read it either way.

Everything depends, of course, on what you mean by the reality of God. If one means by God a kind of super-person who dwells in eternity and from whom all creation proceeds, then “present” would have to mean that an essence of the Godhead is physically present. Now that is pretty hard to understand and pretty hard to take. If, however, you mean that the holy, creative, primal reality indicated by the term “God” exercises a power which is creative and judgment and grace and that power becomes incandescently manifest and does work in a human person,

that is a christology of function. In that sense, Jesus is Lord because he is the incomparable, full actualization of the reality of God within nature and history and in the realm of personal relations. And I deliberately throw in nature because why are the miracle stories told and why does no gospel omit them? Simply, I think, because they want to show that the nature of whatever is specified as Lord must have the lordly creativity, bringing something out of nothing. The miracle stories point to that in the word and the work of Christ.

So a theology of function is one that, for many reasons, has ever since the Reformation assumed a clamant and growing presence within Christian theology. Take, for instance, the man who has been called the modern church father, Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's enormous influence on all theology since him has been his commitment to the elaboration of talk about God in terms that receive their meaning from human operations, that is, realities, powers, the emergence of grace, the exercise of judgment within the human situation. He does not deny supernaturalism; but he says the only supernaturalism he can know anything about is one that has disclosed its energy and power within the world of nature, history, humanity itself.

Schleiermacher has not enjoyed a good press within a good part of Protestantism, although he has been enormously influential. For instance, you simply cannot understand modern theology via Tillich without seeing that he is a kind of contemporary Schleiermacher. The way Tillich strangely gripped the contemporary mind in the Fifties and the Sixties is due to the fact that his work is an operation of translation in which the referential substance of supernatural words is translated into the evidence of operations of a holy, redemptive character on the horizontal plane of humanity. I think that is the key to the powerful address he made to our generation. The reasons why that address could find its target, why the letter he sent could be delivered, is the matter I want to take up tomorrow morning when I talk about what I see to be the construction of the contemporary mind which Christian theology must take note of.

I want to give you the fundamental components of what I see as a christology, a way of thinking about Christ, a way of understanding his power and his allure, which is on the margin of classical Christian theology, whether Reformed or Lutheran or Free Church, but which I find is being probed for by all kinds of secular writers. If you study the work of T. S. Eliot, particularly the works that are explicitly metaphysical or

theological, what you observe in Eliot is this uncanny way in which he uses symbolic language to unwrap the meaning of events and person-ages which have previously been put in quite angelic, supernatural, or philosophical language. I think particularly of the great Quartets. It seems to me a way to get at an understanding of why the Church, from the beginning, could say “Immanuel” even in the absence of a philosophical logos or hypostatic theology. Ordinary people could look through what happened and then talk about God. They saw a man do something and said, “God is with us.” They saw a happening or heard a word and said, “We have not heard it this way; here is a kind of authority which we previously have talked about only when talking about God the Father.” And they were talking about Mary’s son.

THE SUFFERING OF JESUS

I want you to reflect for a moment on what we mean when we talk about the suffering of Jesus. Every time Lent has come around in my parish ministry and in my teaching life, I have been dissatisfied with the answers I have heard to the question: what constituted the suffering of Jesus? There is a whole gory theological tradition represented in pre-Vatican II Roman liturgies which made a great deal of the physicality of that suffering. In the Reformation when Luther—and Calvin here is not different—talked about the passion and death of our Lord, it was not that point that they came down on. They said the suffering was that he took upon himself the sin of the world. The great Latin hymn, the *Agnus Dei*, is still the primary hymn of the passion. In a sense, the accumulated sin, the horror of man’s God-abandonment, his separation from God, which is the Hebrew definition of sin—all of this, accumulated through untold ages, is now concentrated and piled upon the Lamb of God who in the Old Testament figure is driven into the wilderness and carries with him as the sacrificial victim the sin of the world.

To be sure, there is a kind of substitution that does go on, even in human life. There are people who take upon themselves and try to get the meaning of the tragedy of human existence. Dostoevsky is one of the Eastern Christian writers who agonized over the problem of human suffering, not simply in the sense that there is human suffering; that people suffer is not the problem. Many of our sufferings are simply functions of nature. The body is not eternal. The body is pathetically open to all kinds of dysfunctions and invasions which lead to suffering. But you recall in Dostoevsky, in *The Brothers*, the great debates there

between Ivan and the others who bring the problem to a crossing when they say, "It is the suffering of children." Remember the great moment when Ivan, following his experience of watching the Cossacks toss the babies in the air and catch them on their bayonets, says: "If the God that

Not the reality but the distribution of suffering is the problem.

our church declares to us permits this—and he must because he has all power—then I hand you back the ticket. I do not understand it, but I will not have a God who apparently accepts it." So it is not the reality of suffering but the distribution of suffering that is the problem, the suffering of the innocent or suffering all out of proportion to any justice.

Particularly nineteenth-century literature wrestled with this problem, often in language and episodes which did not recall explicit theology at all. A main theme in Thomas Hardy is the problem of human suffering. It is also a problem in that extraordinary woman, Emily Bronte. Probably the greatest book ever written in America, in the opinion of Lionel Trilling at least, is Melville's *Moby Dick*. You read *Moby Dick* looking below the surface of the enchanting sea story and the engaging details of a now-vanished industry and the wonderful prose and see really what is going on at the rail there between Starbuck and Ahab and Ishmael. It is the problem of the vast malignancy that lurks beneath the placid blue of the quiet Pacific. And all this is symbolic language. Melville's other tales, some of them, are even more explicit.

So if we fasten on the problem of suffering and then relate it to the suffering of Jesus, let me say what I am beginning to think. Take a running start at that by reflecting upon the Old Testament drama of Job. Job, too, you recall, underwent suffering for which he, a righteous man, exhibited no deserving. These sufferings were not, as in the case of most Western tragedies, the kind of thing which was a function of his own twisted, perverted selfhood. Classic tragedies simply befall people; they are not functions of their personality or of their selfhood. In a Western tragedy such as *Hamlet*, Hamlet has a faulted character. He has a way of regarding self and the world to which these tragic situations would occur. But in Greek tragedy, the hero simply runs up against something that is no function of his personal structure; it is the fate that falls upon him. Now in the tragedy of Job you have classic tragedy in which the good man suffers ill fortune. You recall that at the end Job is vindicated. "I will trust him though he slay me." He does trust him, and he is restored

to his estates and his family and so forth . . . “and much cattle,” which is simply a Semitic word for all the goodies of a prosperous man.

But how is that different from the tragedy of Jesus? There is a verse that fascinates me. In Hebrews it says “And he is the author and finisher of our faith.” Notice that it does not say, “the author and finisher of our redemption or our salvation.” It is not ascribed to Jesus there that from all eternity and by the discriminate will of God he plays our role assigned to him by God the Father and, as in the Fourth Gospel, slugs it through serenely. The reference in the sentence is not to what God willed for Jesus, that is, that he be the author of our redemption; but “he is the author and finisher of our faith.” This means he is the one who from the human side is the absolute fulfiller of faith. He from the human side is the one who is called Lord because he is the absolute God-truster to whom no return is given.

In the suffering of Jesus we see one who cries from the cross, “My God, why hast thou abandoned me,” and moves from that statement to “Into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Here you have the ineffable, inexplicable, almost unimaginable suffering of a man the center of whose whole existence, work, and dedication is the Father. And at the

Our christology must touch the human situation with its most powerful possibility.

very moment when he might expect some epiphany of the Father’s vindication and love, he cries out in vain, “Why have you abandoned me?” And yet his life does not end with cry of abandonment, but out of abandonment comes a continuing trust: God is still God in the face of this and despite this. This may be what the Hebrews refers to when it says that he is the “author” (it is a strange word, it does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament), that is, the one who created our faith. Like the author of a book, he is its father; he brought it into existence; without him it was not. “He is the author and finisher of our faith.” That is, he is the absolute exemplar, the absolute finisher of that which he began, experiencing that it might be taken from him and therefore with the fullness of the humanity disclosed. In the suffering of Jesus is the suffering of faith.

So when you make the suffering of Jesus not just a calculated equivalent to the piled-up sins of the world, as some atonement theories do, when you make the crucifixion rather a drama of faith, then you

have there a powerful way to understand why the Church called him Lord, Redeemer, Savior—not making him God’s errand-boy for the salvation of the world but the man among us, the man in the human situation who absolutely plays the string out to the last knot. That is a powerful theme in the New Testament. It seems to me that our christology is not wrong in the other things it says; but it certainly does not touch the human situation with its most powerful possibility if it does not come down to this component in the New Testament witness to Jesus.

About a year ago I was at a conference in New Orleans, and the conference was held at a Catholic convent. Every day when I went to and from the room where we were at work, I saw the sisters sitting silently in the Chapel; and up in the front, over the altar, there is the only symbol in the Chapel, that is, the corpus. I began to ask myself during those days: in the history of Western culture, at least for a thousand years of it, has there been any other single symbol which has been able to fasten people’s minds upon itself without diminution? Over and over again you see this, that the sign of the cross has a kind of depth and many dimensioned-ness which is able to draw people around it who, if they heard all this theology I have been talking about, would not understand it, are not learned in atonement theories, do not know what “propitiation” means. But nevertheless human suffering immemorally has been drawn to this figure. And no other figure has been able to exercise the kind of eternal companionship with human suffering so that the sufferer in the presence of the cross somehow knows he is not alone, that which is ultimate, that which is the ground of all is somehow engaged in the profoundest levels of his knowledge of his own humanity.

This element in the Church’s traditional christology ought to be brought forward because it is that aspect of the story which not only stands out as God’s drama for man’s redemption but is the story of God’s own engagement, his taking upon himself the sin of the world not just in a kind of equivalency of suffering such as the old theory sent to lead our minds to suppose but in the terrible actuality of the suffering of Jesus. This way of looking at christology is one which I think has a powerful accent for our own time.



CHRISTOLOGY FOR A NEW AGE

I want to fill out now and complete what I have to say about a christology which shall be pulled through but also taken beyond the traditional language whereby the Church has spoken about Jesus the Christ, he who is and what he accomplished. I want to move to the center of my own theological work, which is the effort to fashion a more comprehensive and intelligible and relevant christology to a quite new age, the twentieth century. But in order to do that I have to shift to a different kind of talk. If I am going to talk about how we might envision an unfolding of the New Testament rhetoric about Christ in a way that will more accurately intersect and work contrapuntally with the contemporary world—the intellectual world, the emotional world, the objective, technological world, the scientific world—then I must talk about that world so that the accuracy of the intersection, if perchance it takes place, will have a certain certification. So I want to make what seems to be a rather radical switch to another gear but is actually a part of the process.

Let me begin by saying that christological thought is never static. We can never develop theological language, which is always a modest effort at best, by simply quoting biblical passages in a row, taking all the testimony to Christ from the earliest to the latest New Testament documents and lining them up as texts and squeezing hard and trying to get a crystalline drop of christology out of it. The biblical testimony to Christ is not a static thing; it is in motion, it has a momentum. We peer into the New Testament documents; and we see that the language about Christ, beginning with a very small core, begins to swing in ever larger orbits of reference. For instance, the earliest language about Christ is, as I said yesterday, made out of the building blocks of the images of Israel's hope: he is the lamb, the sacrificial one, the atonement (provided by God on the Day of Atonement, as it were), the mediator, the Son of Man, the Son of David, the Son of God (that obscure language), Messiah. This is the earliest language, lying ready-made in the Jewish-Christian community, freshly available for new structures in their mind, in their devotion, in their remembered psalms and prophets; that was all there, and they used it.

But the language begins to spin in larger circles. I shall not try to fill in all the circles in which it spins but simply go to the largest of them and show how much bigger the orbit of suggested meanings is in that largest statement than it was in the earlier one. In the Colossians I go back to that statement with which I opened the speech at New Delhi in which I used the christological formulations: "he is the image of the

invisible God” (now notice the massive orbits in which the rhetoric moves) . . . “he is that from which all things came, he is that toward which all things tend, he is both source and goal, he constitutes the integrity (that is, the oneness, the interior integrity) of all that is, he holds all things together.”

If a philosopher made a statement like that, you would have something like a philosophy of total meaning. It is an enormous claim for the meaning of Christ. So the New Testament moves from Jewish language describing Christ as the highest moment, the highest realization of the hope of Israel, all encased with a Jewish metaphor, image, recollection, episode. It moves from Judaism to the cosmos: “all things are made by him, without him was not anything made that was made.” So this christological language spins out of Jewish thought, far beyond the reference of the Old Testament, and becomes a claim that, in virtue of the power, the vision, the image of God, in Christ you have an integral way to understand all that is or, if not to understand it, to invest it with the possibility of a single holy meaning.

Eastern orthodoxy has always had this christological vision. It occurs in rather full development as early as Irenaeus. The possibility of such a vision is intrinsic in Augustine’s treatise on the Holy Trinity. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox tradition has never been without this kind of christological image. The iconography of the Eastern Church has as the central symbol in the dome of the church not the crucified Jesus but the glorified Christ, called *Christus Pantocrator*, world-maker, world-ruler, world controller. In the dome of an Orthodox Church from as early as the third century, that is the image of Christ, which transcends the application of Jewish expectations as an appropriate and adequate conceptualization for Christian theology. So it is a very old idea. But if you get hold of ideas that are old enough, they sound brand-new in the twentieth century.




When I first articulated this, almost without exception, my own theological community did not quite repudiate it— because I had a biblical text—but they sort of repudiated me: “why are you riding on that merry-go-round when we have much more comfortable, close-at-home ways of talking about Christ?” And that kind of dubiety about the marginal authenticity, legitimacy of this kind of christology still maintains itself pretty much throughout Protestant Christianity. But I think I have something here that I find solely adequate to address the contemporary world.

THE MODERN LIFE-WORLD

Now I want to let that just hang there and talk about what it is in my understanding of modernity that leads me to desire, to hope for, to work for a christological proposal whose size shall be congruent with the size of the contemporary mind. I use the word “size” not in terms of intellectual excellence but of the scope of reflections that that mind engages in.

I have tried for a long time to find a single question under the pressure of which I could begin to discern the difference between what I have called the mind-and-life world of modernity and the life-world of everything back of the nineteenth century. The question is this: can I discern and state the fundamental difference between my life-world, which began in 1904, and the life-world of my own children, whose ages range from 23 to 37? And as I look at the world which they entered, the dates that have constituted part of their formal education, the experiences of the world inside, the world around, and the great world outside, can I specify the difference between the way I am and think as I was brought up and the kind of world in which they are invited to a new kind of reflection? I think I can discern that difference, but it will take a little time to spell it out; and I want to spell it out under five rubrics.

I am using the word “life-world” in a way you immediately understand. I do not just mean interiority but the multiple contacts with the world outside whereby the interior is enriched and questioned and opened up and refined, the world of literature, social fact, political life, urban life, the rise of science and its child, technology, the quick-food world of McDonald’s, the quick-satisfaction world of the entertainment industry, the mechanized processes of state education, the whole mass culture in which my children have grown up. I mean by “life-world”, then, everything that impacts upon the organism as sensation and invitation.



The scope of reflection that characterizes my children's world is vastly greater than the one that characterized my young years.

I think I can best summarize these five points by saying, “The scope of reflection that characterizes my children’s world is vastly greater than the one that characterized my young years.” I am not saying “the excellence of reflection” or “the moral quality of reflection” or “the intensity of reflection” or “the results of reflection” but “the scope of reflection.” That is, their little personal drama is being unfolded in a vastly larger theater, in a bigger stadium, than the world of my youth and adolescence and college years. I want now to illustrate that under five heads.

1. First of all, in my life-world in youth, it was the world of history that was the real world. The world of the historic was the fundamental focus as well as the periphery that constituted my scope of reflection. I remember asking myself as I grew up, “Why do I have such an intense and never ceasing interest in history?” Students until very recently have been what Harvey Cox calls *antipasto*, against the past. They either did not know much about it or were not very interested in it or looked at the past as a strange antique world so utterly different from their life situation that it really did not matter. The real life began when they were born, and all that happened before the bracketed years of their life is really not too important. I think I am not overstating the awesome problem of getting students since the 1940s to be interested in history. (I think Tolkien and some other people have in very imaginative ways begun to crack through that; so I do not find so much problem in the last three or four years in getting students to become interested in history.) But I ask how it happened for me and is not happening for them.

I grew up in the great world of the boys’ books. I was a fairly poor preacher’s son—poor, speaking economically—in a little town in which we could not afford very much. But there was a rich man’s son up the street; the lad’s mother had died, and his father partly compensated for this deprivation by supplying the boy with everything he wanted. The boy wanted pretty good things. He was an avid reader, and I remember that lad’s room; for to have a room of your own was a shock to begin with. But he had a room of his own, and the whole thing was lined with *The Motor Boys*, Tom Swift, *The Rover Boys*, the marvelous boys’ books done in the first part of this century by J. A. Penty, who wrote 120 boys’ books in his enormous life, and the books of Anthony Hope (you know, *Beverly of Graustark*, *The Truxton King*, and all that stuff). I

read myself around that room. I had a gift of a huge library of boys' books, mostly junk. The historical events of *The Soldier of the King at Waterloo, With the Coldstream Guards at Venice, Imprisoned By the King*—I can remember these things so vividly.

It was mostly dubious history, presented for sheer excitement and drama; but I know that that made not a bit of difference because if you enter the world of the fascination of the historical through a junky door, you get in. And the door through which you get in does not make a lot of difference. I get angry when I hear teachers deplore the junk books that kids read. I think it is fine to read them if it gets them into the room, into the drama of the past, the variety of human experiences, the sheer vivacity of people (like Shakespeare's "O brave new world that has such people in it"), if it transports me into the world of the past so that I know, to use Coleridge's lines, "We are not the first that ever burst into that sea." If it does that, I do not care what car you ride in on. I rode in on all these freight cars so that my life-world was never constituted by the suspicion that nothing really important ever happened until I did.

That life-world I began to experience vicariously through boys' books; and then later on, to be sure, via Walter Scott I came to a more responsible, morally more discerning, and artistically higher level. From there you go to Jane Austen and Emily Bronte and Melville and Hawthorne and Hemingway and on up the ladder. (I do not put Hemingway at the top of the ladder.) As over against that life-world which I knew in imagination, my actual world supplying me with immediate data for reflection was a very small world compared to the life-world of my children.

The world in which the search for meaning occurs for my children is not simply the world of the historical existence of people, places, and events. It is now complicated by the second massive dimension. Since 1900, the world as nature has occupied the mind of modernity as much as or more than the world of history. I choose the period 1900 advisedly because the investigation and the suspicion of the vast dimensions of the world of nature goes back to the Greek physicists and has development with jumps and starts through the Middle Ages and with the vast breakthrough in Galileo and Copernicus and Newton, in the *Aufklärung* and the development of the basic principles of contemporary science. This all had taken place before 1900. But it did not become a matter of common knowledge until the introduction of books on general science about the time I was a high-school kid when we began to get some vision of the vastness and the complexity of the

natural world. So what I am saying is that my life-world was fundamentally an historical world made up of people and events in history. My children's world, from the time they entered the fifth grade, already was beginning to be informed about the natural world.

I remember when my daughter came home once—she was in about the fifth grade—with her first little book in geography. I remembered my old book in geography, which I dearly loved; you know, I learned how many sheep are raised in Australia and how much wool is exported and how much wheat was gathered in North Dakota and when the railroads were laid down and how much was transported on the Rocky Mountains and the Plains and the Great Lakes. I learned a lot of primitive geography. My daughter brought home a book, and chapter one was on the galaxies. She began not with how much wheat is grown in North Dakota but with the galactic bodies which constitute the large part of the visible things in the cosmos. She started with a picture of nature which was cosmic in scope; I started with Australia and North Dakota and where that stuff of which they make Shredded Wheat comes from. So the natural world is now a second huge dimension of contemporary reflection.

I close the first point with a statement from Dilthey, a philosopher of history. He has a memorable phrase in one of his books: “No one can understand the perturbations of our time unless he feels the terrifying dynamism of the historical.” I like that phrase, “the terrifying dynamism of the historical.” He means not just history but the historical, that is, change, coming into, maturing, dying out of existence, the enormous proliferation of institutions and forms and symbols and images and mores and practices, the coming into existence of the political form known as kingship, the rise of autocracies, the rise of democratic institutions, the development of parliaments, what he called “the terrifying dynamism of history” into which terrifying machinery of time everything is dumped and undergoes transformations, modifications, death, and resurrection. I think that phrase really ought to haunt the mind, “the terrifying dynamism of the historical.” This is the life-world of my children's maturation; and it is natural as well as historical so that you can talk about the terrifying dynamism of the natural world, too. We shall get to that in a moment.

Our time has a scope of reflection that includes both the world of nature and the world of history.

So the first point is: the life-world that characterizes our time and to which an adequate christology must be proposed includes both the world as nature and the world as history. I would suggest to you that so does the biblical world. The biblical thinker goes from reflection on nature (“when I regard the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained”) to an historical reflection (“what is man?”). Our time has a scope of reflection that includes both the world of nature and the world of history, but we know much more about nature than the anthropological reflection directly; in fact, a good deal of the reflection engendered by beholding the heavens is utterly impatient with this little crawling creature on one of the minor planets, pays little attention to him.

2. Having been so deliberate about the first of the five points, I think we can somewhat more quickly speak of the other four. I am trying to

... a world vaster in space by virtue of natural science

give specificity to the change in the life-world. The second point is: the twentieth-century child grows up to live in a world vaster in space by virtue of natural science, which is now brought down to the primary and the high school levels. I grew up in southern Ohio in several towns, and I knew Columbus was a big city; and I also knew that there was a United States and Europe and South America. But this was formal knowledge to me. And the stars and the galaxies—they were objects of wonder. But I did not intellectually wander among them with a kind of factual familiarity that characterizes my children. Even “Star Trek” is a dumbed-down version of astrophysics. This is not simply fabulous stuff; it is built upon factual information about the sheer dream-like size of the cosmos, and the dream-like size of the cosmos we have brought within our purview technologically is apparently without limit. Now that is an unacceptable thought really; but we have to accept that it may be so, that our notion of limit may be an historically formed notion. The cosmos may be curved space which has no dimensions in the way in which my generation was made to think. So the very concept of space is a concept which is a long-haired one, but the children pick it up as the way things are without going through the long-haired work by which it was envisioned.

So the second point is: not only do they live in the world whose actuality is equally history and nature, but it is also a world of apparently infinite space. The perception of infinite space I do not think works

upon the youth the way it does upon maturity. You recall that when this vision became evident to Pascal, he said: "The notion of these infinite spaces appalls me." We all have some interior repercussions that deserve the word "appalls me" because over against the finitude, the limitedness, the minuscule facticity of man, the notion of the illimitability of space tends to reduce the human in such a way that he is a very bad second to the space of the cosmos, the space he manages.

3. The third point is: just as the dimension of space now has an infinite quantity, so the dimension of time has been equally exploded. How silly it is going to be, in the generation now coming to maturity, to talk of the creation story literalistically or to make it a geological, anthropological, biological holy report of the way things came to be. Happily, I had for a father a preacher who, though he was a very conservative man, had an instinctive sense for a story when he saw one; and it never occurred to my father, despite the fact he did not know much about Wallace or Darwin or Newton, literalistically to ask what the story is about. It is about God and man and nature and history and the whole awesome mess of the human condition; he knew that somehow. So I never got stuck on bibliolatry. Because the real McCoy was so fascinating, I was delivered from that. Now all I am saying is that if we find it still possible to have a church hassle about historical-critical methods, this generation will see the end of that, I am sure, not because it is proved one way or the other but because it will be literally uninteresting in another generation; it will not evoke the interest of kids who are taken on field trips to the Grand Canyon and see the geological evidence and the fossil evidence and who take courses in the fundamental development of the fetus and the anatomy in which the complexification of the orders of life is simply laid out and demonstrated. So the time-world is an enormously larger world. I do not know how one even thinks about six billion years. Beyond a certain number of megatons I really cannot conceptualize. It is like my bank account: if I have a hundred dollars, I am in good shape; I do not know what it might be like to have twenty million dollars.

4. The fourth point is really a product, the egg that these other points lay: we are, without ever intending it, being educated by knowledge of the world as nature to the notion of a closed system, that is, that the world as nature has within it the energies which have constituted it, has locked within it the potentials to account for its own structure and change and explosive possibilities. That is simply there. Now philosophically the problem is not solved because it is simply pushed back. Why

is it there? Is there an effect without a sufficient cause? Can you get something out of nothing? But I do not know a natural scientist who

The dimension of time has been exploded.

does not dismiss that as a meaningless question. He says, "A question which in the nature of it can have no possible experimental solvable answer is a meaningless question." Now, you know that intelligent people should settle for that is already a mark of culture. There is a kind of mind that lives with peace and serenity within a closed system so that all the operations of the mind find their satisfaction within a closed system without any question of whence and whither and why. This is a new humanism, a new kind of mentality. I do not know in the history of man that there has ever been such a mind before. All people have created stories of the primal day, what Eliade calls the beginning-time, the prima time, the egg of the universe.

So for the first time in culture, I think, we have an intellectual acquiescence in a closed universe so that the system needs nothing outside itself to account for it; and to gain knowledge we do not have metaphysics, only physics. Philosophy is no longer in large part the quest for light illumination, first principles, but rather analysis of the meaning of sentences, of propositions, training in logical analysis. The importance of this, I think, has not been estimated with theological sobriety or imagination until now. But when I get up to preach a sermon in a congregation that is made up of kids who have been through a twentieth-century high school and college and lay people who often know more than graduates of either by virtue of their curiosity and the availability of good material on the world of nature, when I talk about God and Christ and damnation and redemption and eternal life, I had better know the universal realms of discourse (without using such language) which has permeated these people, which has become the common language of the common life.

. . .an intellectual acquiescence in a closed universe so that the system needs nothing outside itself to account for it.

I think, for instance, of the man in the little parish where I belong and attend in Chicago; his name is Mr. Borling. He is a retired building superintendent for the Chicago Board of Education, a widower, a very lonely but a very intelligent and eager man. He invited me to a meeting in his

house one day for dinner. I saw the man's library. Here is a man who, without formal education (he never went beyond high school), has informed himself. I am sure that what we call adult education does not all take place in institutions for continuing education; a lot of it takes place quietly in people's own reflection and via television and good books.

5. Five is an equally frightening point. For a long time, one of the great philosophical traditions has been idealism. The word does not mean simply that you are a person who has ideals in terms of moral excellence or community or politics. Idealism as a philosophy means the inquiry into the assumption that ideas in the mind have some correspondence to the way things are. It is really the postulation that the beholding, learning, knowing, reflecting mind has the interior capacity to find models corresponding to the way things are. Idealism in Plato, you know, is the assumption that the man who lives within the cave of this world sees the actualities of life reflected in the shadows on the wall of the cave; but he has within the mind an idea, structure, process, reason which is able to organize these things. This is idealism as over against plain physical materialism, and Plato is the great philosopher for this reason. Now what happened?

I can bring it down with a thump by a statement from Percy Bridgman, the late philosopher of science at Harvard. There is a little paperback called *The Limits of Language*, edited by Walker Gibson, published by the American Book Company. In that is a series of astounding essays; I never saw such a dollar-and-a-half's worth of wisdom: the one by Conant, the late president of Harvard and a chemist; a wonderful article by Bridgman called "The Way Things Are"; an article by Gertrude Stein on the limits of language, in which she talks about the miserable, weaseling mark, the comma, and how it screws up thought by keeping things apart that ought to be put together (it's a very funny article); and a superb little article of one page by Robert Oppenheimer on style, in which he has the memorable sentence, "Style is the deference that action pays to uncertainty." The longest article in the book is by Percy Bridgman; and he has this sentence: "We have come to a moment in the development of contemporary science (he doesn't mean technology, he means basic science) where we must entertain the possibility that there may be no correspondence between the thoughts in my head and the way things are."

That is *really* a stunner! Look at the program on Nova a couple weeks ago on "quarks", the term created by the British scientist to talk about the strange radio-photo evidences that neutrinos, a name used to

describe an unknown function of small particles, seem to penetrate everything (there's no place that they are not that we know of) but are no thing, they are anti-matter; none of the characteristics of matter belong to them. Therefore they are called quarks, which is an astrophysical word for quirks, I suppose. Now the thing has been refined so that they are talking about polite and impolite quarks (they better or less well behave themselves). I asked my neighbor, who is a physicist, "Okay, tell me in ten-cent language what a neutrino is." He said, "A neutrino is a something that is everywhere and does everything but is no thing." Now isn't that one hell of a sentence? So Bridgman's phrase is "We must now entertain the possibility" which we have never had to entertain before; no one ever suspected that we could not find some cerebral, prepositional, mathematical equation which should have a kind of correspondence to the way things are. But Percy Bridgman says, "The way things are (that is, the way God the Omnipotent knows them to be, who knows all about the small particles and the neutrinos and the quirks and the quarks) may have no correspondence to the possibilities of our mind." The world may be unimaginable in its complexity and its ultimate structure.

To be sure, that that may be so will not stop the effort to find such correspondences, experimentally to secure them hypothetically well enough that they give the next step forward; and all science operates

The world may be unimaginable in its complexity and its ultimate structure.

on that presupposition. That may be one of man's noblest aspects, that he will not be stopped by the speculative possibility that there may be no correspondence. He says, "I will find a correspondence if it takes a lifetime." That is what makes the greatness of Pasteur and Koch and Einstein and scientists in every realm of research, and it is a noble thing. But think what a shocker it is to grow up in a period which has what one might call a cerebral eschatology in which you have to entertain the suspicion that there may be no correspondence between the thoughts in your mind and the way things are.

Now I think that is a kind of shock at the level of intelligence and education which only we have the privilege to have achieved. The ordinary person will not be disturbed by it because he will not understand the proposition. And also, the marvels of the way things are have sufficient correspondence that we can do business with them. We do not

know the basic structure of the atom; but when we pour iron and steel to make a block for a motor, we know enough to keep right on using it because we know what the stuff will do and what it will not do, what tolerances it will take in heat, and all that. So not to know everything does not mean you cannot operate very efficiently with what you do know. And modern technology does that. That is the fifth of the elements, this bringing into question the ancient idealistic assumption that the idea can somehow scoop up and enfold the reality of things. The reality may be forever elusive.

To me that is a very happy thought; I sort of like that. (We have a Trotskyite in our congregation, a thoroughgoing Communist; he says, "I may be the only confessing Lutheran who is also a card-carrying Communist." One day at vesper service we were singing the Benedictus; and when it came to the "He hath put down the mighty from their seats . . . and the rich he hath sent empty away," he leaned over to my pew and said, "I like that.") Anyhow, to me it is a pleasant idea that the way things are has a magnitude and a complexity and a quality that may forever transcend me. I think that is good for me; it is a pleasant thing in the mind. My scientific friends would not agree; this is a damned nuisance to them. But I rather like it.

We dropped the development of christology in an effort to bring it forward into our time when this morning I referred to what I called the momentum of christological thought in the New Testament whereby the orbits in which it moves use larger and larger, more and more universal language so that the original language of the earliest christological formations is by no means laid aside and has a permanent influence. But it does use language such as that in Colossians. It is likely that the language of Paul or whoever wrote Colossians is Gnostic. We know that the Gnostic cult was centered in Colossae, and the letter to the Colossians apparently takes the way that the Gnostics talked about *gnosis*, knowledge, and its salvatory power right out of their hands and says: "We, too, have an understanding of God through Christ whereby all things can be accounted for and organized, the *telos* of things and the directionality of things can be understood; he is the firstborn of all creation from whom all things came." In other words, Christ is invested with the largest salvatory statements of the Gnostics. So he used Gnostic language to address the Gnostics.

When I first got onto this, a prominent New Testament scholar of our church wrote a little book in order to show that I was utterly wrong

in using this language for contemporary christology because it is Gnostic language. I replied in a one-page letter, simply saying: “Big deal—so what? All kinds of language are used in the New Testament. The Church did not repudiate that kind of language. The Church says we can speak of Christ this way, and they canonized the document in which we do speak of Christ this way.” It is not only in the Colossians but also in the letter to the Ephesians. Sit down and read the first chapter of the Ephesians, that monumental piece of rhetoric made up of only three sentences in Greek in which sub-clause follows sub-clause and all three pieces end with “to the praise of his glorious grace.” You have transparent back of this a christological reflection which goes far beyond any other part of the New Testament except Colossians and the Hebrews. In the letter to the Hebrews you have this remarkable statement which I do not think occurs in any of our pericopes: “by faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear” (II :3). The Letter to the Hebrews is of unknown authorship, certainly not Pauline; and for reasons which I do not pretend to understand, it has very little role in our ecclesiastical decision about what parts of Scripture shall be read in the public worship of the Church. It is a long, very remarkable epistle; but somehow we read only a very little bit of Hebrews and, so far as I am concerned, preach from it very little. And yet it has this kind of christology: “by faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God.”

THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

I want to talk now of a contemporary situation not only in man’s understanding of nature and his transactions with nature but with his present crisis in relation to nature that we call the environmental crisis. Here we shall see how, in my opinion, nothing less than a christology of the size of that toward which the New Testament witness seems to be moving can address the fateful interaction that man is presently experiencing with the natural world. You know, if one pulls back the thread of how he happens to preach a certain sermon or write a certain essay or why his thought almost compulsively goes in a certain direction (it may not always be possible to find out why, but often it is possible), he finds out that a problem that has never risen to the level of consciousness is bugging his unconscious. And I suppose that was my problem in the last twenty years with my teaching, that a christological speech which

should be adequate to the life-world of my children was always an unconscious motivation for seeking a rhetoric of grace, a way of witness to the power of God in Christ which shall not just intersect my world or the world of the New Testament community but have an alluring interest to the contemporary mind.

I began to read the New Testament afresh and came across these trans-Pauline and some Pauline statements in which the operational terms were not atonement, propitiation, Lamb of God, Son of God, Son of David. The operational terms were: by the Word of God were the heavens made, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, by the Word was all made that was made, nothing was made without the Word. Then I came to this Colossians passage which really spun me into outer space, and then from that my inquiries were of a historical kind. I was so astounded and excited by the dimensions, the plenitude of this christological witness that I wondered how I had missed it all these years and why in my instruction in catechism and liturgy and devotion and hearing preaching it had played so minor a role and whether that had been accidental.

So I began to read the fathers again; and lo, I discovered that in the Eastern fathers particularly this theme is not only fully present but much more fully elaborated than in Western Christendom. If any of you have ever attended a Greek Orthodox liturgy (and I am sure you have), you

. . .the Lord of nature as well as the Redeemer of sinful people in history.

know how the iconography is an iconography of Christ who penetrates, resides in, and is Lord of the whole world—natural, spiritual, material, personal. I read the liturgy of John in the Eastern Church and found out how the opening sentences are quite different from our Western liturgies. You do not enter into the presence of God via repentance; you stride right in by standing under the radiance of the created world. “The whole world is full of his glory.” And I recalled how in the agenda of the old Joint Synod of Ohio, in which I was confirmed, the opening sentence of the liturgy spoke with new eloquence: “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

The God into whose presence we are invited is the Lord of nature as well as the Redeemer of sinful people in history: “who made heaven and earth.” Right away we hit the jackpot of the God who is the God of everything. It reminds me of a sentence I read, “If the God of our faith

is not God of all, he is not God at all.” Now this is a typical contemporary sentence because the contemporary mind knows that man himself is not an isolated datum. His roots are in nature as well as in history, in psycho-history as well as in political and economic history; and therefore any proclamation of the power and the judgment and the grace of God which is going to offer the possibility of meaning to modern man, who knows that all the tendrils of his actuality go back into evolution and to nature and to creation, has to be of the God “who made heaven and earth” or it is not God at all.

Take a young person who is having his first course in geology and is utterly delighted with this marvelous story of the development of forms and the picture of the formation of the earth and the development of species. Suppose he comes to church and hears the story of “Jesus only”, which to Jesus would be a blasphemous statement. He hears this “Have you found it” and “Jesus only” and “Snuggle up to Jesus”; and the world in which he is looking for some meaning is already full of rocks and evidences of a mysterious, fascinating story in which he is a relatively late comer. Sometimes we are shocked when we recall that if the Lord made heaven and earth, the men who wrote those lines arrived on the time-clock of evolution at about three minutes of twelve. What was God doing for the eleven hours and fifty-seven minutes before there was a man to be a reflective cerebral? So more and more the process of education and coming to awareness is a process of the vast unfolding of the reality of the self into the cosmos—no less. We cannot stop short of the galaxies because the moment you try to account for the earth you have to begin to talk about the gaseous masses which apparently solidified and formed the elements without which there would be no earth and no possibility of the development of what we call the biological process which is creative of life.

So the scenario of the present and even more of the future is going to demand a christological development which in the orbits of its meaning shall follow. My old friend, Joseph Haroutunian, who for years taught at McCormick, had a memorable sentence in one of his essays: “The fortunes of men’s minds follow the fortunes of their bodies with absolute seriousness.” That is, now that men’s bodies undergo different fates and places and injustices and joys and despairs and as men have now transported their bodies to the moon, we cannot keep our language about meaning within the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Neither do we forget it because they are part of our rootage, too. But “the for-

tunes of their minds follow the fortunes of their bodies with absolute seriousness” so that now that man’s habitat is cosmic rather than earth-centered, the nature of his questioning and the shape of the question to which Christ must become a proposal of an answer has got to have the same magnitude.

The next step will be to look at the way in which man lives with nature, particularly in our contemporary world, and to ask what kind of a proposal of redemption and even survival might be required. That is, I am going to talk now about the theological questions raised by the environmental crisis. The environment is both a tough and a febrile thing; it will stand just so much insult. The environment is not just a dumb resource, but it is a living organism. We are finally getting that through our head in the churches, and this does demand a fresh reflection upon all aspects of the Christian gospel. But the moment one understands that and then reads how the church is responding, he finds on the whole the following: usually a reprimand of the old doctrine of stewardship. Now that is not wrong, the notion that man has, as the most aware, reflective, ingenious, developed of the species, thereby a special responsibility toward the earth. The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; and man, because of the acuteness of his awareness, which is also the pre-condition of his ingenious rapacity, does have a responsibility which the New and also the Old Testaments call man’s care for the earth.

The first story in the Bible, in Genesis, is of the relationship of man to the garden. The word “garden” in Hebrew does not mean where you raise daffodils and carrots; it is a huge word that means the whole fecundity of the given world, this productive, potential world. Man is placed within the realm of nature by God and given a charge; the charge we understand usually via the Vulgate and its unhappy translation into English. The earliest translation of the Bible into Latin for the use of the Western Church, the Vulgate of St. Jerome, says that man is to exercise *dominium terrae*, dominion over the earth and all things that grow and crawl and swim and develop. That then comes into the King James Bible: he is to have dominion over the earth; but the idea of dominion in Latin simply does not mean a self-conscious, rapacious rulership for one’s own purposes. It means to assume the responsibility of care. The notion of dominion in Latin, *dominium*, becomes domination in English. But the old story does not say that. “You are to tend the garden” is the way one of the new translations has it; you are to tend the garden, as G. K. Chesterton says, almost as a mother says to a little boy, “You are

to attend to your little sister on the way to school,” care for man’s sister in the creation.

Our whole vocabulary here is awkward. We talk about Mother Nature; that is a pagan phrase. In Christian faith, God is our Father, the Church is our Mother (she is the one who brings forth all believers, in Luther’s phrase and back of him Augustine), but nature is our Sister; nature is God’s other creation who stands alongside us with her own individuality, integrity, vitality, and which has limits to what you can do. So if we begin to regard the Franciscan notion, the world as man’s beloved Sister for whom he has a very special responsibility, this is a quite different way of regarding that opening chapter of Genesis. I recall how tough it is to bring this over to the modern instrumental, operational mind, which looks at everything with the immediate question, “What can I make out of it?” The modern man tends to look at a forest and say, “How many two-by-fours can I get out of there?” Or the redwoods, “How much patio furniture can I get out of this?” Or as Governor Reagan said, “When you’ve seen one redwood, you’ve seen them all.” So you have this operational mentality, which looks upon the earth as a kind of dumb resource which is there for many to do something with and is not to be honored in its own selfhood.



I remember when, in an old church at Lancaster, Ohio, my father acquiesced to a request from a young man in the parish who was doing his doctorate in agriculture at Ohio State University and much interested (he was a farmer's son) in bringing the new methods of contour plowing, terracing, minimum tillage, and that kind of thing to his fellows in the congregation. He asked father if he could have the church hall and invite all the farmers to come in; he wanted to tell them about the new things he was learning about the care of the soil and their farm. Father made the announcement that the request had been made and anyone who wished to come (and he hoped there would be many) would come to hear the young man talk about these things. After the service, Jack Oberdorfer, who owned the biggest farm in the congregation and was a recalcitrant old tough German, came to father and said: "I don't know by what right you gave this permission. You did not bring it up at the council. I do not want any young smart-alec from Ohio State telling me how to run my daddy's farm." And, I remember so well, father said: "Jake, who's farm did you say you're running?" "My daddy had it and his daddy before him, and it's my farm." And he said: "Jake, how did we open the service this morning? The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.' Now you consider again whose farm you are running." I do not know what the outcome of all that was, but that is a parable of a kind of mentality which has been vastly enhanced via technology since Jake's time so that nothing is new without its transformative possibilities.

I read an almost unbelievable statement last week in Newsweek: that in the discussion in the House of the President's proposal for an energy policy, a man from Wyoming said: "There are billions of tons of coal in those great seams under the land in Wyoming; and since we will probably have other sources of energy invented and refined, we ought to get it out now so that it will not go unused"—as if it is almost blasphemous not to dig it out and make something of it, just to let it be and let the grass grow and the cattle graze. These are clues to a kind of mentality which is just as rampant in our churches as among the pagans of this world: that the earth really belongs to those who get there first with the most and can transform it into something else. That is a most unbiblical notion.

The 104th Psalm is a beautiful ecological doxology. It is a doxological celebration of the divine interrelatedness. "In wisdom hast thou made them all"—the little animals, the great Leviathan who swims in the sea (we do not know what he is for except dog food, but that he is there for something we may be sure), wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and

oil that causes his face to shine—that wonderful agenda of natural processes and substances. Then comes the great coda: “all these hang together and upon thee; in wisdom hast thou made them all; thou withdrawest thy breath (ruach, that is, the principle of life) and they go to the dust; thou givest thy breath and they live.” It is a gorgeous psalm, very appropriate for the people’s new interest in environmental concerns; and I would suggest it for a wonderful adult study or series of sermons.

This notion of God and man and nature in a triadic relationship: this is built into Genesis, it is assumed throughout the Old Testament; and in the New Testament it is not spoken about much because I think it is simply presupposed, but it also works there. You have that elusive, almost opaque passage in the eighth of Romans, which until the last five years of my life I have never dared to preach about, though it is one of the prescribed lessons. You know in the eighth of Romans the argument about “there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Jesus Christ” and then on to “the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God” and then “the whole new creation groans in travail, waiting for the manifestation of the children of God.” What does this mean? The writer of Romans, Paul, enlarges his language of

The creation is pathetically open to abuse and to being done in except for the sons of God acting like it.

redemption to include man’s irreversible rootedness in the natural world so that the fate of the world and the fate of man are conjoined; the world, the creation, our Sister is pathetically open to abuse and to being done in except for the sons of God acting like it in relationship to her. This is a fabulous passage, and I am not sure I understand all that the writer meant because even the best exegetes I have read are a little puzzled by parts of it. So I am sure that my interpretation is inadequate, but I am sure it is not perverse; I am on the way to something.

COP-OUTS

So much for the environmental crisis. When we relate christology and the world of nature, there are three current cop-outs which we had better recognize, three ways in which we are tempted to cop out of the pressure of the problem. All of them have enjoyed great currency in popular speech and thought. The first I would call the technological cop-out. The moment you express Christian, devout concern about this,

probably the brightest people in your congregation will say: “We will find ways to deal with the apparently infinite amount of energy resident within the atomic structure, and we will find a way to release that without the current problems attendant upon the mechanism. We will find a way to deal with this; we have got another twenty or more years of oil and coal.” The easy assumption is that the momentum of scientific knowledge has no limits, that we will find a way.

Four years ago, because of some published stuff that came to the eye of a friend of mine who was invited to attend a conference at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, I was invited to come along as a free rider. They hosted a conference called “The Responsibility of the Scientific Community in the Environmental Crisis.” I was invited because this man did not know any other theologian who was thinking about this or at least had written about it. So I went; and it was a five-day, magnificent conference in which all of the scientific disciplines were there—the physicist, the chemist, the biologist, the marine biologist, petrochemists, the whole gamut—and very learned and very shocking papers about the present state of man’s transactions with nature were read. Being a lover of the sea, I was particularly impressed by the factual reports of what is happening on the continental shelf and off Connecticut, Long Island Sound, the coast of Maine, and Newfoundland.

What I want to report to you is a consensus statement that their

“Unless there is a profound change in our uncriticized way of dealing with the natural world, there is no possibility that any scientific effort can solve this problem.”

drafting committee gave to the press at the end of five days. The statement almost exactly is as follows: “As a result of our consultation, we want to say that there is much that the scientific community can do to come to the assistance of our culture in this moment; there is much more that we ought to do; but unless there is a profound change in our uncriticized way of dealing with the natural world, there is no possibility that any scientific effort can solve this problem.” They did not know they were quoting St. Paul’s phrase when they said, “Unless we are changed in the spirit of our minds” Very interesting. “Unless we are changed in the spirit of our minds, we can offer no hope from just purely scientific work though we can do much and promise to do more.” That is a very significant statement, not from the Methodist Conference in New England or the New England Synod of the Lutheran Church but

from the top brass in the scientific community, presided over by George Wald incidentally. So the scientific cop-out is indeed a cop-out. The limits of science are as evident to the good scientist as the achievements of it are enthusiasm-producing.

The second cop-out one can call the legal cop-out, and this is often appealed to: that because the problem is by definition the problem of the ecological structure of things, the answer to the problem must be equally structured, that is, federal or world-wide. You cannot answer the problem of the Illinois River just in Illinois. You cannot deal with what is fast becoming an immense sewer, the Mississippi, only by the states that border on the Mississippi; the sources of the river, the drainage that it provides, the traffic that uses it, the crud that is dumped into it is not just by those people who live along the river. Any problem in the environment is by nature a very intricate, ecologically-structured point within an endless web. I am a reader for a student doing a doctorate at the University of Chicago in a very flatfooted, dull-sounding subject, "Water Management in the Five Counties of Northern Illinois," a marvelous study of where the water is, how much of it there is, what is the geological history of that area, how ought we to be dealing with the problem. And he finds out that at least those five counties have got to be involved in an analysis and in any viable solution, though a long-time solution may not be possible. So the second cop-out is: therefore we must have statutory solutions to these problems. That is, if people stupidly continue their ways, then we simply must have laws that attack their stupidity and correct it by legal means.

The positive side of that insight is that it is probably true. It was eight years ago that the United States Steel Corporation in Gary and South Chicago was ordered within five years to cut down by eighty per cent the particulates that they were emitting all over that part of northern Indiana and certainly a lot of the city of Chicago and wind-borne God knows where. After five years almost nothing had been done. Finally the matter went to the court, and the court then slammed it down on them. They gave them a fine—I think it was \$40,000 a day—unless they immediately presented a plan. The plan was already pretty well advanced; they just did not want to spend the money. And within a certain time it had to be done, or "we'll shut the place down." So nothing less than the lowering of the boom on U. S. Steel really had any important effect. Now I know steel operators down there and a couple men in the official group who fight bitterly about this; but the facts are not changed by their anger: they did not do what they had the competence

to do until the federal agency said, “Do it or else.” And they have done it! I remember when we moved to South Chicago from Maywood in 1967, you could wipe the windowsill every morning and have to wash your hands again. That is not true now. The effects are dramatic and objectively certified by study: Chicago is 100% cleaner than it was ten years ago, particularly South Chicago, which got the worst part of it. It still smells bad all the way from Hyde Park down to Hammond, but that is not necessarily dirt.

So the legal cop-out is a cop-out. And an illustration is the second conference I want to allude to. At the University of Chicago there was a conference called by the Law School about four years ago with almost the same title, “The Responsibility of the Legal Community in the Environmental Crisis”. It, too, was a conference at which I was allowed to sit in. I heard the papers, and I also read the statement they ended up with: virtually a copy of the statement from M.I.T., only about their own discipline. They said there is much that can be done, legal communities should be very active in writing intelligent and responsible laws.

“The problem fundamentally is not one of law.”

“We should do much more than we have.” Then they added the same caveat: “But we would remind those who read this that the problem fundamentally is not one of law. It will require a change in our American way of life.” They did not say “the spirit of our minds,” but I think they were aiming at the same level of change. “It will require a change in our whole American way of life because we cannot by law solve this problem.”

They pointed out a very interesting thing: “The pace of deterioration



is a gallop, and the pace of statutory law is a crawl.” You know that is true. Before there can be a law, there must be the wide dissemination of information. Not all will take the information seriously or be sufficiently concerned with its implications. After the information is out, you must get a consensus of concern. Then that consensus must beat off all those who have special interest in not having a law in certain areas, like the American Rifle Association. Then you must get the law proposed and finally work like the devil to get it passed, while there is an apparently bottomless amount of money on the opponents’ side. I send in my five bucks a year to the anti-handgun commission, and I know that the American Rifle Association raises forty million dollars a year for their Washington lobby. So the pace of law is a slow and laborious thing, and the pace of pollution and deterioration is indeed a gallop. Any effort on our part to move forward with an integrated theological-pastoral-liturgical approach to change the spirit of the mind in its relationship to God’s nature has got to know what the hazards are.

A third hazard is one peculiar to the Church, and may be the most subtle and the most impenetrable. Problems that arise out of piety are often harder to meet than those that arise out of paganism because a clearly pagan, self-seeking, egocentric, profit-making objection is like a good wall: when you throw a ball at it, it at least bounces. But dealing

Dealing with problems that arise out of piety is like throwing a baseball at a feather pillow.

with problems that arise out of piety is like throwing a baseball at a feather pillow. It just sinks in and disappears, absorbed by soggy piety. And soggy piety is unhappily one form of piety; I meet it in people who say: “I know what you say, it is very serious, and we must do something about it; but I really trust in the Lord. The Lord will not permit us to do this to his world. This is our Father’s world, and he will see to it that we do not do this.” A woman who said this to me took me rather aback because I had not met that one before; in fact, I had not met before that kind of a jovial God who lets you romp all over his garden and will clean up the garbage after you have messed it up. I was hard put for a moment—but by providential help for only a moment. I remembered the wonderful passage in the prophets. You remember where God is talking to the prophet who has worked very hard at a certain vocation and he is very discouraged and is taking the matter up with God and

says, "I seem to be working hard at it, but I'm not getting anywhere." And God says, "I will send my servant Nebuchadnezzar." And the prophet says, "How's that again? That guy? You really mean you are going to let Nebuchadnezzar serve your purposes?" God says, "You heard me! I will send my servant Nebuchadnezzar."

So not all the purposes of God are realized in the hands of the Church, but God is a God of judgment as well as of grace; you cannot get away endlessly with rapacity toward his creation. It is like the other statement somewhere in the Old Testament: "And God led them home by the way of the wilderness." That is a beauty! That is one way of getting home: to be led through the wilderness so that you reevaluate home. But sometimes God, as Luther loved to say, knocks us down in order that he may raise us up. Or the other statement, "God gave them what they wanted and made them sick of it." They were saying, "We want a king like the other king down there; he has an army, a palace guard, men who ride around in chariots with wonderful horses; we want a king too, not these judges that you have sent to interpret your law to us, but a king; we want a big show." And the Lord fought with them and said: "Are you sure you know what you are asking for? Kings levy taxes and make wars and take away your young men." They said, "We know all about that; we still want a king." It says, "And the Lord gave them what they wanted and made them sick of it." That is one way in which the purposes of God are worked out. So I told the woman about that, but I do not think she was convinced. You see my point: there is a kind of piety about an indulgent God, who will simply smile with fatherly mercy upon the endless egocentricity and wastefulness and rapacity and stupidity of his children. He is also a God of judgment.

THE THEOLOGY OF GRACE

I should like to complete what I have to say about the movement forward into our own time of the doctrine of grace. I talked about what I called the momentum in the dimensions of the doctrine within the New Testament and its much more important career in Eastern Orthodoxy in theology, in worship, in architecture. Now I want to speak of certain moments in the history of thought in the Western world which in my opinion have locked the doctrine of grace completely within the meaning of the second person of the Trinity. If I had to state the theological problem succinctly, that would be the way to put it.

Grace in Western Christendom since Augustine has been talked of almost exclusively as that about the power and will of God that comes to us via Christ. Now as you know, the time in which Augustine developed the many facets of his thought was a time in which he was obliged by the nature of the situation to elaborate grace primarily in relation to sin. So Augustine's great axis on which he talks about grace is always in the rubric, sin and grace; and the Augustinian doctrine on sin and grace really set the pattern for a thousand years. The only remedy for sin, that is, man's alienation from God and man's moral depravity or, in Augustine's own words, his *incurvatus in se ipsum*, his curvature inward upon himself in godless egocentricity, was what he called the invasion of grace whereby grace preveniently meets man in God's advance into the human predicament in the incarnation and which is signaled in its God-initiative by the prevenience of grace in baptism. The prevenience of grace as initiated from God is reenacted in the Church's sacrament of baptism. That is why the Western Church (not only the West) strongly went to *infant* baptism, and there is plenty of evidence that in the early Church infant baptism was not the only form of baptism. But they went strongly to infant baptism because it was a dramatic symbolization of the fact that grace is really prevenient; it does not depend for its giftedness upon the desire or the receptivity or the condition of the recipient. Each new arrival into the human family in the Christian family is baptized as a signal that this one, too, is in the circle of a grace that was before he was, that came into existence without any consultation with him or his parents; and therefore prevenient grace was celebrated.

Grace not only comes before us, but it also attends us through life. The occasions for our life's attendance by grace are principally the sacraments of the Church. They include the word, the preaching of the Church; but as you know, after the fourth century, preaching was not really a precondition of ordination. Grace is prevenient; it is operational; and it does its inward formation in such a way as to create an *habitus*. Now you recognize there the standard catholic Western understanding of grace.

The second great moment in the stylizing of this understanding of grace came at the Reformation. Luther during his early years was looking for a way to celebrate what he had learned as a teacher of Scripture: the freedom of God in his grace. That is the heart of Luther's struggle. I think it remains the heart of his theology, his preaching, his commentaries. He sensed in Scripture the freedom of God in his grace; and he sensed in the medieval Church, of which he was a child, through the

Augustinian order, that whereas the Church could theoretically admit this freedom of God in his grace, actually that freedom was ecclesiastically canalized through an ordained priesthood, through a legitimizing of the sacrament which, except at his hands, was not available, through a penitential system—so that the God-relationship, be it ever so penitent, unless it somehow got recognized through these channels, was uncertain and not even available. So what happened in the medieval Church, at least in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and at least in those parts

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of the Church that Luther knew—we have to be careful not to make big fat statements that cover everything—the freedom of God's grace had been sacerdotalized, bureaucratized, and substantialized.

When Luther looked around for an instrument whereby to unlock, to let loose the freedom of God in his grace, he seized upon those words of the gospel about God's-freedom to forgive sins to the repentant sinner. He said, "This word is always there, available as the Word of God to every sinner, to every person: you are accepted by God as a sinner." Luther never ceased to be a devout churchman. He was no free churchman. He had a very high view of the sacrament, an enormously high view of baptism; but he wanted to free the grace of God from its entrapment, so he believed (and he was largely right, as modern Catholic scholarship indicates). Therefore the freedom of the grace of God in Jesus Christ is the focal point of grace. If you ask, "Where do I meet the grace of God," the answer is that you meet it in the forgiveness of sins which comes to you in virtue of and via your encounter with Christ. In other words, in freeing grace from the sacerdotal and ecclesiastical entrapment, Luther put it in a second box—now certainly a true and a right box. But grace was now completely identified with the work of God according to the Second Article, the grace of God in Jesus Christ. You know the benedictory words in Paul's letter, "Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit" and so forth—this also invites the mind to suppose that God is love but Jesus is grace and the fellowship belongs to the third person of the Trinity (he creates the community). There is a legitimacy to dividing things up that way. But we forget, if I may say it banally, that there is an inter-com system with the Trinity, too, so that the powers

of each belong to all and you cannot cut up the reality of God simply along these modal lines.

That Lutheran inheritance (and I am afraid it is also pretty much a Calvinist inheritance and hence gets into most of the rest of Protestantism) is the one that Lutheran dogmatics received in the seventeenth century, which was a great theological systematizing period. To skip all the intervening years and put it in a simple way: those of you who are communicants of Lutheran parishes, when you early went to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, is it true that this was a particularly lugubrious service in mood, in music, in liturgical acts, and the sermon was always about sin and grace, the forgiveness available in the sacrament or at least signalized in the sacrament, though not only there, available, signalized, materialized in a special way? As I grew up, when I heard the word "grace," the one word that always came to my mind was "the forgiveness of sins," the justifying of me before God which is signalized, actualized in the reception of the elements in the Lord's Supper. What I am saying is that the scope of grace as it begins to open up in the Scriptures, as in the whole catholic tradition it has enjoyed a larger dimensionality, is at the time of the Reformation so violently concentrated at the point of christology and the forgiveness of sins in virtue of Christ's person and work and passion and death and resurrection. Grace is completely transparent, offered, understood only at that point.

We have sometimes talked about "created grace and uncreated grace" or "common grace and special grace." By "created grace" the early Church meant that grace which is a power and gift of God the Creator and with which he endows his creation. There is a gracious reality present in the things that are made — in this created world, the world which we are equipped to enjoy, study, criticize. To be human in the midst of God's world is to dwell in created grace, that is, the grace which is inherent in and given in, with, and under the creation. By "uncreated grace" the old Church meant grace which comes over and above the creation by the incarnation, the sacrifice, the teaching, the presence of Jesus Christ.

They had another set of terms. As early as Augustine they were using the term "common grace." To be a person, to enjoy the world, to rejoice in nature, to love the beautiful, to enjoy a man or a woman and particularly being a man with a woman, to love (as Luther says) good beer and sausage, that is, the whole humanistic potentiality of person-

hood, was regarded as a common grace. This is given with the fact that we are people and not dogs, that we have perceptive abilities, sensibilities, appreciative abilities, aesthetic sense, joy in work, craftsmanship, artistic creativity—this is a grace. The farmer who rejoices in the coming of spring and the strong horse and the chance to plow the fields and

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see the work of his hands turn out well—this is the common grace of humanity and is given with the world. What I am saying is that in the Reformation that ceased to play a large role in Protestant dogmatic development. It has almost no place in Lutheran hymnody. Interestingly, Methodist hymnody retains more of it. The Eastern Church has a great deal of it. But there are very few hymns in the Lutheran hymnal that have anything about the natural world that is not the necessary scenario through which we pass on the way to something better. There is very little celebrative about this world. There is very little relaxation within our hymnody. There is very little of the shift to a humanistic, devout delight in God and his creation.

This morning I talked of the deepening awareness of man's embeddedness in the web of nature, the growth and refinement of information about our common source in natural evolution, that is, our biological source, the long development whereby mankind itself has emerged in this "immense journey," as Loren Eiseley calls it, our knowledge of the vastness of the cosmos. When we say, "This is the world that the Lord hath made," we do not mean just this earth, we do not mean just what came into existence when this earth was formed but the dreamlike distances of the enormous past in which, if God is the God of all that is, he must be God of all that before there was a man to whom to send a historical revelation via Moses or Christ. So the scope of data that the contemporary mind now must have before it as it uses words about God and Christ and the Church has got to be stretched to cover the reality.

It seems to me that a filling out and a stretching out of the meanings available in the doctrine of grace are not the only way to go about this. My colleague, Phil Hefner, is trying to do the same thing I am but in virtue of a rethinking and reworking of the doctrine of the Spirit; and he is doing it very well indeed. And my friend, Harold Ditmanson, of St. Olaf, has just written a good book on grace, published by Augsburg

Press, a big, thoroughly responsible, carefully written work on grace; but he is doing it with a quite different accent than my own more modest work. There are many areas in Christian theology today where what I am talking about as the increase in the magnitude of the referent is being made so that theological and devotional and hymnic language will now intersect the actual data of the modern mind's theater of personhood and society. That is, as I see it, the stage which the next times in theology are going to have to enter.

Now I want to say very briefly how I think we should go about writing the theology of grace in a new way. In my little book, *Essays on Nature and Grace*, I have said what I have to say about that. I shall not write any more; it is too hard, and I am not sure that I have the energy left to undertake a thing like that. There I have said it as well as I can say it briefly. But preaching and teaching—that is what I am interested in now. You are, most of you, not theologians by profession. You are by ordination but not by day-by-day full-time profession. How shall the preacher go about exciting interest in an understanding of the grace which we encounter in the common life, domesticating the reality of grace within experience, talking about nature and history and personal life in such a way that our people are reminded of the gifted nature of life? *Gratia* means “gifted”; the heart of the word *charis* means that which is not of your own invention, that which has a gifted quality. How do you do that? Let me suggest several ways.

We have a very poor vocabulary of grace.

We have an elaborate rhetoric, a very full and vivid vocabulary of alienation, anxiety, sin, separation, wretchedness: but we have a very poor vocabulary of grace. We have a fine rhetoric of sin; but we have a very thin or old, not current vocabulary for the occasions of grace. That vocabulary is being enriched, of all things, by the poets. I think there is nothing strange about that. The poets are the virtuosi in language. The poets have always been those men and women who have perceived and been able to expose the miracle of meaningfulness to make words and sentences resonate with deeper meaning. That is a gift; the poets have it. Let me use an illustration. I think the efficiency of a poetic line is not only that it share the memorability of music because it has usually an interior musicality, a rhythm; it has the advantage of combining speaking with singing, in a sense. It also has the quality of condensation. It

glitters like a jewel because it is terribly compressed.

Take illustrations of quite secular poetry. One line that is so beautiful and so full that it almost makes one weep at the incomparable beauty of it: John Keats on a certain afternoon took a walk around Winchester Fields and he wrote in his day book, a little diary he kept, and a letter he wrote to his brother, Tom, that “I walked today in the wheat fields around Winchester, and I noted with what grace the wheat fields rippled in the wind and the lovely color of the wheat” (that was an October day). That is the little entry. Two months later he wrote a little poem, the ode “To Autumn,” which a great teacher of English literature says (and I tend to agree) is probably the most perfect poem in the English language. You recall from your school: “Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun, Conspiring with her how to load and bless With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run.” And then about twelve lines down, he apparently thought of that wheat field; and he creates a figure of autumn as a young child with golden hair half-asleep on a turned furrow in the midst of a field. He puts the winds and the wheat all together: “Her hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind”— what a gorgeous line.

Here is the ability to look at nature in such a way as to reenact primal astonishment, the sense of the sheer giftedness of wheat, of the wind, of the colors of the year, the fact of the miracle that what man cannot live without he cannot of himself bring into existence, the fecundity of the earth, the ability of the sea to multiply by millions of times, to live in the world in such a way that you do not look at a forest and think only of a local lumber yard or to see a wheat field rippling in the wind, which does not mean you do not grow wheat and make good bread out of it or make a profit out of making bread out of it but that before you use it you enjoy it, to use Augustine’s phrase: “it is the heart of sin that men use what they ought to enjoy.” If they enjoy it properly, they will use it properly. And he turns it around and says, “they enjoy what they ought to use.” Augustine says, “Faith and charity are not just for enjoyment, they are for use. The charity of God is through you for your brother’s sake.” It could be Luther saying the same thing.

We have got somehow, in response to the warning of the gentlemen from MIT, who said, “We must be changed in the spirit of our minds,” to re-relate to men to the giftedness of the world of things and of other people and the world of personal relations, of the massive challenges that confront us in reformation of human society into more humane,

The “engracement” of the world is announcing its necessity in the environmental crisis.

joyful, and just forms of government and better cities. The “engracement” of the world, you see, is the job which awaits us and is announcing its necessity in the environmental crisis. We must deal with the things of this world gracefully— see, that word takes on a new meaning. “To be graceful”: when we say that about persons, we sometimes mean the way we look, the manner, the walk, as in “she is a graceful girl.” The word means that in the beautiful movement of the body there is a gift, a grace acknowledged.

Let me mention some of the poets who are trying to awaken us to this: Richard Wilbur, Theodore Roethke, John Berryman, and Robinson Jeffers. One piece in which I find what I am saying all together in one relatively short poem of about ten quatrains is a poem by Richard Wilbur called “Advice to a Prophet.” He has a sharp eye for the threatened environment and a sense that the change whereby the environment no longer is regarded as a place of grace and meaning will really be the death of the human race. Now that is not just a poetic effusion. I am constituted by my relationships; the psychologists are never tired of telling us that. But I am also constituted by my encounters with the non-human world. How much of my life has to do with animals, the beauty of the natural world, climate, places I have been, the thingly material creations, portraits of Rembrandt and Vermeer, Renaissance art, architecture—all these things are condensations of the grace inherent in creation which is released, unfolded, expressed, celebrated.

Wilbur wrote his poem apparently after having heard a report about someone announcing doom upon our civilization because of our rapacious transactions with the world. He says that we are constituted by the gliding trout and the jack pine with his knuckles’ grip on the cold ledge and the white-tailed deer. And he sees a time when maybe in an atomic blast the white-tailed deer will slip into perfect shade, this gliding trout will be stunned in a twinkling, the jack pine will lose his knuckles’ grip. And he says, “How shall we be, lofty or longstanding, when the bronze annals of the oak tree close.” That is a pretty gorgeous line itself; you know what happens to an oak tree in the fall that turns that rich, lovely brown. To use the word “annals” of that is to combine nature and history.

You fly over southern Indiana and look at the wretched earth where the strip mining has gone on for fifty years, and you almost feel as if you are looking at a torn and tattered body. This is going on more and more. "The earth groans in travail, waiting. . . ." What is she waiting for? If you put it into idiomatic English, she is waiting for the sons of God to "act like it" and take care of their Sister, to have a new sense for the common grace, created grace. That is where I see the doctrine of grace as a potential to be at the center of a renovation of Christian theology opposite to man's new opportunities with nature.



COMMENTS

USE AND ABUSE

Augustine says: “It is of the heart of sin that men use what they ought to enjoy and enjoy what they ought to use.” By enjoyment of things he meant something that Calvin later put in his catechism. You remember the famous answer to the first question in the catechism: “What is the chief end of man? To enjoy God and glorify him forever.” To enjoy means to let a thing be itself and rejoice in it. So the first relation we have to the earth is to enjoy it, that is, understand its strangeness, its structure, its utility, its beauty because, says Augustine, if you enjoy a thing, you will not abuse it.

He defines “abuse” in another beautiful sentence: “Abuse is use without grace.” That doesn’t mean that the natural world is not to be used; it is made for use. A forest has a lifetime; it should be harvested. But if you understand and enjoy forests, then you will use them in relationship to their integrity, their own quality and nature. And there are finer forests; for instance, the State of Washington has more fine timber now than it had fifty years ago because Weyerhaeuser and other companies, whether on religious grounds or others, have seen that if we are going to secure an economic future for timber, we must not abuse the structure of the life of a tree. And therefore, they put in more than they take out. So “abuse is use without grace” is a great epigram.

It applies to analysis of personal relations. If I enjoy another person in terms of that other person’s particularity, then I will not simply regard him thus: “How can I use this guy, what use can I make of his friendship, how can I use him to get a leg up on my own purposes?” Or take the field of sexuality; sex is for enjoyment in the fullest sense of that word. If it is enjoyed, that is, understood in its profound particular difference in men and in women, then it is not abused. This thing spins off in a lot of relationships.

JESUS ONLY?

We have got to find a christology which has its own interior authority but which does not constitute a threat to Jews. I am sure that this sign we see, “Jesus only,” we ought to tear down because Jesus never would have such a thing said. When it was said, he

immediately repudiated it in the name of the Father, “whose word I am, who sent me, whose work I do.” So this “Jesus only” thing is really bad biblical theology as well as bad christology. In my own feeling, if we move toward a christology of function, we still celebrate the doctrine of the Holy Trinity legitimately but we avoid the question of hypostatic union, of essence, which is not necessary for biblical theology. The Bible does not use that kind of language.

In the Old Testament there are not definitions of God. He is what he does: “He is the one who brought you out of Egypt, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness. What God are you talking about? The God who did this and this and this.” So I think we can pass beyond the time that required the Nicene kind of formulation; and we must find a way of talking of the function of God, God being God in a way in history in the person of Christ, which will preserve the relation of Christ to the Father, the *das* but not the *wie* (we can say the “that” though we may not be able to say the “how”), and so not be an offense to the children of the old covenant who live according to the covenant of God through Abraham. We have plenty of work to do as Christians without spending our labors on the people of the first covenant for their renovation. I have no interest in that at all.

HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

I am reminded of that charming story that Jastrow himself tells in the BBC program in which I heard him. He said he was lecturing at a church in London, and there was an old lady listening carefully to what he was saying; he was talking about how long a certain structure will likely last. And the old lady says (she was sort of deaf), “Did you say nine million years?” “No, madam, nine billion.” “Oh, that’s better,” she said. That gives a little more time.

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

So much of our judgment on new translations is really based not upon linguistic knowledge but often on ancillary disciplines—our feeling for language, our fascination with some words, the degree to which the English tongue has formed our speech (and it has very

deeply formed mine). There are certain rhythms in the English language which are really characteristic of English; no other language has them. And long exposure to that in the greatest practitioners of it (because I am really a frustrated teacher of literature, I think) has formed my taste in such a way that I may sometimes be unjust....

The language of a culture is not the Word of God; but the language of a culture may be like John the Baptist, who goes before the face of the Lord to prepare his way. That is, the language of a culture is probably the most significant and disclosive signal that a culture sends up. I think this is pretty generally recognized by anthropologists: that the speech of a people, the way they use metaphors, similes, adjectives, verbs is the way a culture walks around in its underwear. So I attend to the language of my culture— and not only high culture, that is, top literature and drama and poetry, but all kinds of language. Since I cannot read anymore, I do what until three years ago I did hardly at all: I watch television. And God bless channel 11 in Chicago, which has hours of excellent input for a trapped fellow who cannot read. So I watch the television a lot.

It is estimated that between forty and fifty million people every morning and early afternoon watch soap operas. Now I never had time for this, but anything that that many people watch with fascinated regularity deserves attention from anyone who wants to understand the culture. I was trapped once in a hotel between two duties; and to be in a hotel in a strange city, not able to read— that's a bore. So I thought, "Now's my chance." For three days I watched "Edge of Night," "Young and Restless," "As The World Turns"— five of them, from nine in the morning till two. And of course, one comes at twelve; and I sent down and got a corned-beef sandwich sent up because I could not lose out on this. And then I watched them the next day and the next. Now that is 15 hours of watching soap operas.

After the first couple of hours, I began to make notes. What I noted was the gravity of the themes that actually are the skeleton of the story. The themes are not trivial; the episodes disclose real human tragedy, pathos, delight, absurdity, all kinds of things. The themes are not trivial or evanescent; they are grave human themes, the same themes that Homer and Dante and Shakespeare made great literature of: loneliness, anxiety, dislocation, a sense of

worthlessness, a personal possibility that has no adequate field for its operation, a feeling of abandonment, desertion, the waning of love. These are great themes.

As I watched these soap operas, I found out that the themes are great; but the form of the soap opera, which must go on for a long time, imposes a slowness of pace upon the development of the theme which could only be put up with by somebody who is scouring the pans and getting other things done while watching. The slowness of the development is annoying, and the resolution is out of scale with the magnitude of the theme: that is the worst part of it. The resolution comes often by an act of good fortune or by a providentially planned death. Often the theme is too easily resolved, given the gravity of its presentation. So I really learned a good deal which led me to say to myself that if I have sometimes supposed that people do not wish to be addressed on grave problems, I am wrong. The soap opera is doing it all the time. They do it in a slick, lubricated way; but the themes are there, and they evoke identification with them on the part of the viewer.

Someone once said: "You must take your people more seriously than they take themselves, and they will not thank you if you do not do it." I think that is quite true. So watching common language has meant a great deal to me. I read—or I did, and now I can only listen to—a great deal of literature. The inventiveness of the language of the best sports writers is remarkable. Ring Lardner started as a sports writer, and a good many of the best story writers in the country got their apprenticeship that way. Then I read a contemporary short story. I read that mostly because it is short, and the form demands great economy in language. Some of our best writing occurs there. And I continue a lifelong habit of rejoicing in poetry. I get in tapes now. (You may not know it, but the Library of Congress will send you within a week a tape of anything you ask for in any language. And if they do not have it, in a month they will have it for you. If I wrote for a tape of Rilke in German, I'd get it within a month. So the Library of Congress is a great resource for people with difficulty in reading.) So I listen to a lot of tapes, and that is particularly fine for poetry because poetry is addressed to the ear. Poetry is meant to be heard, not just read on a page. You hear a line of poetry in which the image is so gripping and so right, then push

the question, “Why is it right?” Then you begin to open up possibilities for your own improvement in language. You must ask, “What about that use of the word there is so right?” Let me give you an illustration from a very old book. In J.L. Motley’s *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, which is not on everybody’s coffee table, Motley, an English historian, wrote a long section on William the Silent, one of the famous rulers of Holland in the great years of the Netherlands’s naval and commercial supremacy. William the Silent was an admirable man, a man of strict personal discipline, great modesty, a superbly sensitive king, a man of great simplicity of speech, of manner, of moral life. He paints a very beautiful picture of William, a very full picture of William’s reign. And the last sentence in the essay is so simple that it has stuck in my mind many years. The chapter ends: “While he lived, he was the father of a brave people; and when he died, the little children wept in the streets.” Why did that stick in my head? In that single sentence with the two images—“the father of a brave people” and “when he died, the little children wept in the streets” — the language is an absolute equivalent to the man. Its simplicity, its forthrightness, its candor, the absence of any verbal decoration— it is absolutely simple as William was simple. It is simply asking of the good why it is good, of the sharp why it is sharp, of the fitting why it is fitting; you train the mind not only for that sentence but for your own sentence. You do not do this by going to school or taking classes in rhetoric; at your age I doubt if anyone could teach you this. This is what education is preparing you for; lifelong attention and reflection. Now I think this is capable of development; this is not just a gift or an endowment. This can be developed.

ECUMENISM AND LUTHERANISM

I have participated for a long time, for thirty years, in the “salad days” of the ecumenical movement; and I have reflected about it. People sometimes talk about the waning, the disappearance of the ecumenical movement among the churches. I do not lament the present situation. It took about thirty years for the churches to come to know each other’s traditions in such a way as to make all of them aware of the historical influence in the forming of their tradition. All of us learned, except a very few pockets, that no theological system

is an absolute box for the truth of the Christian faith. None is absolutely wrong, none is fully right. So it was a vast relativization of the historical communities which claim to be the people of God. They are the people of God but not in the sense that their theological statement of how and why is adequate to that which makes them that. That was a great deed that the ecumenical movement did. Lund, Evanston, and New Delhi really had very little to do with John and Joan back home; these were meetings of top ecumenical brass. And they were necessary things to get official acceptance of work which most of the people doing the accepting did not do.

For instance, I worked for twelve years with the commission on the doctrine of the church and the commission on worship. We worked hard year after year after year. And a whole new row of books came out from this work in biblical studies, worship, liturgy, and history. The movement was enormously rich in creating a worldwide fraternity of scholars who before had not been able to break out of their family house. That has been particularly dramatic in the realm of biblical scholarship. Now that Brown of Union, formerly of St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, the ranking New Testament scholar probably in the country, writes his big commentary on the Fourth Gospel, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, and everybody read it. Why not? These fellows take in one another's critical washing, they use the same methodologies, they investigate the same issues, they exchange information. So the ecumenical movement has accomplished what it set out to do: to break down the walls of partition —academic, ethnic in some degree, linguistic — so that now that the fat is in the fire, it cannot be taken out again.

Now if you feel a kind of restlessness within a form of the Church or a form of Christian piety, I think that is good. I think anyone who has a sense of humor about the abyss between systematic theology and the reality of God becomes both a better theologian and a better Christian. And if he does not have that sense of humor, it is going to be hard to be either. When I talk about Christology tomorrow, if God is listening, I'd better have a sense of humor. I remember something that Gregory Baum once said to me. (You know, Gregory is a very turbulent Roman Catholic; and he has just demitted the priesthood. He has become a secular, not a secular priest but no priest at all. He is a layman now at St. Michael's

College in Toronto.) He told me this one night. A Lutheran student was so enamored by the spirituality of the Roman Catholic community she had had friends in that she was going to become a Roman Catholic. Gregory said: “No, I don’t think you should do that.” He dissuaded her from doing that because, he said, “I have found that you nowhere meet original sin in its more pure form than in the house where you were born.” That is pretty good. He said: “You would find, if you became a Roman Catholic, that some equivalent of what makes you unhappy as a Lutheran now would certainly pop up and you would have to become something else.” But he said: “Original sin—you meet it in its most pure form within your own house; and you might as well stay there and encounter it.” Well, that is the way I feel.

In a sense, to be a Lutheran is not important to me. Now I want to be understood. It is significant, I am grateful for the tutelage of that particular Christian community. But when I use the word “important,” I mean really centrally important to my life. I want to be a catholic Christian, that is, the most comprehensive understander, feeler, exemplar, and person of the Christian faith I can be. That is the important thing. I am grateful to my church, I love my church. She has her kings, queens, jokers, kitchen maids; I know where the kitchen is, I know where the front office is, I know where the men's room is. I am at home in that community. And a human being is meant to have a house; you cannot just be a Christian-at-large. I do not intend to make any such effort; I am a Lutheran Christian. But the adjective is not nearly so important as the substantive, you see.

Now I know that is dangerous talk for many Lutherans who absolutize the Lutheran tradition. Well, that is a form of idolatry, it is evil. I do not say that to everybody because they are not evil people, but I have no right to use the word Lutheran in relationship to the God-relationship in an absolute sense. It is a relative thing. It is my tradition, where I was nurtured; I am at home in it; it has given me much and continues to give me much; it is my house. But it is not my home. We are a pilgrim people; we have here no abiding city, not even the LCA.

When we ordain to the ministry, what do we ordain to? To the ministry of Christ’s Church. Then we make a secondary thing: obey

the rules, understand the polity of your own church body, and serve it. But your fundamental ordination is not to the Lutheran Church ministry; it is to the ministry of Christ's Church.

I remember a student in my class at seminary asked old Dr. John Olaf Evjen, a great church historian: "How did the ULCA come to be?" He said, "My boy, by a combination of Machiavellian duplicity and Napoleonic diplomacy—next question." That was not quite true, but there was a good deal of Machiavellian trade-off going on. Why not? This is a human institution. I find nothing banal or evil about it. That is the way it has to be if you are going to form a corporation, which a church is, among other things.

So what I call a sense of humor will see that ecumenicity is now a theological mind, an openness about historical establishments which I think will never again be eradicated. We cannot put that tooth paste back in the tube. I do not believe the Augsburg Confession is the only complete, accurate, errorless statement about what a community believes about God, Christ, the Church itself, Holy Scripture. I subscribe to it as a very responsible and brave and admirable statement of a sixteenth-century group whose backs were against the wall and said, "This belongs to a truly catholic Church." Remember, it is a confession of the catholicity of the Reformers, not of their Lutheranism. It aims to be a catholic confession, and it is a very good one. But happily it is not the last one there will ever be. Now that would knock me out of ordination in certain parts of the Lutheran Church, but this does not distress my soul either. . . .

I think back of my years in Faith and Order. I am like Ishmael in Moby Dick: I alone am left to tell the story of a diminishing world. Lilje and Fry and the Bishop of Chichester and Oliver Tompkins and Visser 't Hooft, Henri d'Espien, the German bishop I knew so well, and the Swedes are virtually all gone so that there is not much brass left. And the top organization is an information processing thing; most of their reports and information now do not have to do with top-level negotiations but with congregational demographic facts from India, Asia, Burma, Africa. There are almost as many Lutherans in Kenya and in Tanzania as there are in the LCA. That is really a stunner, you know. The ministerium of Pennsylvania would be appalled to hear this, but it is true. . . .

Especially young pastors and students have transcended the sociological, historical understanding of church with a specific coming into being at a certain time because of a reformation; and they root the church back into the community of believers before the splits and reformations and problems. I think all that is very healthy, and I have not found that a more spiritual understanding of the life-giving realities that constitute the Church diminishes one's faithfulness and duty toward the necessary organization. I am not a worse pastor in my Synod because I think the Synod is a geographical arrangement that occupies the same lines as the State of Illinois, which was carved out of the Northwest Territory not by the Holy Ghost but by the Congress. So I do not find that the deepening of spiritual understandings is a danger to organizational loyalty and activity, do you? It is like education. Hutchins said: "The University of Chicago is really not a good university, it's just the best there is." If you have a sense of humor about the limitations of all, you do not necessarily become less loyal.

BLACK THEOLOGY

The man who said that there is no such thing as Black Theology meant that the events, disclosures, communities which bring theology into existence all deal with the same events, episodes, themes. In the same sense, there is no such thing as Black Medicine; if the people a doctor working on kidney disease has around him are black, white, red, or yellow, it really makes no difference. Only if the incidence of a certain disease showed up in one group more than another would he look for that in terms of color. But he would look for it in terms of conditions of life, diet, or something. So there is not Black Medicine; there is sound or unsound medical science. In that sense there is no such thing as a colored theology, black or any other color.

But the moment you say that, then you turn around and say, "But what is theology?" Theology is a bringing to articulation of "the faith of the Christian Church," as Aulen puts it. And that faith has both that which calls to faith and that which is evoked by the call to faith from responding people. And these people have had life experiences, language development, ideas which cannot be kept out

of their theology. So in that sense, the theology as influenced by the black experience would certainly be not a thematically different theology; but it would talk about freedom in a less celestial way and a more historical way. It would talk about love probably in a profounder way because they for a long time had to live on it almost exclusively; they found out that about the only love they could gain was within the community of the disenfranchised. When you hear black people talk, particularly preach, you are talked to in a way which brings to their illumination the particular experience of the people. So in that sense there is black theologizing and there are black theologians; but the adjective “black” is a secondary thing. James Cone has got to do theology along with the fraternity of theologians, and he does; but he brings to it certain accents and experiences which are corrective, informative, also polemical.

SLOTH

I know more people cut off (from God) by fat-heartedness than by filthy-mindedness. The people who permit the injustices and brutalities of this world to go on and on and get organizationally powerful, most of them are not moral rotters; they are stupid, fathearted, satisfied, complacent. They have got it made; they do not want to be bothered. You know that is true. Many of the world's most awful things happen not because people will the evil but because they do not will the good; and Paul calls it stupor, sloth.

A CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGIAN

I am what is called a constructive theologian; that is, it is my job and my vocation to probe at the edges of things as responsibly as I can. But I am not a normative church theologian. Franklin Clark Fry never turned me loose here in the United States; I was never a ranking theologian in the LCA. He once said to me, “You’re purely for export.” And he was right about it in that a fine transmitting, enriching theologian like Martin Heinecken—you had a whole cadre of them in the Missouri Synod—these are, in a sense, church theologians. I am not a non-church theologian, but my interest is always in asking: ‘To what degree is this precious tradition ductile,

flexible? To what degree do the images and the symbols and the statements intersect modernity in ways which the past has had to investigate?" That is the margin on which I live.

You are engaging here in a conversation with one who worries about these things but who has no authority beyond the intrinsic authority of the connections he makes and their appropriateness to the culture. So you do not have to agree with Sittler, and most people don't; but this is a legitimate exercise within the church. And the church must cherish these characters and keep them alive for her own discomfort and growth. It is a bad day in the church when we do not do that, and I think that is one of the unintended strengths of the LCA. I do not think this is a virtue because that would be intended; it is sort of a carelessness: they let us alone if we do not rock the boat publicly. So that is why I never lectured in Philadelphia but rather in Geneva, Switzerland, where I was far enough away. It is sort of like being a member of the Missouri Synod in Massachusetts; you can make more waves up there.

COMMUNITY AS A PROBLEM

Comment: Sometimes community, or the emphasis on community, gets in the way. My wanting to have someone to suffer with me or to rejoice with me too soon can get in the way of it being the God-experience; and then it becomes less than that.

I begin to see what you mean. There has been a torrent of studies in the last 20-30 years about human relationships and community and sharing and the resource that lies in close relationships. Now that is not untrue, and we can stand more of that probably. But there is a time when to declare those resources as the absolute, ultimate resource of the Christian gospel will not do. There is an ultimate loneliness in every human life which lurks just under the covers of those books. I am simply not impressed by the happiness promised to human existence by the mutuality possible in human relationships. Human relationships are marked by the same ambiguities that I know in my own solitude. Human relationships are not fulfilling, and this is what the books are always saying. In fact, if I could push my thesis farther, I would say: the community gets in the way by promising fulfillment, and fulfillment is not a possibility for human

existence ultimately. That is why we have to have a gospel of the divine redemption. I do not think my life is fulfilled; I do not think it can be fulfilled. I am always envisioning beyond the actual; I am always seeing the negative under the positive and the loss that balances the gain. I see what my career has cost my wife and children. This talk about being fulfilled is not Christian talk. There is much good and joy and happiness in life, but life fundamentally has a cruciform character. . . .

If your anthropology includes the *imago Dei*, that man is really constituted in the image of God (and this can be understood in many ways)—“thou hast formed us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in thee”—if you really believe that, then the acknowledgment of the impossibility of fulfillment is the fulfillment appropriate to human existence.

TOLERATING SIN WONDERFULLY

Part of the problem of a self-consciously confessional church is that you do not have to have a reportable or specifiable sense of the presence of God if you're sure your church is including you in right teaching and pure doctrine. If you really belong to a corporation that secures pure doctrine, certified from headquarters as such, then many of the problems of life you do not have to worry about because they are all taken care of at headquarters. This is one of the Lutheran problems. You said, “We are by nature sinful and unclean.” Now the new commission on the liturgy has changed that, right? And the new Book of Common Prayer is considering the famous sentence that comes from Cranmer, “We have sinned against thy holy name, and there is no health in us; the burden of our sins is intolerable.” Sometimes I drop in at St. James Church, the Anglican church around the corner. It is a rather posh congregation, and I see these mink-clad ladies with their tickets to Fort Lauderdale in their pockets with their heads devoutly bowed saying, “The burden of our sins is intolerable.” And they're tolerating them wonderfully.



A STRATEGEM OF CARE

I had one illustration in my parish—I was for 13 years in a parish. A strong and faithful and devout woman was a complete biblical literalist; and she was simply stopped by that literalism from following the enriching images and invitations of the biblical speech into understanding. She used, when talking to me, the business of Jonah and the whale: “. . . and if you don't believe this absolutely literally, what can you believe? If the Bible doesn't speak literally here, why should I trust it anywhere else?” So I deliberately preached a sermon on Jonah and the whale; and I followed the advice of old F. W. Robertson of Brighton (a famous English preacher), who said (in his sermon to young preachers): “When you meet a situation like this in a parish, do not be like a horse trying to get a fly off its back. A horse swishing its tail and leaping around to get a fly from biting in his back will whip himself into a great lather, and the fly stays right there. Simply build up the larger without specifically attacking the smaller, and let the grandeur of the larger do its own work with the lesser.” So I preached a sermon on Jonah without ever bringing up the anatomical matter of the dimensions of a fish's throat and all the rest of it, just took the message of Jonah and preached it without referring to what the woman thought or what she believed or any of the great argument about it, just let Jonah make his speech and then said Amen. Then I dealt with certain parables and miracles in that way. And within a couple of years, without ever mentioning the matter, the woman ceased her carping at me because I had demonstrated an earnest attempt to hear what the Word of God is here without attacking her openly. Now I think some kind of stratagem of care is what we have to use here; otherwise we increase the body but do not nurture the body.

SCIENTIFIC HUMILITY

The qualities of mind that are encouraged by what I have been talking about, this we do want to talk about. And it is an invitation to both despair and arrogance, to bewilderment and to over-certainty, a certain methodological idolatry. This arrogance is all over the place among the secondary level of scientists, not the primary level. I do not know a first-rate investigator who is arrogant. But I know a

lot of second-raters who think they have got the natural world by the tail.

PREACHING AT YALE

Two years ago, having undergone the complete disorientation and disorganization of the mind about New Testament theology which came to a climax in my work with Ricoeur and Perrin and Tracy, who were my colleagues for five years, I wanted to try a new thing in preaching to test out whether preaching as proposal, without any traditional, theological, ethical support, would do business. And I was invited when Bill Coffin was on leave at Yale at Battell Chapel to come there for a month and take four of those Sundays because I had known Bill and he asked me to do it. I thought if you can do it at Yale, you can do it anywhere; if you can crack those skulls or invite those minds, it ought to be workable at other places. So I took two miracle stories and two parables and began the sermon after having had them read. There is only one lesson read at Yale's order of service, and they read it just before the sermon; the moment it is read you get up to preach. I remember that George Lindbeck's wife the first time read the parable story; and then I immediately got into the pulpit and asked my leading question, "What's going on here," with no introduction and then took the parable apart, tried to analyze what are the dynamics present in this story. It was the parable of the unjust steward. And coming to that climactic point, "and the Lord commended this crook," I got all the dynamics and asked, "What is in this man who is manifestly a crook?" The Lord does not commend his morality (he has nothing to do with that), but there is that in the man's action which our Lord found commendable, I just let it hang there and said, "Amen."

They have the interesting custom at Yale that down in the quadrangle in a coffee shop run by the chaplains, students and others may come afterward for coffee and sit around and talk about the sermon or to the preacher. They always have someone to open the discussion; he is the critic for the day. And in this case it was George Lindbeck (now that's hard on any preacher). George leaned back and said "Well, I didn't hear a sermon today. The preacher really didn't advise me what I ought to think or help me along the

way as to how I ought to behave and act and what things I ought to attend to. I didn't hear a sermon. I don't really know what he was up to. He just told me a story and said, 'Amen'.' There was a deadly silence, as if these students were saying, "George, you can't be so rough on a guest." But I sensed what George was up to; he just leaned back and said: "Well, that's the way I feel about it; I didn't hear a sermon; he didn't tell me anything." And this silence was finally broken by some little girl in the corner who said, "He did too say something." And she got up and said, "I don't know what he said, but I can't forget that crazy question." And George in that mild way stopped smoking long enough to say, "Maybe that's what he was up to; I don't know." Well, it worked. I mean, if the hearer says, "I can't forget that crazy question," you've done it; then the story has done its job because the parable often ends, "And what think ye?" I did not quote them that because that might spoil the point, but I just let it hang there.

LIFE AND MEANING

People will not live without meaning; I'm sure I am on common ground when I say they will not live without meaning. They will elevate a hobby or a pastime or even a vice or pure physicality as sexuality into a realm of total meaning ala Playboy. People will not live without meaning; and if they cannot find a big enough one, they will take a little one and blow it up. I am not without hope.

JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIP

Often, in the presence of Abraham Heschel, I felt myself clearly in the presence of a man whom Paul calls the God-fearer, a man with whom, if I were not a Christian, I would have a full religious community and would feel convinced of a redemptive God-relationship. Now that does not mean that Jesus is to be jettisoned; but it means, as Paul says, the old covenant attesting to the faithfulness of God is the heart of biblical Judaism. And it is because I am so thoroughly convinced of that that I have never had any enthusiasm for Christian missions to the Jews. The Jews stand, it seems to me, within a God-relationship which honors, loves, and seeks to be in communion with the same God as Jesus Christ. I do not see the

Jewish-Christian relationship as like any relationship to non-Christians. It is a very particular relationship, and I think we must not just throw in Jewish faith with Baha'i and Zen and errant paganism and other religious formations. Jews are not Canaanites.

A LIMERICK

You have been about very sober business now, and I think we need a light touch. The British have a wonderful facility for interspersing real wit into the most ponderous of issues. And one day at a meeting in Geneva, it was the birthday of C. H. Dodd, the famous New Testament scholar, who was a little man, only about 5' 2". His British colleague, Gordon Rupp, announced that it was his birthday. We were having dinner, and he proposed a toast to C. H. Dodd as follows:

*Don't you think it excessively odd
That a bumptious professor named Dodd
Should spell, if you please,
His name with two Ds
When one is sufficient for God?*

COMMUNISM IS NO SOLUTION

American consumption is a massive problem, but I do not know anyone who says it is an insoluble problem. It is only insoluble if we assume there are no changes possible in this way of thinking. It will require much more boldness, the political entertainment of ways of organizing society which we have called subversive until now. And as a matter of fact, the communists do not do any better ecologically than we do. Lake Baykal, the deepest inland lake in the world, is as filthy as Lake Michigan or much worse apparently from the reports I get. So just do not say, "If we were all communists or socialists, we would immediately solve the problem." No, I do not know how to solve the problem; but neither do I believe that these problems are intrinsically insoluble.



LANGUAGE AND PRAYER

Schleiermacher said: “My deepest feelings are not severable from my clearest ideas.” Now my deepest feelings and my emotions are evoked by the most clear and precise linguistic equivalent of reality, such as in poetry and description, in Conrad, Hopkins, and Keats. The elevation of language which tries to be the linguistic equivalent of the object of its adoration is to me much more moving than liturgical dance or language put in modern idioms. Language is idiomatic because it serves the common. But can we assume without criticism that that flatness and directness of language which serves the common is always the appropriate language to serve the uncommon? I think that is the great, vast blunder in contemporary liturgical writing. They say, “Say it the way it is.” Well, you know, the way it is cannot be said really. We cannot talk about God the way we talk about the bus stop. The great collects of Cranmer were produced at the very flower of the magnificence of our English language. Now God knows that isn’t our common language any more, but I must lament the passing of liturgical language that has sonorities and resonances that go beyond the common.

Let me use an illustration. Quiller-Couch, professor of literature at Cambridge for many years (and he was an opinionated guy, but he had a right to opinions, too) said: “I think Cranmer’s collect assigned to be read at the bedside of the sick may be the most perfect prayer in our language: ‘Almighty God, who art the consolation of the sorrowful and the strength of the weak, may the prayers of them that call upon thee in any distress graciously come before thee’— marvelous rhythm. Some joker in our church set his hand to rewriting the great collects into common speech. And he took that one and said: “God, you are the help of the sick.” Well, that’s true, all right. But that’s a different statement. “Who art the consolation of the sorrowful and the strength of the weak”: the language lies with the tenderness of the holy upon the distress. And “God, you are the help the sick” is a report; it is a theological proposition, and I violently oppose it—but I don’t oppose it publicly because I have given up fighting for lost causes, and that is a lost one. My students have tin ears; they do not know the difference, most of them. I hear they make up their own prayers in Chapel; I wish they would quit it. If we’ve got a Cranmer around, for heaven’s sake, let him make his speech.

Whenever I'm tempted to make up prayers, I read from John Donne's sermon, "The Occasional Mercies of God," and think second thoughts. I do not mean there is no such thing as *ex anima* prayer. Thank God there is; there ought to be. We all do it. We can do it in public worship, too. But we should know our limitations in language; most of us cannot do what other men have done who with a great sensitivity and hours of labor have sought to find the right word to say the great thing.

CHRISTIAN HOPE AND HISTORICAL OBSERVATION

If the object of Christian hope is God, then that means that Christian hope is not a devout function of an evaluation of history. That is, some people evaluate history as moving, maybe in a jerky and oscillating fashion, toward a broader humanity, a deeper justice, a more humane relation to the environment and person-to-person. That depends, I suppose, on how you read it. I do not hope in that in the sense that I "hope in God." If anything is going to be redemptive, it will have to be in virtue of God in strange ways working out his purposes with his creation which, it is my faith, he does not abandon. So my hope is in God; I have literally no hope, in the same qualitative sense, in historical procedures. That does not mean I do not have certain observations which I think indicate we are moving well here but badly here, and I greet all advances as I see them with joy and I lament the recessions. But in a general sense, the big word "hope" I would not apply to historical observation.

I do not think we are in a very good situation historically. I, for instance, do not believe that man's relationship to the earth is liable to change for the better until it gets catastrophically worse. I am of the conviction that man's historical record indicates he can walk with his eyes wide open straight into sheer catastrophe if he has got a profit on the way, and that seems to me what we are doing. . . . I have no great hope that human cussedness will somehow be quickly modified and turned into generosity or that man's care of the earth will improve much until a catastrophe occurs. But I go around planting trees on the campus.



GOD AND ENERGY

Pannenberg (in “The Crisis of the Scriptural Principle” in *Comments Basic Theological Questions*) has a wonderful paragraph about the Holy Spirit. He is talking about the doctrine of the Spirit; and he calls us back to the statement of the Nicene Creed, “And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life.” He says significantly that the fathers at Nicea did not identify the Spirit of God, who is God in his creative action, with a special gift whereby one sees Jesus or gets illumination, although he does that (“he shall teach you all things, lead you into all truth”). But he says what the fathers of the Church meant by the Spirit is “the Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life,” all life, that is, the seed in the ground, the energy in the galaxies, that which is constitutive of natural life, human life, historical life—all of this is what the Nicene Creed refers to. He is the Lord, that is, the originator, the controller, the Lord and Giver of life, unqualified life—intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, family, the most ordinary life, biological life.

So you can say the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is, for the Christian, postulation of the source of energy. If the closed universe people say, “All there is is energy, constantly transforming itself from the exhaustion in nuclear energy to other forms of energy, creating elements, finally collapsing itself into a black hole, the black hole being such a concentration of small particles that the pressure creates a new bright star and the whole process starts all over again,” this is the Spirit. I am a part of God’s creation. And that creation undergoes many forms, but it apparently persists forever. So the earth does not abide forever, but apparently the creative energy of God does—God as energy.

In fact, the Orthodox tradition never talks philosophically about the attributes of God. From the fourth century on, the Orthodox theologians talked about “the energies of God”—a wonderful phrase because it brings a way of talking about God that intersects with the contemporary worldview in which this table top and that rug are but transformed energies. They are not substances in the old sense. In modern physics substance recedes; and what you finally have left in particle physics are combinations of energies in such molecular forms that we call them wood, paint, brain, blood, cells—all is energy. In a sense, the Greeks always knew this. They talked about God as the function of energy, and the energies of God have various forms.



THE UNIVERSITY

The university tries to know the way things are and to peer into the structure and the function and the process of things, natural, historical, humane. It is better to know than not to know. All truth has a potential function and usefulness. I honor the university as I honor the research institute and all efforts to see more clearly and more comprehensively, even though this comprehensiveness may be much less, philosophically or metaphysically, than the church wants. I just like to stand on the flat-footed statement, "It is better to know than not to know." The university is dedicated to knowledge, and I honor that.

RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

There's a mystery in both life and death. University people know that, but it is seldom articulated. I think faculty funerals were my times of making a present to the university out of the Christian depth understanding of whence we come and whither we are tending and celebrating what happens in between in language they would not use about themselves but do not negate when somebody else uses it, even feel themselves in a strange way honored by seeing what they are doing as somehow of a humanistic, fulfilling, transcendent value which their kind of speech cannot deal with and maybe should not deal with.

CHRISTIAN HUMANISM

There is such a thing as a Christian culture that evaluates the godless beauties of mankind more highly than the godless teachers do. In other words, when I speak to the university, I try to speak in such a way as to show that my humanistic sensibilities are not shriveled by virtue of my being a Christian. And that is often a shock to them.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE


There is something fairly gallant about a couple walking up the aisle and saying, "This one is for keeps." I think even the contemporary mind can be addressed by this. Otherwise, why in the most exultant couple walking out of a divorce court is there nevertheless

a certain sadness in the event. “To view with aught but pain the end of love for a season” (R. Frost) is a kind of treason, and we know it. Something I hoped would be good and started into with high desire turns out to be not good or not-possible. That may be so: it may not be good any longer, it may not be possible. But it is not thereby wrenched out of the reality of the person by being brought to a close. The new we hope will be better, but the old lingers on as a moment in which a dream was not realized. Something could not be brought off. That is not culpable, but neither is it forgettable. And that says something about the organic character of human life. There is a kind of genetics in history. The genes of historical experience are still operating in our programmed genetic structure. We are not meant to sit loose to everything. There is something in us that brings us beyond ourselves when we take that big gamble; “this one and forever” is one form of it. I think divorce may be a tragic necessity, and to speak about the necessity in loud language does not extinguish the haunting tragedy.

PREACHING TO THIS GENERATION

Many in this generation have that highly individual sense that “the world is such a mess that I’m going to have to do it my own way and figure it out in my own way and make what I can out of my own life.” I understand that. But in preaching to that generation I have tried, when I preach at university chapels, often to preach self-consciously and openly to some cliché that I hear all over the place. “I want to be on top of the thing, on top of the world”— you know, that is no place from which to relate yourself to the world. That’s not a very fruitful way to be with the world, on top of it. You ought to be inside of it or even under it sometimes or part of it. But “on top of it”—that’s a phony idea.

I preached a sermon which I am glad was not tape recorded because it is almost pornographic. I took a sentence from the Song of Songs; and they thought, “Boy, this guy (not only the guy who wrote the Song of Songs but the preacher for the morning) really understands us.” I had a number of delicious parts from Donne and Shakespeare to build up the whole physicality of sensuality and so forth. And then the last five minutes of the sermon were: “But don’t



kid yourself. Why is it that some of the deepest literature in every language points to *tristesse d'amour*, the sadness that occurs after the act of love? Now that's psychologically true: there is a kind of sadness. What does that sadness mean but that many things are good and delightful but they are not God, they are not absolute? 'Thou hast formed us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till we rest in thee.' Copulation's a great idea, but it is not absolutely fulfilling of humanity; so I do not want you to build yourself up for an absolute let-down. Amen." In a sense, you can say the last thing because you have talked so pornographically about the first thing; they know you know what you are talking about. And therefore they will listen to the end of the sermon because you have paid your dues in the first part.

A LITTLE DISCOURSE ON STYLE

I want to precede our consideration of eternal life by something that I started reflecting about the day before yesterday. We were talking about how one operates responsibly and sensitively in a parish situation in which there is an abyss between what you know out of your studies of Scripture and theology (about the nature of Scripture, how it came into existence, your deepening knowledge about how to interpret Scripture to get at the fundamental fact of a passage or parable or miracle story) and, on the other hand, what a very conventional group of people (to whom the articulation of what you feel to be the heart of the matter will seem unconventional, even dubiously orthodox, disruptive of certain notions of church and Scripture and God and man and Jesus) will think. On the one hand, you feel you must build up the body, nurture the people; but you cannot nurture them into what Scripture longs to tell them without creating a certain demolition of often rigidly-held ideas which stand as a wall between you and the deeper interpretation. We all have that problem. So I began thinking more about how one stands within the tension, the ambiguity, even the perils of that situation and tries to have a kind of integrity toward the truth, insofar as his study and the work of his peers give him to know the truth and perceive it, and at the same time a tender regard for the sensibilities of people so that they are not torn and shattered and lost for their possible growth and their own depth and so that the body is not disrupted. Let me try to speak about that in a little discourse on style this morning.

Style does not seem to be a very heavy word or a heavy attitude with which to enter into so difficult a problem. And that is probably because in English, “style” has a kind of fashionable meaning. It means “being in fashion”; it has to do with decor, with the outer habiliment, not with the inner attitude or action. It has almost a cosmetic meaning: “she is stylishly dressed,” or “this man is always in style, he has pants wide at the bottom and wide lapels or the kind of neckties which are affected this year.” So what is the fundamental meaning of style? Buffon, a French literary critic, once said: “Style is the man himself.” He was talking about writing. But in a sense, the word “style” points to the permeation of everything a person does or says or his gesture, his action in life which is a sort of signal of the organic center of the person. I can illustrate that better than talk about it abstractly.

Why, for instance, in American history is Abraham Lincoln, by a kind of solid consensus, the most admirable, the profoundest, the most

fascinating, alluring of all our American presidents? On the grounds of political finesse he would not have that position; probably FDR exceeded him there. On the grounds of powerful, direct, single-minded leadership, that is, as a man completely with one idea and through hell and

There is that about Lincoln which you can only designate as being a style.

high water he will get it done—no, he was not that kind of man. There is that about Lincoln which you can only designate as being a style. Now the style really points to a moral quality, a sense of the ambiguity and the incompleteness of all human action. He had the profound humility of a man before the judgment of God who had to make judgments in a given situation with the limitations of knowledge, and he always understood what he did as having that quality: “This I must do because it seems right as God gives us to see the right” (how beautiful that modification is), never “I think it’s right, therefore it is right” but rather “it is right as God gives us to see the right.”

Remember that remarkable statement in the Second Inaugural Address (this was right after the Battle of Fredericksburg when the situation was never darker for the Union, but his commitment to the federal union was never stronger, . . . “it must be preserved”) when he said that the people of the North and the South read the same Bible and pray to the same God but the prayers of both cannot be answered. And then he added, “For the Almighty hath his own purposes.” That is, he did not, as every American president in my lifetime has done, have the moral audacity to identify his perception of the right absolutely with the will of God. He felt that there was that in the motivation and the concern of the South that, despite the detestable institution of human slavery, had a certain authenticity, too. And therefore he never damned the people, though he was sworn to uphold and preserve the Union. Now the word

The way it is done is more important than what is done.

“style” points to that central humility which one has in the presence of the knowledge that he is a creature and not the Creator, that he is a man and not God, that he makes judgments within the ambiguities of history and not from some celestial point of absolute vision.

I want to have read a single paragraph written in the book, *The Limits of Language*, which I referred to yesterday. It is a little series of essays which show a multitude of efforts to point to the nature of style, and the shortest essay in the book is the best. It is one single paragraph by Robert Oppenheimer. Now Oppenheimer, as you know, is a nuclear physicist. I think he still lives and is at Princeton Institute for Higher Studies. But Oppenheimer, in addition to being a physicist, is an extraordinarily broadly educated humanistic man. I think he owes a good deal to his Jewish tradition. He has written a little essay on style which is one of the most packed paragraphs I have ever read; every word counts. It is such a relief to read a man who writes like that, who obeys Joseph Conrad's dictum, "In writing every line must justify itself." Reader: He entitles this "A Definition of Style," and it is a paragraph from a speech he delivered in 1948 called "The Open Mind." The problem of doing justice to the implicit, the imponderable, and the unknown is of course not unique to politics. It is always with us in science, it is with us in the most trivial of personal affairs, and it is one of the great problems of writing and of all forms of art. The means by which it is solved is sometimes called style. It is style which complements affirmation with limitation and with humility; it is style which makes it possible to act effectively, but not absolutely; it is style which, in the domain of foreign policy, enables us to find a harmony between the pursuit of ends essential to us and the regard for the views, the sensibilities, the aspirations of those to whom the problem may appear in

"It is style which is the deference that action pays to uncertainty."

another light; it is style which is the deference that action pays to uncertainty; it is above all style through which power defers to reason.

Now let's take those in order.

"It is style which complements affirmation with limitation and with humility." You have a situation in your congregation or in whatever community for which you have a particular vocational responsibility. It is style which complements affirmation—"we shall do it this way . . . let us go this way . . . let us make the decision this way"—with limitation and with humility. The affirmation is not made as if you are God's little errand boy disclosing the absolute, ineffable, and permanent knowledge of God. "In this situation, given these circumstances, and according to the right as God gives us to see the right, I affirm this"; but

the affirmation is not made like DeGaulle talking about the glory of France, you know. The affirmation is made with the knowledge of limitation (you do not know everything) and also with a kind of humility, not a groveling but an intellectual and a moral humility.

“It is style which makes it possible to act effectively but not absolutely.” Think of your task as a parent. Many of you are parents. A child does something or is bent on a certain course which it is your obligation to bring under reflection, direction, or forbidding. Now you can act effectively but not absolutely; this is a very delicate matter. When dealing with children, particularly from the age of 12 to 16, you have to act effectively or you resign your obligation; that is, there must be decisions made; there must be limits and ground rules laid down. But to do that in such a way that the child knows you are not slugging him under parental power but exercising your parental affection and duty: this is a very delicate thing, and you all know that the way it is done is more important than what is done. The child will accept what is vehemently unacceptable to him or her if it is done in a certain way. If it is done in another way, the ever-so-reasonable will be violently rejected or rebelled against. Now you try to analyze why the response differs, and your mind is led into what I am convinced is an un-analyzable mystery; but the fact that it is un-analyzable does not hide the results of it.

“It is style which in the domain of foreign policy enables us to find a harmony between the pursuit of ends essential to us and regard for the views and the sensibilities and the aspirations of those to whom the problem may appear in a different light.” I thought of that sentence last winter when I, along with many of you, I’m sure, watched *The Adams Chronicle*, the wonderful television show of that amazing American family, the five generations from Samuel, John, John Quincy, Charles Francis, and Henry. Do you remember the episode in which John Quincy Adams was the ambassador to the Court of St. James and he had to deal with the British Foreign Office on a very delicate matter? He manifested an absolute conviction that Britain must stop certain supplying of our enemies with arms and assistance; at the same time he did it in such a way as to understand the sensibilities of those who saw a concern of Britain tied up with their action and with a powerful sense of their right to exercise their own sovereign freedom. The style with which Adams carried on that conversation was a beautiful exercise in diplomacy which was not just slickness and calculated smoothness or Machiavellian duplicity but candor, firmness that evoked from the other

side a disposition to reach a compromise, that is, an acceptable course of action which could honor the intentions of both sides but not permit either absolutely to have its own way. When upon the death of John Kennedy someone wrote the now famous article in the New York Times ending with the words, "He had a certain style," that was the right word. Now I do not think the style was of the quality of Abraham Lincoln's, nor was it administered in the pursuit of such noble ends always. But when you think about Jack Kennedy, he had a combination of a sober purpose, a firm resolve, and a light touch which constituted a style which poor Richard Nixon could never bring off—nor anyone else since Kennedy, I think. We are in the presence of a new man who has a certain style, too; and it may serve him well.—The next one is, I think, the most packed phrase in the essay.

"It is style which is the deference that action pays to uncertainty." Think of how many situations we are in where action is essential: a decision cannot be deferred, we cannot wait forever, something must be done; therefore we must act. But the way we act may be so compounded that the action contains the deference, the acknowledgement that all things are not certain, that tomorrow may be different, new facts may enter into the case. And I love that wonderful use of the word "deference." "Style is the deference that action pays to uncertainty." Neither is changeable: the uncertain cannot be made more certain at the time, the action cannot be deferred. So the action is taken with a kind of acknowledgement which is not verbal but lies in the way the action is taken. College presidents, deans of students, deans of faculties, heads of congregations, presidents of synods—all have to act in that kind of situation. But to act in that situation deferentially, which is a kind of moral acknowledgment that one's perception is not identical with the omniscience of God—this is a personality quality; it is a gesture which will make an otherwise unacceptable action acceptable.

Let me think of—and then you think of—people who somehow in their style represent this. I think of a man most of you would think not possibly brought under this category, Franklin Clark Fry. He was a powerful, decisive, intellectually acute, enormously articulate man. He acted with complete precision, always the reasons well worked out behind his statement. But he did it with a combination of firmness and, just underneath the firmness, the bubbling laughter of a man who knew he was a very big man but not God. People who did not know him well never suspected this. Frank Fry was thoroughly detested by many church leaders because he laid it down hard. But those who knew him quite well—

and I did, before he became president, as the pastor of a neighboring parish—knew that underneath Fry’s tough-minded exterior was a kind of interior softness and devoutness before God which enabled him to be almost bubbling with interior laughter about Franklin Clark Fry.

You know, he had to sit in that front office and be very important. One day I sent him a post card with a line that I had copied from Ogden Nash: “You sit in your office at 231 Madison Avenue and say to yourself, ‘You have a responsible job, haven’t you?’” Frank Fry called me long distance; his secretary said he just uproariously hollered the whole day, he laughed a day about it. It was just good getting to know that somebody saw the man under the surface.

“It is above all style through which power defers to reason.” Many times we have the power by our action to say which way things should go. And when we do not exercise the power with which we are invested in virtue of our office, we defer to reason. By “reason” there he does not just mean “logic”; he means the longest, largest view of what may best

Our reflections upon style prepare us for what will be central in ethics as we move into a time in which, in the midst of indeterminacy, we must make judgments.

serve the body by the restriction of our use of power or by the refusal to use it at all in certain situations.

This is sort of prefatory to what I want to talk about this afternoon when we come to ethics. Our reflections upon style prepare us for what I think will be central in ethics as we move now into a time in which, in the midst of indeterminacy, we must make judgments. And “style” is the word and the thing that points to how we may find our limited redemption in the midst of that.

COMMENTS

THAT’S STYLE!

Comment: I may be wrong. It is good for Tores, conservatives, aristocrats to have a certain style, to be gentlemen and gentle ladies, as Federalists (and you mentioned several of these) not to be yielding into the emotions of a moment the way that Richard Nixon did; but those people—presidents of denominations, presidents of countries—have power. They are Tories: noblesse oblige, ability to laugh, etc. might be a virtue in such a person. But it does not sound to me like the kind of thing that would characterize the Christian style of people who are really among the church militant, the people who do not belong to “the haves,” who are searching for justice and peace. They might know that they could be wrong, too; but it is not something that they would cultivate as an Abraham Lincoln or a John Kennedy. I feel as if this is really a cosmetic thing, fashion; it is not fundamental to what love and respect for our neighbor really is about. I may be wrong obviously, but it may be; and I respect that point. It looks to me like the kind of counsel good for those who really are on top or would like to give the impression they are on top of the situation. So I pull against it.

If I hear you, you are saying that what I am talking about really emerges as a matter for reflection for those who have power, who have the freedom from sheer will and the pressure of injustice to be able to raise this kind of question about decision making. But the masses of people who are crushed by the sheer unchangeable situation of their lives do not have the freedom even to think about style, to act in one way or another because the way they must act simply to survive is given. The migrant workers: the only style they have is get up early, work all day, sleep in a filthy place, and do it over the next day. That is certainly a legitimate point.

Comment: I think that some people have freedom and reject this in the name of ethics, in the name of character. The defenders and advocates of the oppressed might have the freedom but choose not to have this character, this style that has been represented here in the name of truth and love. They might choose different ways. I am not sure how to articulate that; but I am saying one other thing, I guess. How we act or what we say as spokespeople for the truth does not guarantee and should not be thought of as an assurance of the

response we will get. We are not responsible, finally, for those responses. It looks to me as if the other person, who we may think is on the wrong track, has the freedom—and we should respect that—to take an opposing view. It is not our responsibility, after we plant the seed, to make it grow. God gives the increase, and the Spirit and the freedom of the other people have something to say about that. I would think that we ought to feel free about that, make our point, lay it out there, and try to persuade surely (compromise is part of that). But it will not be perceived as style by those people who have a really different view, no matter how you do it. Martin Luther King tried many ways; he was still thought to be a troublemaker. Chavez also. And Jesus.

Well, that's a necessary complexification of the issue.
Comment: That's style! That is good style, what you just did.

A PARKING-LOT GOD

The deference which style transmits sometimes erodes rigidity on the other side. I have an illustration from that strange year in which I was an interim pastor between a catastrophic pastorate and the oncoming one. There was a group of about six persons in the parish who were caught up in the new prayer movement so profoundly that they were using prayer as a kind of club to beat God over the head. They firmly believed and preached loudly that if you prayed hard enough and vehemently enough and sincerely enough, whatever you prayed for would happen. One woman used to expostulate on this matter. She worked at Michael Reese Hospital; and she said, "I pray all the way down the Outer Drive every morning that God will find me a parking place, and he always does." I tried to use reason with her. I said: "Now there is a woman in the next lane perhaps taking a sick child to the emergency room, but she does not find a parking place. Is God asleep at that moment?" She said, "She doesn't pray hard enough." Well, now, with this kind what can you do?

I think by perhaps divine inspiration something came to my mind, and I said to her (and this is really an act of style): "Mrs. Miller, what do you suppose Mary, jogging on that donkey all the way to Jerusalem, was praying about? Maybe a parking place?" I

don't think I changed her mind, but I jolted her rigidity. Reason would not do, but the little image of poor Mary about to have a baby . . . what do you suppose she was thinking, "I hope there's a decent place there"? She ended up in a stable. "A soft answer turneth away wrath," and sometimes an answer like that can stop the question in its tracks; she may reconsider her parking-lot God. These moments do not occur often to one, but that is the kind of answer of which Churchill was a master. Sometimes he did not answer the problem, but he stopped the problem-asker. Often upon reflection the problem then would dissolve.

LIBERAL EDUCATION

The aim of a liberal education is to issue an invitation to join the human race; that is what an education ought to be. And that is a way of being saved from the incurvature of this radical individuality which is always a danger to us.

THE LITURGICAL MOVEMENT

Lutheranism is at the moment getting very cosmetically liturgical. Part of this liturgical movement is very legitimate and right and strong; it is an effort to enrich the way in which we celebrate with riches beyond our own time and more sensitively within our own time too. But part of the liturgical movement has what I call a cosmetic quality that worries me. My worst students have the best vestments. (That does not mean all who have good vestments are bad students.) The less Greek they know, the bigger the stole they want to wear and the more elaborate they want their own role in the liturgy to be. This troubles me a good deal.

THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE SO-CALLED

You know, to hop around with plenty of means from Monte Carlo to Acapulco and back to Broadway for the season and then over to Kashmir where it's cool—this may be very nice, but it never produced anything of human significance.

ETERNAL LIFE

I should like to talk today about how, in the light of everything we said yesterday about the brave and large new world of modern reflection, the concept of eternal life as it is elaborated in the Scripture and has had a career in Christian thought comes under a very severe criticism. What the meaning of it might be is no longer completely clear; and I should like to take the notion of eternal life or life after death and put that in the context of the kind of thought that is coming now ever more deeply to constitute the scope of our reflection and ask how we might as pastors and teachers talk about eternal life to our people. That to me is very crucial because I cannot think of any Christian concern or topic which comes more loaded with popular notions, expectations, and images which are so incongruous with the truth.

Try to bring forward in your mind the biblical speech about life with God eternally or life after death or the persistence of life beyond that closure which is death which is part of the Christian confidence and belief in God. How does the Scripture talk about that? In the first place, the Old Testament does not have any clear doctrine of eternal life, certainly no clear doctrine of life after death. There are, to be sure, words such as these in the Old Testament: “I know that my redeemer liveth, and I shall see God.” But these are interestingly very late documents, almost from the apocalyptic period. In Israel the notion of an individual survival with God was not an acceptable notion because Israel did not understand individual existence as being constitutive of the person. Personhood is corporate identity with the whole people of God. When a man dies, he is gathered to his fathers. He becomes a part of God’s eternal Israel, his chosen, his elect.

There is no soul, as one slice of the pie of personhood, in Hebrew thought, as there is in that notion of the immortality of the soul in the Greek philosophers. The soul means the whole life of the whole person in corporate identity with the life of all of Israel. The powerful notion of a survival of the individual as a solitary person—they would not see much good in that. So there is no problem of eternal life in Israel. What is life after death? There are words like sheol. Sheol was a kind of imaginative midway station between being and nonbeing, between clear awareness and a cloudy, obscure awareness. There is a shadowy, cave-like existence in which the dead may wander about, numbed in their awareness, really only partly alive. Now why they created that notion I do not know, but they had nothing like the notion that Christian faith

has about eternal life with God in heaven; and then that needs some explication, too. Heaven is a word that means the existence of everything appropriate to the will of God and thereby different from everything now.

When you come to the New Testament, Jesus has no explicit teaching about life after death; it occurs very little in the teaching of Jesus. We depend mostly upon the teaching of Paul and on that quite different gospel, the Fourth Gospel. Let's take that first. In the Fourth Gospel, interestingly, the word "eternal life" is a term whose meaning is not simple futurity: "this is eternal life, that you may know God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent" It is the eternal as a qualification of the temporal. In John, eternal life means a way of living, knowing God, loving God, being serene in the knowledge of God within this life. It may perhaps have an indeterminate extension after death, but the focus of eternal life is the knowledge of God now and the consequent transformation of life which that presence of God with you in grace bestows upon you now. Read particularly in Raymond Brown's commentary on John and in Rudolph Bultmann's big commentary; you have this very carefully documented from the Fourth Gospel.

Paul's letters were written out of the Jewish background and out of his experience. How much he knew of Jesus is hard to know. There are books that detail all the quotations of Paul that disclose his knowledge of the Synoptic and the Johannine traditions; it is not a great deal. Jesus after the flesh he did not know, nor did he seem to be too concerned with the teaching of Jesus. Jesus as the action of God for the liberation of men: that is Paul's concern. But in the congregations that Paul helped to establish and to which he went and to which he wrote letters, the matter of life after death does arise. The earliest document of the New Testament is Thessalonians (that may be as early as the year 50; some scholars put it as early as 48). Paul there has to talk quite directly as a kind of responsible teacher to people who raise the problem in its most crass and bodily form: in what body shall the dead arise, and how shall they appear, and when shall this happen, and what will be the nature of life after death? Now if you reflect upon the way Paul talks about that, you see something that is very interesting because it illustrates what I tried to say yesterday, that you just cannot pick up packages from Paul and think that they are designative of all thoughts. There is a movement in Paul's thought; there is a momentum in his speech about Jesus, about what Jesus Christ the anointed one, means; there is movement from Thessalonians to the Romans and the Corinthian correspondence.

So take the Thessalonian correspondence as Paul's earliest way of speaking to a problem which he radically changes in the course of his correspondence. In the Thessalonians when he confronts that quite unduckable question, "In what body shall the dead arise," he succeeds in ducking it anyhow. Notice his answer: "There is one flesh of fish and one flesh of fowl and one flesh of this and one flesh of that." In other words, he does a kind of apostolic evasion of the point; he does not come down and give a plain answer. And then there is this quite apocalyptic language: "the dead shall arise incorruptible, the trumpet shall sound." And you know how deeply all that imagery has entered into Christian thought, much more deeply often than the more profound Pauline notion. The ordinary life knows all about the sounding trumpet

People who do not know anything else about the Bible do know about the pearly gates.

and the other side of Jordan and the passage over the river and the arrival at the Promised Land and the golden streets and all that. That is very sharp and memorable stuff; the people who do not know anything else about the Bible do know about the pearly gates.

But in the later epistles of Paul, you notice that speech about the nature, the content, the specifications of eternal life is absolutely absent. Paul has no speech at all about what it will be like to be in eternity with God. The summary answer occurs in Romans in one phrase when he says: "If we live, we are the Lord's; if we die, we are the Lord's; therefore whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." In other words, Paul apparently has moved to the point where it is perfectly clear to him that, by definition, one cannot talk of eternal life. One can talk about the that but not the what. He can make an affirmation based on the logic that God does not die and "you are Christ's and Christ is God's." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away." You now participate in the life of God, and God does not die— that is the logic of eternal life. But what it will be like in eternal life: I suggest that Paul refuses after Thessalonians to talk about it because it has dawned on him that you cannot talk about it. And he is quite right. Let us try to work that out a bit.

When I say life, what do I mean? The field for which I must garner meaning is a field of mortality, finitude, historical life; what I mean by life is what I know about the life of men and women and animals and

plants and all things in time. That is the only data I have. I have no time-less data; I have no trans-temporal data. Life is that which comes into and passes out of existence. I am the focal point of that datum in my own existence. When I am to talk about eternal life, the very term “eternal life” is a contradiction in terms. The only life I know is not eternal; it is finite, mortal, passing. As my cerebrum gets more and more sclerotic, that which has constituted the stuff of my recollection will become more and more irretrievable. In this mortal life, as I get older, the very components of my own person, life, recollection, knowledge, experience will be biologically blocked; they will not be available. So old age accomplishes a kind of diminishment of personhood in terms of the erosion of that which has been constitutive of your person. This is the interior pathos of old age. One suffers growing diminishment in the richness of intersections, recollections, memories, and personal relations which have constituted his life.

When we talk about eternal life, the adjective “eternal” is unthinkable because the only thinkable thing, except in a theoretical way, is historical life, temporal life. The only meaning I can give to “eternal” is a negative meaning: it is other than what I know. It is the opposite of the pathos of passingness and mutability that constitutes our life here. So formally I can postulate the possibility of an other, but I cannot fill the other with data. Paul does say something: “then shall we see even as we are beheld, then shall we know even (now notice the passive form of the verb) as we have been known”—not as we know but absolutely. The way God knows us shall then be part of the way in which we are related to God, with an absolute communion. I think logically now the argument is unassailable. We cannot speak of eternal life though we can postulate it—but postulate it only in terms of the delectable mountains which are other than what we know.

Now, if that be the case (and I think it is the biblical case), what are we going to do in the situation as preacher, pastor, counselor, consoler to those who experience death of ones who are very near to them? This hit me in my interim year as pastor. You know, it would be very good if every theologian were shoved back into a parish about every sabbatical (seventh) year to keep his synapses open to the ordinary. In that year I got a lot of thumping that was good for me. There were some old people in the parish, and among them there were some deaths. I remember a delightful couple, old Mrs. Svenson and Mr. Svenson, who was about 78; he was a man of great charm and really a beautiful person. We have thirty percent black people in our congregation, and old Svenson was

one of the holdouts. He had been buildings manager for one of the public schools which was in a particularly tough neighborhood; he was a respectable, buttoned-up, quiet, responsible old Swede. And this idea of kids throwing rocks and messing up the halls and putting graffiti on the walls and smashing the lockers and all that—this is not the kind of housekeeping he liked. And many of them were black children, and he had an unreasonable and very profound distaste for black children. They gave him so much trouble mopping up. So he opposed the way in which the congregation was admitting so many black people to its membership; and he was fairly articulate on the matter, though never nasty.

I inherited Mr. Svenson. Before I became interim pastor, I helped out with the adult class; and I took him on directly. And finally I persuaded him that I could understand the data out of which his prejudice and dislike had arisen. But I said, “You dare not ask the community of Christ’s Church to act that way, to draw a circle where your personal dislikes draw it. You dare not do it, and I charge you, you must not do it.” I got along pretty well with Svenson. Finally he came to me one day after we had had a particularly tough time, and he said: “Well, I don’t like ‘em, I suppose I’ll never like ‘em; but you’ve persuaded me”—it was thick Swedish—“that the Lord does. So you get no more flack from this old Swede.” Now in a sense, that is admirable; he did not just collapse and say, “Now I have suddenly become a Jesus people and I have seen the Lord.” I don’t think he had seen him very well. But he was convinced that the Lord wanted something, and he just did not. And he said: “The Lord’s the boss, and that is the way it’s going to be. You’ll get no more flack from this old Swede.”

Upon his death, Mrs. Svenson was desolate. She talked to me, and she said: “Some day Ole Svenson and I will be together again; and I

. . .the reenactment in eternity of the affectionately-remembered conditions in time.

wonder, Pastor, could you tell me, do you think it will some day be the case that I shall see him again coming up that path on his way back from Talbott School and stopping at the gate and knocking the ashes out of that old pipe and stuffing it in his side pocket and coming in and saying, ‘Well, Mamie, what’s for dinner?’” Now what am I going to say to her? In heaven I doubt if there will be pipes (who would make the tobacco) and tweed jackets. The very concreteness of the thing postu-

lates the reenactment in eternity of the affectionately-remembered conditions in time. That will not do! That simply will not do! In fact, it stands in the way of what the Scriptures talk about in terms of eternal life with God. What am I to say to her? As I recall, I did not say anything to her; I just let her enjoy her image. But then I preached three Sundays, not right after that (that would have been too transparent); but after a little pause I preached several sermons on various passages about eternal life and tried to disabuse the people of this quite crass reenactment picture that eternal life will be a place where there are no bills, where there is no rent to pay, no problem with the exhaustion of natural gas, and the children will all have been long since happily married (you do not have to worry about them)—you know, all these concrete, earthy pictures compounded of human anxieties and delights which people think of as eternal life with God. Now I do not know whether it worked or not, but I felt it necessary to do the job. Now I want to know what you think: how are we going to talk to our people about eternal life at a level that the Scripture invites us to use and avoid the level which the Scripture never uses? That is a real problem.

Let me give you one more aspect of this problem which is even more troubling. There is a passage in the Bible, “The earth abideth forever” (Eccles. 1:4; cp. Ps. 119:90). Men and women come and go and events transpire, but the earth abideth forever. As a matter of fact, it does not. How shall we think about the future when we know as clearly as we know anything that for the earth the future has a limit, too? I ask you to read (Robert) Jastrow’s book on *Red Giants and White Dwarfs* (Harper and Row, 1967, 1971) because it presents a picture of the unfolding and tremendous changes that are going on all the time in the organization of cosmic energy whereby there will be a time when the earth is not, when the very solar system is not.

For instance, the sun is the absolute source (speaking now in human terms and in terms of the cosmos, not about God but in terms of nature), the sun is the furnace of energy whereby our solar system exists; all energy comes via the sun. But the sun is a star. The life of a star is about nine billion years (from the time of that coagulation of gases and that tremendous concentration of energy whereby a star is born). That is called a bright dwarf; the white stars that you see are new stars, burning with intense white light and heat. But when a star gets older, when it is seven or eight billion years old, the star begins to exhaust its nuclear fuel and begins, because of the lessened force of gravitation which

holds it together, to loosen up and pass from a bright dwarf to what astronomers call a red giant; and it enormously expands. Now our sun is about four and a half billion years old, which means that its lifetime is half gone. In another billion years or so, the sun will become a red giant. It will expand so that it will cover the whole space of our sky. The Fahrenheit on earth will be over four thousand degrees. All life will long since have ceased. So the earth does not abide forever. The earth is a star, too, a dead one; and its whole life depends on its relationship to the sun.

So even the future is a notion that can be used only speculatively about the self-generation of an exhaustible fuel within the closed system of nature. Everything we call life within our solar system will itself cease to be. We talk about the future as the unquestioned theater in which to talk about eschatology and the kingdom of God. But what does the term, “the kingdom of God,” mean in a human society when humans themselves will someday cease to be, at least on this planet? So when the context for reflection becomes cosmic and when the clock of time becomes cosmic, then what happens to these fundamental Christian ideas about eternal life, the future, eschatology, progress, history? History is an invention of aware mammals reflecting upon continuity on this star, which is a dying one. What I am trying to project in this crazy way is that that which now blows my mind will be constitutive of the mind of my children. I look at the new stuff coming out of astrophysics with a kind of lowered-jaw astonishment, and my kids will apparently grow up with that as a presupposition.

I have an illustration which I am sure you can match in your own experience. I remember about eight or nine years ago, when the first moon landing took place, I sat in front of that television set with Walter Cronkite giving a play-by-play description with little models of the orbits and then the detachment of the landing craft and its slow descent and looking for a place and its landing, the door opening, the men coming out—and you know, this is Jules Verne stuff to an old Newtonian like myself. This was really far-out stuff. My kids sat there: “Yup, big deal,” you know. The difference was they knew enough about the scientific work that had preceded the project, the computer-calculated precision whereby each step and all the conditions that had to be anticipated in order to prepare a technology to deal with it had carefully been done. They expected it to work. I thought, “Real crazy, this can never be.” I looked around at the familiar living room and thought, “Where am I

The gospel is a fight against the regnancy of egocentricity, and then our thought about eternal life becomes radically egocentric.

and what is happening?” These kids just sat there relaxed and said, “Yup, that’s the way it was planned; of course it will work.” They never worried for a moment about it. “It will work, and he’ll get back in there; it’ll go up, and he’ll get back to New Orleans somehow.” They did not worry about that. Well, all I am trying to say is I am having a certain amount of trouble with eschatology these days. . . .

Question: Is there not also a beautiful humility in Mrs. Svenson? The imagery that she grew up with talked about a mansion, golden streets, pearly gates; and in a kind of remarkable humility she is willing to have a cottage. The imagery is down where she lives.

In her case that was right. That imagery may also do service for a kind of heavenly everlasting increase in the gross national product; and they feel that heaven will be an indefinite continuation of American affluence so that we have more and more things, more and more satisfactions of a material and bodily kind. That is a very great danger in some people’s lives: that eternal life will be the death of the barriers to absolute aggressiveness and acquisitiveness, and egocentric satisfactions will be deuces wild. So we must watch that. Isn’t it interesting, though, that we spend all our life teaching the kingdom of God, life with God, the realization of life in relationship with others, and then our thought about eternal life becomes radically egocentric? The gospel is a fight against the regnancy of egocentricity; and then people talk to us about eternal life: “What shall happen to me, my precious identity?” What they are concerned with is not relations or the general course of things or what values will finally persist and will the purposes of God prevail—but what is in this for me. Now this is the thing that has laid upon me as a preacher the necessity to talk about eternal life as if that were a postulated situation in which God will be all in all, whatever that means—not “I shall be all in all” but “you in Christ and Christ is God’s.”

Now let me fill that out a bit. At the age of 72, these thoughts are not altogether abstract and speculative for me, you know; I think about death a great deal, not morbidly but I do think about it. And I begin to ask myself, “Just what is the meaning of my life, the days of which are now not as many as they were?” As Housman says, “Now of my three score years and ten, Twenty will not come again,” and so forth in his “Ode Upon A Young Man Twenty Years Old.” I begin to think in this

way. Who is this “I” whose destiny beyond death I raise as an interesting question—I with a name, born of certain parents, having had a certain career, interested in many things? What is the meaning of all that? What will happen to that? And then I begin to think: what I call “I”,

I am much more interested in what happens to certain things to which I have been committed.

myself, ego, is but the focal point of a complex which is not identical with my identity. That which is constitutive of my person is really not what my person is; that is, I am much more interested in what happens to certain things to which I have been committed. I cannot draw a line of distinction between my identity and those purposes, causes, interests to which I have given my identity. If they persist, if these things have a kind of pertinacity, continuity, then I am absorbed in the ongoing continuity of that in which my identity is actualized in such a way that “if we live we are the Lord’s.” Okay, I am the Lord’s; via baptism and in the reception of grace, I am the Lord’s. “If we die, we are the Lord’s.” You know, that’s enough, that’s enough. So the whole matter of what will be the nature of life after death, in what body shall the dead arise, I haven’t the foggiest notion and I don’t think Paul did either. But he apparently, after all the Thessalonians business, finally moves to the point where he lays down the crisp sentence which is the sum of the matter: “If we live we are the Lord’s, if we die we are the Lord’s; therefore living or dying, we are the Lord’s.” That is the only sermon I have to preach on the

Your identity becomes the most firm when you think about it least.

matter any more; and I find that is completely satisfying, in fact, exultant for me.

I have no further interest with the eternal destiny of Joe Sittler because what that name means and what those years that I have occupied mean is not just me. So when people say, “Who are you,” I can only begin to answer that question by talking about things which are not of myself: the transindividual creations, admirations, loves to which I have given myself and of which I have been the recipient. So in a sense, this whole contemporary search for identity, whereby for years our youth have been encouraged to “go to San Francisco or Denver and gaze at yourself and find your identity,” as they say. . . the last place to find your identity is to look at yourself, I am convinced of that. This

whole notion of identity, which is psychologically and in bull sessions very important for thousands of young people, I am afraid is a poisonous error and it is bad counsel. He that shall gain his life shall really lose it; and when you really lose it so that your identity becomes a function of transindividual specification, then you do not need to worry about your identity any more. Your identity becomes the most firm when you think about it least. You know, Bach writes a cantata to the sole glory of God. There was no fuzziness to the identity of J. S. Bach; he apparently never worried about it. I think our preaching must go absolutely counterclockwise to the prevailing mores of identity talk and begin to talk of identity in relational terms that transcend the almost accidental particularities of our personhood; they are drawn into that which transcends them, which challenges them, which draws them into a fruition they could not of themselves have chosen.



COMMENTS

ADDRESSING THE COMING GENERATION

Can I speak of eternal life in other terms, without destroying these simple, concrete terms in which our people think, for the sake of the oncoming generation to whom that kind of reenactment of life beyond the gates will no longer be a possibility for thought? We must have a talk of eternal life for all levels of anticipation. One level belongs to a past anthropology and cosmology. But if we have now a cosmology in which the earth does not abide forever, in which all the conditions that are constitutive of the occurrence of the human being are burned up, what is God up to in this whole cosmic drama? That is what I am asking.

DEFENDING THE THEOLOGICAL TASK

My vocation is to teach theology, and my vocation is to try to expand and expound possible meanings of biblical images which shall be congruent with a not-earth-centered notion of the cosmos. This is not Mrs. Svenson's job. It is not my job, maybe, as pastor of Mrs. Svenson; but I am not just that. If the church sticks me with this job, then confound it, I have got to run where the hounds are. So I would defend the legitimacy of theological speculation as necessary obedience to the momentum of thought. I am not expounding this as what I say to Mrs. Svenson, but I am talking about you who are also running with the hounds. You cannot ever say of a theologian, "Yes, but what does this have to do with the Mrs. Svensons of this world?" Nothing, maybe nothing. That does not mean they are simple-minded, outside the realm of God; they are probably closer to it than the theologian is because, as Luther once said about theologians, "Theologians may be saved, but it is hard." I think I know something of what he meant. But I have got to do it; and in a degree you have got to do it, too, because the playpen in which you are operating is filled with these crawling babies who are reading Jastrow and doing astrophysics and a lot of other things.

SIMPLE FAITH AND AWFUL DOUBTS

I think Mrs. Svenson had been taught very clearly. She knew you were to trust in God in life and in death, as the Swedish catechism told her; she believed every word of it and lived as if she believed it. She is as high as I can ever get; I doubt if I will ever have that uncomplicated, complete commitment and trust in God that Mrs. Svenson had. I complicate my brain with doubts, necessary doubts in order to be any good as a theologian. I am not sure the simplest person is ever free of doubt either. The poor mother whose child dies in infancy must have awful doubts which make the cerebral doubts of the theologian seem fairly simple.

REGARDING KUBLER-ROSS

Do you know about these polychromatic, psychedelic colors of the world and a fabulous unearthly brightness that the dying are reported to behold with the gates opening? I got to thinking about that in January when, following a hemorrhage in my right eye, I had to go into the hospital; the vitreous had blood in it and was obscure, and they had to pull the stuff out with a syringe and refill it with sterile Prestone or something. For two days I had a patch over my eye, and I was not allowed to open it. During those days I was seeing colored movies in my eye, all kinds of absolutely psychedelic colors. Before I went to the hospital, I had watched the Rose Bowl game on a color television; and when I was there recuperating from that vitrectomy (they pulled the crud out of my eye), the whole thing was being replayed. I could see the guy in the dark blue jersey taking the ball and going off left tackle, and I just had a fine time.

My ophthalmologist was a man I had known; he was an Anglican, a very good churchman. He came in to see me one day; and I said, "Look, you have read this Kubler-Ross stuff (about people who come back from death and relate their experiences)?" "Yes," he said, "I've read about it." I said, "You know, I think I have an explanation ophthalmologically of what she thinks is a transcendental experience." And I told him about my experience. He was fascinated. He said, "You know, for a long time we have suspected there is such a thing as retinal retention of images." Well, my retina or some aspect of the neurological system had retained in memory

the images of a week before; and I was getting a playback in my absolutely blacked-out eye. And he said, "That's very interesting. I've heard it referred to, but you talk about it so clearly and give me the colors; there might be something to it." So I am convinced there is a physio-neural basis for a lot of this happening in the last stages of life that she sees in a kind of Bunyan vision the eternal city.

RESURRECTION OR IMMORTALITY?

I do not believe in any immortality for me in my personal existence. My existence is a word I use to indicate the particularity of the one, the piece of anatomy, that bears my name. In my death that is gone. From my standpoint, I have had enough of that guy; it is okay with me. But eternal life does not talk about the persistence of my existence; it really is a word that draws my mind to reflect on this: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." All the vitalities and potentialities and even the madness of my existence have now transcended my existence because of the God-relationship and I can safely turn over to God what he does with that. If it is cared for there, then all I really care for is cared for by God; and therefore the rest I do not bother about anymore. The immortality of the soul never was a Christian doctrine; it always was a philosophical speculation that arose in Platonism and certain near eastern religions. The fate of that doctrine is of no interest to us. As long as you cling to the doctrine of the resurrection, "God giveth life to the dead," God's care for all that is his, then you do not need any dubious doctrine of immortality.

When I was a kid, there was a little brown book (which you are all too young to know) that all kids could get for a quarter called 101 Famous Poems. How I used to love to read that one: "Oh may I join that choir invisible of these immortal dead who live again in minds made better by their presence." Now that lasted for quite a while. Then I read the poem by Walter de la Mare, which pulls the rug out from under the earlier one. He has a lovely little poem called "Epitaph": "Here lies a beautiful lady; Light of step and heart was she. I think she was the most beautiful lady that ever was in the west country. But beauty vanishes, beauty passes, However rare it be. And when I crumble, who will remember My lady of the west

country?” It pushes it one notch back, you see. If I live in “that choir invisible of those immortal dead who live again” in the memory of my children and their children, I shall just be a name in the family Bible. “And when I crumble, who will remember?” The things I remember die with me. So I am driven through immortality to trust in God who protects and sustains all life.



THE NEW SITUATION IN ETHICS

What is happening in contemporary efforts to formulate a Christian ethical style, pattern, or even method which attempts to lead people toward a way of making ethical statements and forming ethical behavior which takes into account the rapid shifting in values, the erosion of older habitual ways of behavior, older guidelines and borders of the unacceptable, including many very pressing matters like population control, sexuality, particularly the problem of the society and the individual and the problem of homosexuality? Each of these problems is embarrassing to traditional ethics. Often they simply are not handleable within the terms of traditional ethics. So I want to share not my wisdom but my embarrassment and my confusion at many points on the matter. In my work for years at the university, I had appointment in three fields. My main field was, of course, theology; but I also participated in the field of ethics because the men in that field were mostly in social ethics and not theological ethics. They were not theologians, and they wanted someone with a theological focus in there; so I did participate for years in that field. The other marginal field was religion and literature, which you might have suspected by this time.

I have been trying to think of an analogy to what is happening in the field of ethical reflection, and I think I have one that will do. About seven or eight years ago appeared the book by Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. It was an important and widely-read book because it tried to find out why scientific innovations and new theories occurred exactly when they occurred and what was the prolegomenon to their occurrence. He ends up with a kind of story of how that happens. He looks at a number of scientific revolutions in various fields and says: "Of course, the development of orderly thought in science begins with observation and then moves to an hypothetical construct that includes as much of the data as it can and then to models of the structure of relations between things and then tests the ability of these models to predict new occurrences. And when this last element begins to falter, when a behavior takes such a form that the hypothesis does not properly account for it or when a model of individual or social behavior or behavior in matter or energy occurs which causes the model to stutter

Contemporary problems are embarrassing to traditional ethics.

or when what a model predicts runs full up against a surd or some event that should not occur according to the model, then the scientific community gets into a tizzy; and the people who are innovators in that science begin to reconstruct the hypothesis and the model.”

I suggest that is a pretty flat-footed but probably very accurate account of the way things happen. Think, for example of the development of the hypotheses about the differentiation of species and the work of Darwin and, before him, Wallace. In ethics, think of the shuddering that has gone on especially in the Roman Catholic Church (because the system there is the more tight, rigid, clear, and capable of very exact application to particular cases) since Bernard Haring’s *Law of Christ*, which so far as I know was the first evidence that there was trouble in the main office. His way of talking about the church and the tradition and contemporary life began to use a language that was sensitive to new inputs into the traditional statement of ethical cases; and from there on it has been a big, long shudder all the way down. I understand that the committee of the Catholic Theological Society, appointed a number of years ago to study human sexuality, has just released its report. And I would say to you, on pretty good evidence from their past performances, that that will be an extraordinary document. They do not just meet together in a hotel room and knock out a statement. They spend years at it and must bring biblical, theological, patristic, sociological, psychological, phenomenological stuff together and do a typical job of grinding it under their back teeth for about five years; and when they spit, it’s worth watching. So I am eager to see it, and I hope you are.

How do we account for the fact that this great perturbation in the field of ethical reflection happens just when it does? It is not a Roman Catholic phenomenon; it is throughout the whole front, even in philosophical ethics, though they will be less troubled because philosophy floats in a kind of stratosphere of abstraction and the dirt of the concrete sometimes takes a long time to get up there. Philosophical ethics changes, I think, more slowly. I think one reason that the field of ethics is now blown pretty wide open is because, if I may steal a phrase from my admired, one-time colleague, Bernard Meland, the base line of the human has been broadened. I think that is a fine phrase to specify what has happened in the life of hitherto slave nations, captive peoples, as in South Africa, Rhodesia, and other places. The base line of the human has been broadened so that the agenda of what is right or good or proper or acceptable or permissible, what is necessary for the unfolding of human energies, needs, desires, and goals has been much extended.

I doubt that what people need is much different from what it was five hundred years ago, but culture has developed in such a way that available ways to meet those needs have been considerably diminished. For instance, the urbanization of life for millions of people has meant that a certain generous view of the nature of the natural world and a certain kind of satisfaction in the directness of the hand to the thing that is made have been lost and a certain erosion of personal investment in production has taken place. You do not make something; you play a role in a very large organized operation which cranks out stuff at the end. But the stamp of the individual is less marked; the interior satisfaction correlative to the putting of that stamp on something is now so wan that who can say, “I helped build Fords or Plymouths”? He can jump to General Motors or Porsche and not have much difference. The stuff is put together roughly the same way, mostly bad. So I am suggesting that in our whole culture in the West—and I talk now only about America and the Continent—the scope of the variety of life experiences has shrunk. But I do not think the sensate quantum has shrunk.

One of you was talking about taking his girls out to the country where, for the first time, they could see a pig-farm and a cow-farm; this is not a usual thing for a contemporary child to see. They are probably more sensated in Oak Park in urban high schools in terms of just the number of sensations that they encounter in the course of the day than I was in a fairly run-of-the-mill Ohio town when I was young. But the quality and the depth of these sensations is different. A pig farm is hard to come by in Oak Park; and a pig-farm suggests a whole structure of life and living—pigs and the people who take care of them and the periodicities of life on a farm—that is radically different from the city. So the individual’s input and his mark upon things is for the millions lessened; and the quality of his sensation is often so homogenized, like McDonald’s hamburgers, that the general quality of his life, I think, is hurt.

In a scientific enterprise the surds, the inexplicable, the ought-not-to-have happened, the unexplained, the neutrinos— this data piles up and builds up pressure within an accepted system, and it has to give. Either the system gives in small stages, or the data becomes so clamant that it simply explodes. I have a son in liver research, and he is particularly interested in the body’s immunization processes. I did not know it until he talked to me about it, but the whole study of the immunological process is now apparently the bright new front in medical research. Many diseases we thought were microbial or infectious or genetic may

be really a fault in the body's immunological mechanism, and it is very fascinating and heady stuff. I understood mostly the prepositions when he talked about it, but one gets the point. We can expect, he believes, a very great explosion pretty soon in the very theory of disease itself. Long and old traditions in trying to lay the foundations of ethics—the source, the norm for the good, and then subsequent guidelines for aiming at the greatest possible specificity for predictable human behavior confront now the data that pours in in virtue of our deep human changes, changes in our needs, our desires, our sensations, our ways of living, the closures from the inside which demand new openings in what is permissible human behavior. These pressures have built up, and the result is a kind of explosion in ethical reflection.

Before I talk about that particular aspect of the explosion in which I have been involved rather steadily, let us look briefly at what have been the regnant or principle modes of ethical behavior and reflection in Western society. I shall speak very briefly about the natural law tradition; you know what it is in general definition. It is the oldest Western (not including the Semitic, the biblical) way of reflection of which we have documents. It looks into the structure of nature itself and says: “Do we find within the structures and processes of nature modes of self-preservation and survival, ways in which the good is protected and the evil is discouraged or contained? Do we find there guides which are deeply rooted in even primal areas of natural activity which also resonate into the human?” The philosophers, particularly in Greece, believed they saw these and built up a very powerful natural law ethics. Aristotle's ethics is a wonderful combination of rational reflection and data which he draws from the observation of nature, including human nature. But I think the best way to make that concrete is to use an illustration.

In one of the Greek dramas in the series under the general title, “*The House of Orestes*,” you recall a gallant warrior leading the Hellenic troops against Troy; and in the battle for the possession of the beleaguered city, this warrior is slain. And when the battle is over, the victors, who did him in, take the body of the slain leader, strip him of his clothes, tie him behind a chariot naked, and drag him exultantly through the streets of the city. In the Greek drama, the chorus at that point sings. And if you remember your studies in this field, you know that the chorus in the Greek drama is never the voice of the protagonist or the antagonist but always an articulation of the common-sense voice of human opinion. (T. S. Eliot uses the chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*, you remember; when the bishop is considering coming back

to resume the seat of Canterbury, the chorus of the old women sing those haunting little quatrains about the bishop returning. They voice the instant consensus of the most common and primal feelings of the common life. Now in a Greek play it is the same.) In the Greek play, the chorus sings; “O shame, shame it is thus to deal with the body, the slain body of a gallant man.” And then, “It is not in nature so to do, and nature will take her reprisals on this action.” “It is not in nature so to do” the appeal upon which they base the reprimands of the chorus’ voice is something deeper than opinion or judgment or mores but “it is not in nature so to do”.

Now this natural-law ethics, even outside any religious tradition, has continued to play to this time a very powerful role in the life of the West. We find it, to use even a trivial example, when a parent says to a child who is caught running around without his clothes on, which little children tend to do, “Nice boys don’t do that” or “Nice girls don’t do that.” Why? The kid inevitably would ask why. And then there is no answer except “one just does not do that.” You do not need any reason; at least, when my kids did it, I could not think of any reason to say why not. But I had to stop it because it creates increasing merriment out of the seminary windows. That is a trivial illustration of the force of natural law operating even in minds that know nothing about the natural law tradition. It is simply a base line behind which you do not have to go: “Nice boys don’t do that—so stop it.” The natural law tradition, to be sure, never developed in such a pure way that it was always the imperatives of nature that were being appealed to; often under the guise of natural law we simply appealed to the opinion of the neighborhood. We often use natural law bases to give natural law authority to quite local mores of family customs or neighborhood opinion that is a powerful tradition, based upon a sense of consensus and making an imperative out of it.

There is Semitic morality, the Old Testament code. That, of course, is a development out of fundamental statements about God—this particular people and God’s destiny for it in his election, a general weight and the promise in Torah, which is their fundamental law (more than law), and then what obedience to the Torah and the working with God to fulfill his- election and the destiny of his elected people might say and do. This is the way the prophets come to decisions when they address the people. It is not just that they have broken the interior contract or covenant with God, but particular actions which seem to be neutral are subjected to scrutiny to see whether they comport toward fulfillment or tilt toward a bending in an unhappy direction.

You recall how Isaiah becomes an unofficial Department of State for his people when he goes after them on the Egyptian alliance. He

The number of options presented for ethical decision are mightily multiplied.

penetrates a political situation and looks at that alliance not just as a kind of a merger of powers for self-protection or for aggrandizement but from the standpoint of what this action that is now proposed says about the firmness of their confidence in Yahweh, the giver of their Torah. Does it indicate in an indirect way that their confidence has to be buttressed up by horses and chariots and armed men from Egypt? Do they really trust in God, or don't they? It is very interesting to see how these political, social, seemingly neutral actions are traced back in their interior meaning as possibilities for Torah-reflection. And so this law becomes developed in enormous proliferation.

The rabbinical schools developed and got their reputation and authority because of the earnestness, piety, and precision with which they carried on these endless discussions. Some of the novels and short stories of Sholom Aleichem give humorous tale to the rabbis sitting and discussing at great length matters which you would think have no real religious importance. This developed to almost an absurd degree, and a good deal of the trouble that Jesus had with the doctors of the law had not really to do with substantial Torah matters but with the increasing rigidity and the humorless kind of gravity with which they took Article 16 under Section VIII, B (six hundred and some principles of interpretation they had developed). We can be a little amused at that. But read Leviticus from the standpoint of a modern person and ask why certain laws, particularly as they had to do with relations between the sexes, were extremely wise laws if you look at them from the standpoint of modern genetics. The Mendelian development in genetic theory they knew very little about, but Jacob knew something about spotted cattle and how the reproductive process does make certain strands dominant and some recessive; and he used that to further a very slick cattle deal. They had a long accumulated observation whereby they knew that first cousins had better not marry and that marriage between families of too close a relationship was frowned upon. They had very sensitive laws about the life of women. Sometimes when the women's liberation people talk about the patriarchal domination, they are quite right many ways; but the quiet modifications that ought to be present often are not. The

laws governing the menstrual periodicity in female life are dealt with in Leviticus with exquisite sensitivity.

In the Christian tradition, that tradition is not abandoned, though any legislative extension of the fundamental laws of Torah is laid aside. But usually our Christian ethics come from a combination of the commandments of God which we received via Israel and the evangelical counsels (which was the catholic centuries' name for counsels for proper Christian thought and behavior drawn from the teaching of Jesus). Luther's Small Catechism is a superb blend of these in which the moral law is laid down and then its often quite negative statement is filled in with a positive constructive statement: "you should so fear and love God as not . . . but rather." And the "rather" then is loaded with the kind of constructive, positive, caring, evangelical counsels that Luther gets from the teaching of Jesus. That is true not only of Luther's catechism, although in its concision it probably is the greatest of the catechisms. The Heidelberg Catechism of the Reformed Church operates roughly the same way.

These great moral traditions have served us a long time, but they are now in profound trouble. Why does this trouble erupt right now with particular vehemence? I have suggested why I think that is. But there is another large reason why an explosion happens right now, and I can illustrate it better than I can talk of it abstractly.

For five years before my retirement at the university (I will have been retired four years next week), the president of the university, through the dean of the Divinity School, asked me to serve on a committee at the Medical School, upon which committee two persons by law (the committee has to be by federal law) must be non-medics; and the president has to appoint the non-medics. He asked the Dean of the Divinity School who would be interested in this kind of thing, and the Dean said I would; so I was appointed to the committee. The committee is called the Pritzker School of Medicine Committee on Experimentation in Human Subjects. Every teaching hospital and medical faculty has to have such a committee, just as by federal law they must have a Tissue Committee; a Tissue Committee is the committee required by the law according to which the pathologists must examine all tissues removed in surgery as a protection of the patient against unnecessary but highly remunerative surgery.

So this committee is set up, and to this committee go all the Medical School's proposals for investigation involving human subjects. There are

nine medics on the committee and two non-medics. My non-medic colleague on the committee was a young man from the Law School who was interested in that aspect of law which deals with human rights. He and I were on for five years. The committee met every other month, that is, six times a year, for an entire afternoon; and before we met, I would get a big stack of papers each of which was a précis of what the man or the woman was proposing to do in experimentation. Usually it was the kind of proposal they sent to the National Institute of Health or to some foundation or to Health, Education, and Welfare to get a grant to carry on the proposal; so it had to be explicitly spelled out what they were doing, why they were doing it, what seemed to be the risks involved, what would be the experimental data they needed. Needless to say, I would read some of these and not know what in the devil I was reading because that business has its own shorthand, necessarily I suppose; but it is not meaningful for me. But I had to be on the committee. So happily my

We are absolutely required to make absolute decisions between absolutely given options in the midst of absolute indeterminacy.

neighbor, who was an internist, would spend an evening with me before the committee meetings; and I would underline things which I just could not penetrate. And he would say, "Well, what the man is up to is as follows. . . ." He would tell me what these polysyllabic counters really meant so I could go to the committee not totally ignorant, though still pretty ignorant.

These committee meetings over a period of years were a kind of post-graduate school in contemporary ethics for me because there I saw, to put it in a single sentence, that there is a new situation in ethics not only because of the pressure of cultural change upon the human but also because human beings now have available ways of behavior which simply never existed before, human possibilities for dealing with human problems which were not problems even to my own family one generation back. Science, developed as medical technology, has made many things possible which were not possible even ten or twenty years ago. So one reason the discourse of ethics is in such an uproar is that we not

"What is the will of God?" I do not know.

only confront new pressures for more humane ethicality but that the number of options presented for ethical decision are mightily multiplied.

Now to be sure, the ethical issues arising out of contemporary medical practice are a quite particular case; but they are not a unique case. They are a dramatic and very complicated instance, but other areas of discourse—business operations, fabrications, mining, production of oil, any human operation—are finding options for decision or behavior which carry an ethical component and development, as we call it. In all fields it is so amazing that the ethicality of the past cannot enclose the data which are popping up like popcorn all over these fields. So let me use an illustration, something all of us can understand. Even I could understand this one the moment it was proposed because it was not a technical matter; it was a quite human decision.

A man in pediatrics had for many years been dealing with a group of eighteen little children who were deficient in what is called the growth hormone. Every normal body exudes a growth hormone which not only invites the cells to growth but regulates the rate of growth. And this rate in a normal eight-year-old will be so high and others will be a little higher or a little less, but the average is fairly common in the United States (it has a nutritional component in it, too; it might be different in Peru). I do not know of any case where the growth hormone is utterly deficient, but it sometimes stops at a certain point or gets very lazy; and a child twelve years old will be only so big. Parents, of course, see that Jimmy or Mary is not growing as fast as the other boys or girls on the block or a child does not walk as sturdily as he or she ought. Upon examination, they discover that the growth hormone is simply deficient. The stuff can be and is synthetically produced, but the procedure is so laborious and so fussy and requires such huge amounts of money that the National Institute of Health does it; the federal government supports it, and they control its use. And they cannot produce it, you know, by the quart; it is very expensive and laborious to do.

So the pediatrician reported that the NIH had told him that for the next year he would have to cut in half the group he had been dealing with over the years, and half of these children simply would have to be cut off from treatment. He brought the matter in and wanted to know what to do. Immediately the lawyer and I looked at each other with a look of mutual recognition. The whole committee, except the two of us (and the committee vote must be unanimous), voted to accept what the government said: if you cannot get enough for eighteen, get enough for nine. The lawyer and I at once, out of different traditions, both sensed that there was something wrong here. I spoke first and said, "I cannot approve the decision and will not vote for it."

The pediatrician was livid; he said, "Man, you're costing me two-and-a-half million dollars." Well, that was a kind of a crass response; but he lives on those dollars, and of course he saw it as cutting off the spigot. He said, "Why, by what right do you do this?" I wasn't quite sure why I said No so quickly, and I did not have a lot of time to summon my answer. But I did the best I could, and I said: "Here you have a situation which is not simply an experiment in investigative medicine, but the experiment has a particular quality because it deals with young children and not only with young children; over the years the parents who accompany these young children every month have formed a very close and affectionate community around their children because they have a common problem." We had heard him in previous reports talk about what he called this fraternity of parents who are a supportive group, very close; you simply cannot go to the parents of these eighteen children and say, "Nine of you cannot come back beginning next January." And before you say that, you have to decide which nine cannot come back. You simply cannot do that; the value of the experiment does not outweigh the rather awful thing you are being called upon to do. I think for the first time it struck him, that dimension of the problem hit him.

He said, "I know what you say, but what the hell am I supposed to do about it?" The chairman of the committee is a hard-nosed character who said, "You and Sittler get together and rewrite the proposal." He said: "Write it? It's written with perfect clarity. They know what I want to do and why I want to do it. They know that I have to have the stuff and that I have done good work with the stuff. How can I rewrite what already meets all the specifications?" He said, "I asked Mr. Sittler to work with you because maybe he can write a prolegomenon to your proposal." I wrote a page in which I spelled it out as carefully as I could and as movingly as I could—because people who read these things are, after all, not computers either; they are human beings who probably have children. The next month the man came back; he came into the room beaming. He said: "It's okay. They said, 'We have reviewed your proposal, and we will continue the supply for an indefinite period.'" Well now, I claim no great victory on this. But that event and others not quite so dramatic made me aware of the problem which is arising in medical practice but calling upon particularly pastors, priests, ministers, counselors in an immediate way to deal with it. I do not have much more to say except to use one more illustration to bring your discussion right down to the concrete point.

The wife of a colleague of mine about ten years ago was very seriously ill, by consensus of the physicians terminally ill, with heart failure. She had had rheumatic fever as a young girl at a time when rheumatic fever was not really understood and attacked with antibiotics the way it now is. And not having had the possibility to do those things when she was young, it did leave permanent heart impairment. She had lived quite normally, but finally that impairment caught up with her (she was in her mid-60s). And the heart was simply in failure: she knew it, her husband knew it, the doctors knew it, each one knew that the other knew it. But, you see, at Billings Hospital you do not have to die when the body decides to die; they decide when you shall die. So they started doing one thing after another, and each of these things meant spending more time being manipulated and pulled around and punctured and so on.

She was a lady of an extraordinary gentle nature, had a beautiful marriage, was a beautiful lady, and had a kind of innate dignity. This was highly unpleasant to her; it was simply not acceptable any longer. I went to see her at her husband's request; I had been writing her notes and all that but had not been over to the hospital. I went to see her and there she was, surrounded with all this gadgetry. She said, "Close the door." I closed the door. She said: "Now look, I cannot say this to (I will not use his proper name) Robert; but I do not want this to go on any longer. I know exactly what my situation is. I have in a certain sense been prepared for it for years. I am only grateful that I am 65 before it has caught up with me. I have had a fine life; the chance of having anything but a miserable life for Robert and for me is none. Why do all this? I want you to promise me that you will tell the doctor that I do not want this and that I

The focus of ethical reflection has moved from obedience to the clear to judgment within the indeterminate.

really mean it." I waited a while, and I said: "What I have heard you say is as follows, and you really mean it." And she said, "Indeed you have heard me correctly." So I, in a sense, raised my right hand and said, "I will do what you say." A day later I did see the doctor; and I told him exactly what she had said in almost her own words and added, "She really means it." Now he could not say to me, because there is always the possibility that it could become a matter of public law, "I will do what she asks." But he had a very interesting way to answer me without answering. It reminded me of my father's verbal strategem whereby he was able to indicate to the proud parents of a new baby that he had real-

ly attended to the new baby. They all looked alike; and he baptized hundreds of them. And he could not get ecstatic about minor differentiations in a ten-day old baby. So he would say, "Now that is a baby, isn't it?" Well, obviously so. It says not a thing, but they are pleased about it. This doctor had him bettered apparently. He said, "I hear you." He did not add anything to that; but I knew by his choice of words that he meant "I not only have listened with my ears and know what you say, but I will do what she wants." She died two days later.

That is only one experience; you certainly have had parallels. What it means is that things which formerly lay within the area of human will, decision, and arbitrament have now been taken out of our hands. We are called upon to make a good ethical decision where that is simply not available. Or you are called upon by an agonized family to make a decision between two possible courses of action when the probabilities of either course of action are not only indeterminate but indeterminable. Forms of illness in which the chance of recovery from a very elaborate, costly, long-term treatment is one or two percent and the chance of wreaking catastrophe—financial and emotional—upon the family with that very small margin of chance is great have to be weighed against who else is in this family, what is their situation, what is the age, the situation, the disposition of the patient.

Let me give you one more that Jim Gustafson has written up in a case study, a very moving one. A woman who had two children delivered a third child, and the new child was a Mongoloid child. The child, as is often the case with Mongolism, had an insufficient lung capacity to clear the mucus from his throat; and they have a routine, simple procedure in the hands of a surgeon—or it does not have to be a surgeon—to clear that throat. If they clear the throat, breathing will go on normally; and the child will live. If they do not, the child will not live. But in order to perform that procedure—it is called an operation — the consent of the parent has to be got. So the doctor explained to the woman, after she knew the child was Mongoloid, "Now the normal thing is to carry out this procedure, and we must have your consent." What he was really saying was: "Do you want this child, or don't you? Can you, given your family situation, undertake the rearing of a Mongoloid child with two other young children? If I do not do the procedure, I have broken no law; I am not required to do the procedure. The child simply will not survive if I do not do it. If I do it, the chances are the child will have a survival which, in the case of Mongoloid children, is not a long life but a life."

This case came to the attention of the Kennedy Center, which is a group of Catholic moral theologians who have also invited others in, and became a classic investigation, not just for this particular case but to articulate in concrete terms the kinds of complex options that are open in contemporary medical care. The Kennedy man who wrote the report talked to the mother and got very careful interviews to find out how she arrived at the decision she did arrive at. He talked to the father, who had a secondary role in this decision because he said, "What the child's mother says is what we will do." He would not assume the responsibility. Now there is a moral problem there, too. He interviewed the father and has a long report on that interview. He talked to the doctor and several others who have had these cases before about how they feel about it. And the most moving interview is the interview he had with the nurse because the mother decided not to do the procedure and a nurse was assigned to be with the child until the child died. That means this nurse simply had to sit, could not feed the child; so the child would slowly starve to death. The nurse simply had to hold this child day and night (it did not take very many) until it died. The nurse was the most violent and vehement in her expressions of moral distaste and moral remorse and moral revulsion at having to sit and hold the child until it died.

That is the kind of situation which I say is at least one component in one area of human practice and reflection. Such situations can be multiplied along the whole front of ethical reflection. There are new situations either because there are new options for which old mores and ethics are no longer satisfactory or because new procedures are available requiring new decisions that our generation must confront for the first time. I remember my father once used the phrase, "the old man's disease." It could be used of old women, too. I remember very well when I was a child, before antibiotics, when old persons had an illness that would not in itself have been fatal but kept them bed-ridden for a long time, they often were released from a long period of terminal illness by pneumonia; it was called "the old man's friend." They got pneumonia from the fairly static condition of a bed-ridden body where the lungs do not clear properly and invading bacteria, pneumococci, have a chance to get in. Now we do not have the old man's disease; most forms of pneumonia can be kicked in the head within twenty-four hours. So we can maintain life beyond that moment when the body has clearly indicated death.

As early as Pius XII there came out not an encyclical but an important document from the Vatican with the authority of the Papacy. And I think I am quoting him almost exactly, that it is not morally reprehensi-

ble if one does not use extraordinary means to maintain life when the body has clearly indicated death. But of course, what is an extraordinary means? What was an extraordinary means in 1950 has become normal procedure in 1970. So “extraordinary procedure” has to be defined. If you had said to the men who were dealing with the professor’s wife who died in heart failure, “Those are extraordinary means,” they would have said, “No, that’s routine in these cases.” And I suppose they would have told the truth.

Let me attempt to make a summary statement of “the fix we is in.” In contemporary ethical reflection, we are absolutely required to make absolute decisions between absolutely given options in the midst of absolute indeterminacy. (I’m pretty proud of that one.) We are absolutely required to make decisions. When a family calls you in, you cannot say, “Sorry.” There is an absolute requirement that a decision be made, whether we involve ourselves in it or not. Decisions have to be made. The options are usually absolute, too, because “no decision” is a kind of

Ethical life will be made tougher and not easier.

decision. And these decisions are made often in the midst of absolutely indeterminate factors. You cannot know what this procedure will do or not; even the most learned physician cannot tell you. He will say: “It is very complex and no two cases are alike. In certain cases it works, and in certain cases it does not.” We are working with more and more wide-open indeterminacies in social, political, medical, and personal decisions. And the old way of trying to go from a general principle to a casuistically arrived-at sub-principle for decision in this particular case has become almost useless. I could ask (I suppose subconsciously I did ask when the woman asked me to talk to the doctor), “What is the will of God?” That is the question for the Protestant Christian. But I do not know. There was no possible way, by ever so devout reflection, to find out. I do not know what God’s will was in that case. So the ethical light by which my feet should be guided has gone out. The law by which I might at one time have made the decision is now so complicated by other options that it no longer has directive urgency or categorical imperative.

Everything I have said could be summarized in this, that the focus of ethical reflection has now moved from obedience to the clear to judgment within the indeterminate. That is where we are. The role of judgment is now at the middle of ethical reflection. When I stood by this woman’s bedside and asked, “Will I or will I not do what she asks,” I

could not find a rule to which I was obliged to be obedient, a law of God; I simply had to make a judgment. Now this means that ethical reflection as we are encountering it will be good or less good reflection according to the sensitivity with which we put the proper components into the act of judgment. And there the Christian faith will have a decisive role; the Christian will make judgments not in virtue of a clearer law in all cases but of a larger context of sensibility and concern so that my judgment will be subtly colored by my weighing of the components that enter into the judgment. So ethical life will be made tougher and not easier.



COMMENTS

DO WHAT YOU MUST...AND PRAY

Some years ago I wrote an essay in which I tried to dramatize the truth of the statement of Kierkegaard that before God we are always in the wrong, that there is no possibility in a moral problem of being absolutely right or absolutely wrong. I quoted Montserrat's book, *The Cruel Sea*. Do you recall the episode? The skipper was named Carlson; he was in command of a cruiser which was accompanying a group of merchant ships across the North Atlantic in the Second World War, and the cruisers had the job to protect them as well as they could against submarines. The fourth day out the sonar said there was a sub at the appropriate location, and each of the previous nights one merchantman had been sunk and hundreds of lives lost. So they went in the direction the sonar indicated it was; and when they got there, there were seventy or so men from a previous night's sinking still in their lifejackets waiting to be picked up, those who had not already died from cold. They saw the cruiser coming and thought, "We're going to be rescued." The captain, if he was going to get that sub, had to make an immediate decision: "Do I drop the depth bombs and destroy the sub, which if not destroyed will certainly sink another ship or more before they get to England?" He had to make a decision. If he dropped the bombs, he would of course destroy the men in the water. If he did not, he would save them and there would be another hundred in the water another night. He made the decision to go after the sub and drop the bomb.

That night on the bridge, so the story goes, he was standing alone in what Conrad called the loneliness of command; and the executive officer stood beside him and simply stood there with him, knowing that there was no point in talking about it. Finally the captain said (that remarkable sentence): "A man must do what a man must do and say his prayers." That is, what he must do is an absolute option: do it or do not do it. To decide not to drop the bomb is already a decision with consequences. He must do what he must do. A man must do something; and given options, he must do what he must do. And then over the whole thing he has that sentence which is a kind of confession that either action is death-dealing. There is not a moral option to be made; both are immoral, they are both death-dealing. "A man must do what a man must do and say his prayers." You finally extrapolate from the phrase, "to say his

prayers,” that a moral judgment is an act of offertory: you offer that judgment before God as you make an offertory prayer; you must say, as it were, “not as we ought but as we are able.” It is never a case in which we can do the wholly right.

When I think of the decisions I had to make in counsel with my children, good God, I do not think I was right in many of those cases. And as I think back, not to have done what I did do would not have been wholly right either. So you make a judgment and then you say: “Okay, God, I am not you. I have to simply offer this to you. If it is wrong, modify in your mercy the consequences and forgive me.” Then keep on living. That is our moral situation; we do not operate in a sinless, non-evil world or in a world in which evil is concentrated totally here and not here. It is a kind of calculus of judgment which becomes ever more refined and therefore ever more in need of grace.

SPEAKING BACK TO THE CHURCH

I am very grateful for this week. It has been a very hard one, but I did not expect a rose garden. The enjoyable and gratifying thing has been the eagerness of you people to hang in there when the subject matter was often complicated and the necessary background sometimes was partly boring but necessary to set the problem. You have been a very courteous and generous group.

Now you ask if I have any final word to say. Yes, I do. It will not have much to do with the practicalities of your job, which I have never engaged in. But I have been close to the campuses; and campus ministers are, I suppose, the largest cadre of my friends. I would say two things.

First of all, in a way larger than you may suspect, you live your Christian existence on the frontier of the church’s life in the culture. Your very exposure to the movements of life as they are most vivaciously exhibited and with the greatest candor expressed in the student generation puts you in a privileged position. You are not locked into already stiffened and stylized forms of life into which maturity does trap you. You are with the most flexible, varied, articulate, and explosive aspects of our culture. That is your situation, as I see it.

But that situation devolves upon you a responsibility, and that is my second point. I won't talk of your responsibility in terms of how you do your job, which I could not talk about with any knowledge. Rather, in your responsibility to the church, I think you do not speak back to the church enough, or clearly enough, out of your own extraordinary experience. The church has a hard head. And the heads that must be penetrated are often far distant from where you work. But make no mistake: the church does hear you when you scream, if you do. They do hear you when you protest or when you, with the sensitivity born of your position, say that the way the church is doing this or this or this is not the way in which the future is opening up for the coming generations of the church.

I think you are in a position to be loving and constructive critics of Mother Church. And I think your criticism must not be exhausted by mutual sessions among yourselves but carefully articulated and made available to the decision-making levels in the church. All kinds of things which you see to be of significance for the future, I think, you do not produce enough in clear writing and get into the right hands. It does not mean you have to write scholarly things; you seldom have the time to develop that. But you have perceptive things to say, and you should not waste them just on one another. You ought to send them upstairs.

So I am hopeful that either through some corporate organ you develop or through your individual efforts in writing – I am a great believer in the written text; it can be referred back to, it will not go away like the evanescence of spoken words – I trust you will become more articulate, perceptive, and ardent constructive critics in the church. The church, despite her bland appearance of confidence, is a deeply troubled Mother. And I think she is prepared to hear the children. Each of you must do this in your own way, but I would suggest you do it.

Thank you again for a fine week.

Afterword

May 4, 2000

My first encounter with Joe Sittler, like Donald Hetzler's, was on a college campus - in my case, Northwestern University. Joe would occasionally head north to Evanston to speak to our Lutheran student group, and, just as in Dr. Hetzler's case, Joe's influence on me was profound and long lasting. Perhaps the most important thing he taught me was that neither reason nor good humor was antithetical to the gospel, a message which our generation sorely needs to hear over and over again.

My wife, Meta, was likewise touched by Joe as a student at Northwestern. As the years went on, she and I had encounters with Joe in many different settings. Sometimes, we enjoyed polish sausage and beer at Jimmy's while talking about everything from medical ethics to the state of the organized church. Joe visited our home congregation in Columbia, Missouri, and the University of Missouri. I shall never forget sitting in the back of the classroom at the University listening to Joe talk about death and dying to a group of some fifteen vigorous eighteen-year-old freshmen who would surely never die. His description of death as less an isolatable event than a process that is akin to the unraveling of a piece of fabric still moves me.

When I became president of St. Olaf College in 1985 - the first non-clergy and non-Norwegian to be called to that position - Joe sent me a telegram asserting that "Three and one-half billion non-Norwegian laypeople salute you in astonishment." A few months later, Joe spent a couple of days at St. Olaf to receive an honorary degree, which was a great honor to the college. Joe spoke formally several times and interacted widely with students and faculty during his visit, yet he found time to chide me with a gentle twinkle in his eye that our cross-town rival Carleton College had given him an honorary degree many years earlier!

Meta and I talked with Joe about poetry and the arts and heard his displeasure at the modernization of language in the church's hymnody; once he confessed that he disliked the new words so much that one might as well sing the names of the states in alphabetical order to the hymn tune! He expanded our vision of the gospel, and he embraced scientific knowledge as revealing the majesty and wonder of the God of the universe. He was curious about everything he encountered, interested in everyone he met.

Meta and I miss Joe very much, and we believe that the church and the world need to hear his words even more today than in the past. They need to experience his genuine humanity, stand in awe before the creativity of his intellect, and bask in the warmth of his good humor. We are helping put together an archive of his work written and oral - to make materials that are relatively inaccessible more widely available. But an archive accomplishes nothing unless the words it contains are disseminated. So we are immensely grateful to Galen Hora and his colleagues in campus ministry, which Joe loved, who have made possible this reprinting of one of his most substantial contributions. The lectures he gave to campus ministry staff back in 1977-78 have the same significance today as they had nearly 25 years ago. Through them, may many more people discover and read his message and come to know the gift that was Joseph Sittler.

Meta and I have often chuckled over a story about Joe visiting a very elderly woman in the hospital, talking and laughing with her in her illness. Later, the woman was trying to describe to her doctor the impact Joe's visit had on her. The doctor remarked that what the woman said was very powerful, making her visitor "sound almost like he was God." The woman snapped, "God should be so lucky!" Those of us who knew Joe can certainly understand her feelings.

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