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Valparaiso University

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE, THE ARTS, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS / MAY, 1983

THE CRESSET

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Contributors

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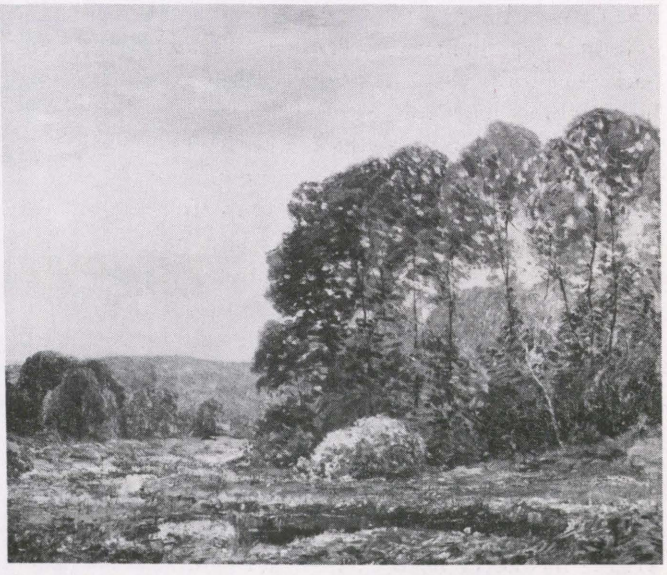

Wilson Irvine, American 1869-1936, *Spring*, o/c, 24" x 27". Valparaiso University Sloan Collection. Percy Sloan Bequest 53.1.94

Cover: Karl Anderson, American 1874-1956, *The Idlers: August*, 1910, o/c, 49-3/4" x 51-5/8". Valparaiso University Sloan Collection. Percy Sloan Bequest 53.1.109

Karl is the brother of the writer, Sherwood Anderson. *The Idlers: August* is one of Karl's major paintings, and was for many years in the collection of the Chicago Art Institute. It has recently been restored. RHWB

IN LUCE TUA

Comment on Contemporary Affairs by the Editor

May Melancholies

In the vicinity of the *Cresset* office, May normally comes as a time of special blessing. Here we celebrate not only the usual glories and graces of spring, we celebrate our annual reprieve. The May issue of the journal marks the end of the academic year and the end of *The Cresset*'s nine-month cycle of publication. The summer break lies ahead with its promise of pressures relaxed and energies renewed, and there revives again the consoling hope, by which we all live, that next time we will surely do it better.

But this year, May shares some of April's cruelties. We have hard news to bring to our readers.

With this issue, John Strietelmeier retires as custodian of *Campus Diary.* The Editor's abject pleas notwithstanding, John has decided, at least for the present, to give up his column. There is quite literally no way to measure *The Cresset*'s loss.

John Strietelmeier's association with *The Cresset* goes back over forty years. For some twenty of those years, he served as its Managing Editor. More of his words are enshrined in its pages than those of any other writer, including even O. P. Kretzmann, the journal's founding editor and John's only possible competitor as embodiment of what *The Cresset,* at its very best, has tried to be.

Professor Strietelmeier has written on public and private matters with wit and grace and unfailing lucidity. His voice, always civil, moderate, and sophisticated, has reflected a certain detachment from the passionate certainties that too often intrude into public discourse. Yet behind the cool and worldly intelligence his readers have always been able to discern an unapologetic note of Christian affirmation, and that affirmation has given a quiet urgency to his reflections on public affairs. His writing has never been excited, but it has always been thoroughly engaged. And through it all, his subtle wisdom has manifested that elusive combination of high intelligence and Christian commitment that both *The Cresset* and the University that supports it look to as their true object.

All is not lost. John has promised to stay part of *The Cresset* as an occasional contributor, and it might even be that in a year or two, when his administrative and teaching duties demand less of his time, he could be persuaded to return to us on a continuing basis. In the meantime, we reluctantly grant him a peaceful release, and we tender with it, on behalf of all his readers, the endless gratitude, respect, and admiration that are his due.

More May Melancholies

As long as we are dispensing bad news, we might as well make it a double dose.

Beginning in the fall, *The Cresset* will be forced to raise its subscription rates. This journal is published largely as a service of Valparaiso University to the Lutheran Christian community and to all others who benefit by its presence. Our deficit is as old as the journal itself, and to read the balance sheet of *The Cresset* is to know what it means to operate a non-profit enterprise. We do not expect ever to rise out of the red, but we must make some effort to keep our losses within reasonable bounds. For that reason, we regretfully increase our rates as follows:

	Current	*Future*
One Year	$ 6.50	$ 7.50
Two Years	11.50	13.00
Single Copy	.85	1.00
Students One Year	3.00	3.50
Student Single Copy	.50	.60

The new rates come into effect with our next (September, 1983) issue. But we offer a special opportunity to current subscribers. All those who write to us before September 1, 1983 will have the opportunity to extend their subscriptions at the old rates, regardless of when their subscriptions come due. Simply send your checks in for either one or two year renewals and we will extend your subscriptions, at current rates, from when they are now due to expire. New subscribers who write before September 1 will also have subscriptions entered at current rates.

Even after the increases come into effect in the fall, *The Cresset* will remain as good a financial bargain as exists in magazine journalism. Our thanks to Valparaiso University and in particular to its President and our

Publisher, Robert V. Schnabel, for subsidizing so generously the work we so joyfully do.

Racial Politics in Chicago

Chicago's "ugly election" (terminology courtesy of *Newsweek*) turned out better than might have been expected. The race between Harold Washington and Bernard Epton for mayor of the nation's second city may not have been as edifying an example of democracy in action as one would have wished for, but at least it did not end up as the disaster for which it had such ominous potential. Had Washington not won his narrow but clear victory, race relations in Chicago would have reached a nadir. In the aftermath of the election, the city's black and white communities may not be united in a beloved community, but neither do they face the state of incipient civil conflict that could have resulted from an Epton victory. If there is little in the story of the election to induce optimism concerning race relations in America, we can take some comfort from reflecting on how much worse things might have been.

It was a most peculiar election. Chicago came close to electing as mayor its first Republican in over half a century and its first Jew ever. Under normal circumstances, such willingness to innovate would have been cause for congratulations. But, of course, Chicagoans could contemplate so drastic a break with tradition only in order to avoid the even more unthinkable option of electing a black man to lead them. Seldom if ever has a candidate drawn support for such overwhelmingly negative reasons as did Bernie Epton.

With minor exceptions, Epton supporters voted for him for no better a reason than that he was not Harold Washington. It was only Washington's surprise victory in the Democratic primary that made Epton a serious candidate (no one had bothered to oppose him for the Republican nomination), and the unlikely candidate ran an eccentric and bad-tempered campaign. Epton is a proud man—he is a self-made millionaire and has been a competent state legislator—and one suspects that his testiness and surliness during the campaign stemmed from his resentment over the widespread assumption, an assumption he at bottom knew to be accurate, that he had attained prominence and plausibility for reasons that had nothing to do with his own qualifications.

Yet if it was race that almost made Epton mayor, that is not to say there were no good reasons for voting against Harold Washington. A great many whites seized on Washington's past difficulties as respectable reasons for doing what they intended to do anyway, but it took a kind of willful blindness to suggest, as so many in the media did, that opposition to Washington could only arise from racial prejudice. Here was a candidate for major office who had served a brief term in jail for failing to file income tax returns for four years (the prosecution stated in court that he actually had not filed for nineteen years), who had been suspended from the practice of law for several years for taking money from clients for services he then failed to perform, and who had, in his personal finances, often shown a casual disregard for the claims of his creditors. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a conscientious citizen casting a vote for Washington without *some* twinge of uncertainty, even against so marginal an opponent as Epton.

His legal and financial problems aside, Washington invited non-support from Democratic regulars for his opposition to the party machine. Washington's supporters argued that it was the duty of party officials to support the winner of the party primary, and they charged, quite rightly, that the failure of many to do so could only be attributed to racial causes. But again, Washington provided a plausible excuse for party officials to flee from his candidacy.

One could hardly expect Democratic party regulars to show enthusiasm for a candidate for whom the death of the organization was an expressed matter of indifference. Washington's reform platform naturally attracted the goo-goo constituency, those who equate party organization with civic corruption. Those, on the other hand, who believe in party government—and such people are not, contrary to reform mythology, restricted to party hacks—just as naturally found it easy to oppose Washington's election. All in all, the racial issue made it difficult for people who had perfectly good reasons for doing so to vote against Harold Washington without embarrassment.

All that said, however, it remains clear that Washington's chief impediment was the color of his skin. Had he the moral credentials of Mother Theresa and the loyalty to party of Richard J. Daley, he would still have faced formidable opposition. If, as the old saying had it, Chicago was not ready for reform, even less was it ready for black leadership. Chicago's blacks understood that, and they made the highly persuasive case that, all other things equal, a white Harold Washington would have buried a Bernie Epton of whatever color in an electoral landslide.

Had Washington lost, Chicago's blacks would have felt cheated, and the costs to the city in racial amity and civil concord could have been enormous. The Washington campaign took on the character of a semi-religious cause in the black community. Whatever legitimate reservations might be raised against him, Washington must be acknowledged as an heroic leader of his people. The possibility of his candidacy spurred a major increase in black voter registration. And when in his televised debate with Richard M. Daley, the former mayor's son, and incumbent Jane Byrne he easily outclassed both his opponents, he became a genuine folk hero to blacks throughout the city. Here was a man of

obvious intelligence, eloquence, and style, and black people felt a pride in their candidate that lifted them up with him. For all his flaws, Washington has to be recognized as an estimable force for good in the civic life of black Chicago.

It has been argued that Washington's appeal to blacks was no different in its racial implications than that of white voters for Epton. After all, critics point out, the voting of blacks in the election followed racial lines far more consistently than that of whites (over 95 per cent of blacks voted for Washington; only about 80 per cent of whites voted for Epton). How is it, they argue, that one form of racial identity can be condoned as expression of racial pride while the other must be dismissed as bigotry?

What this argument overlooks, of course, is the critical distinction between voting for and voting against. Most blacks voted for Washington out of pride, admiration, and racial solidarity; they were generally indifferent to Bernie Epton. A great many whites voted not for Epton but against Washington, and for no other reason than that Washington was a black man. No other explanation will account for why so many otherwise unshakable Democrats suddenly developed an urge to vote Republican. The difference in the two cases may be subtle, but it is unmistakable.

Yet as is so often the case, the media managed to trivialize the racial issue by reducing it to incoherence. The word *racism* has been so distorted by overuse and misuse that it has largely lost the intense moral significance it should convey. It is racism when a white ethnic indicates he will vote against a candidate simply because the candidate is black. It is *not* necessarily racism for that same man to express concern that scattered-site public housing (which Washington supports) may increase his neighborhood's crime rate and decrease its property values. Middle-class people naturally feel uneasy over the prospect of living next door to a public housing project. That uneasiness holds regardless of the color of the people involved, although color differences obviously exacerbate the situation. Racial factors in matters of this kind are not easy to sort out, but it is essential to clear thinking that the attempt be made. Issues of race and class are not the same, even though they may frequently coincide.

Similarly, greater efforts must be made to differentiate among levels of color consciousness. It is misleading, for example, to describe the behavior of the 97 per cent of Chicago's blacks who voted for Washington as racist, yet some awareness of color was obviously involved and needs to be accounted for. We need a vocabulary that will reflect the nuances in our racial attitudes. Precious few of us are entirely oblivious to differences in race or to the cultural distinctions that may accompany those differences. It is therefore pointless and self-defeating to hold up as our ideal a color-blind society; our goal should rather be to see to it that, to the extent possible, such distinctions lose their invidious connotations.

Chicago is clearly a long way from achieving even that modified state of grace, as the election campaign demonstrated. Part of the problem was that the city's whites had so little time to accustom themselves to the prospect of having a black mayor. In most cases where a major city first elects a black, the event can be seen coming a long way off, and the city's residents have time to get themselves used to the idea, or at least resigned to it. Chicago enjoyed no such period of adjustment. When Washington entered the Democratic primary, few people, even in the black community, thought he had much chance of winning. It was only the unusual circumstance of two white candidates splitting the non-black vote evenly between them that allowed Washington to win the primary, which he carried with some 36 per cent of the vote cast in a city that is 40 per cent black.

Washington's victory in the primary, then, came as something of a shock to all concerned, even, perhaps, to the candidate himself. During the primary struggle, Washington out of necessity ran an essentially parochial campaign, directing virtually all his efforts to generating a crusade spirit in the one place he could count on for support: the black community. After the primary, he quickly had to shift and broaden his focus to take in the extensive coalition of groups that makes up the Democratic party. Washington made that transition with more speed and grace than his critics conceded, but memories of the primary appeal to blacks—with its cries of "It's our turn" and "We want it all"—persisted among fearful whites and were exploited by an opposition campaign whose only hope for victory was to divide the Democratic party along racial lines. Had Washington's win in the primary not come as such a surprise, the appeal to racial fears would likely have had less impact than it did. (It also would have had less impact had Washington's personal record been less disquieting.)

Indeed, given the particular set of circumstances in the election, one might argue that the surprise is not that race counted for as much as it did, but that it did not count for more. As things turned out, Washington received almost 20 per cent of the white vote, which, as defenders of Chicago's reputation like to point out, is a higher total than whites in similar situations in almost all other cities have given a black candidate in his first run for mayor. Race pervaded the campaign, but it did not, in the end, determine its outcome.

So it is that Chicago's ugly election has had an at least semi-happy ending. It seems that the right man won, whatever his flaws (Bernie Epton's behavior since the election has been cranky and mean-spirited to the point of paranoia), and the racial divisions of the campaign show some early signs of healing. Washington's victory speech included a gracious and eloquent plea for unity, and his considerable political skills are being devoted to presenting himself as mayor of all the people. Chicago is not likely soon to become a model of racial harmony, but there is no reason to suppose that it cannot

sustain the level of civil concord necessary to maintain it as what the late Mayor Daley so proudly proclaimed it to be: the city that works. That's not a particularly ennobling vision, but it's what politics, properly conceived, is all about.

Making Choices in El Salvador

Democracies are at their worst when they have to face hard choices. Authoritarian regimes may not find it pleasant to make difficult decisions, but at least they do not have to deal, except in highly attenuated and limited form, with the pressures of public opinion and the political stalemate which closely-divided opinion can produce. Hard choices become doubly hard in democratic regimes when they involve the fundamental political and moral values that underlie democracy in the first place.

All of which helps explain why the current debate over American policy towards El Salvador is so rancorous and divisive. It is, in a way, not a new debate at all. It has been held, with minor variations to suit particular circumstances, in any number of cases involving relations between the United States and third world nations. During the post-World War II era, America has found it difficult to construct a workable policy for dealing with revolutionary movements in developing nations, and El Salvador is only the latest instance of a long debate and a frustrating policy conundrum.

Simply put, the hard choice arises when the U.S. finds itself facing situations, as currently in El Salvador, where it apparently must opt to support either an authoritarian and repressive right-wing regime or a revolutionary movement in which Marxist-Leninist elements play an influential, often dominant, role. (The term *Leninist* involves no mere rhetorical flourish; it serves to differentiate authoritarian revolutionary movements from democratic socialist groups that combine Marxist principle, appropriately modified, with commitment to political pluralism and civil liberties.) In such cases, the national interest points away from Left revolutionaries, but most Americans understandably hesitate to endorse aid to governments that flout, either wholly or in part, the democratic values we hope to preserve and extend.

Faced with unpalatable alternatives, the characteristic American instinct has been to seek a reform option that will allow us to reject revolutionaries and reactionaries alike. Thus the search, in one such situation after another, for a liberal center, a political third force committed to economic growth, social reform, and constitutional democracy. Defenders of the third force option argue that not only is it the only policy consistent with our national principles, it is also the only one likely to achieve our objectives. Revolutions, they point out, have roots in popular grievances against authoritarian rule, economic stagnation, and social injustice, and unless those "root causes" are addressed through reform we cannot hope to get the masses of the people in the country involved to rally to our cause. Therefore, the argument goes, hearts and minds must be won, and in the meantime we must avoid seeking military solutions to political problems.

If the world were constructed the way we would like it to be, the third force policy would recommend itself to virtually everyone of good will. But experience and theory alike suggest that such an option often is not immediately available to us. The democratic center has most often been associated, in social terms, with the middle class, and it is precisely a significant and vital middle class that underdeveloped societies characteristically do not possess. Many third world countries lack either the traditions or the economic conditions under which the politics of democratic reform can flourish, and no responsible American policy toward such societies can be built on ignorance or evasion of that reality. (It was Jimmy Carter's obliviousness to that reality that made his human rights policy so largely an exercise in wishful thinking.) It is clearly in our interests and in the interests of the people involved that everything possible be done to create and nourish centrist political and economic institutions in third world nations, but that involves a long-term process at best, and Marxist revolutionary threats do not wait for the long term.

There are those who argue that if our choices are as constricted and distasteful as this analysis suggests, then we ought not choose at all. If in fact our situation comes down to choosing between oppressors, it is said, then our best—indeed our only—moral alternative is to abstain. That way, at least, we do not become accomplices in torture and repression and do not make a mockery of the beliefs and values we claim to cherish.

But as the slogan from the Sixties reminds us, not to decide is to decide. We may maintain a posture of pious non-involvement in revolutionary situations, but the Soviet Union, acting either directly on its own or indirectly through proxies such as Cuba, has no such scruples. It prides itself on its support of revolutionary causes throughout the world. For us to refuse to aid governments that proclaim themselves our friends and that resist Marxist revolution is to sentence such regimes to defeat by forces that are as much our antagonists as theirs. That policy choice becomes particularly dubious when applied in our own back yard: El Salvador is a lot closer to the U.S. and its vital interests than Vietnam ever was.

Critics of American policy respond that if abstention is indeed a form of unilateral concession, then our intervention should come not in the form of military aid but in providing our good offices to bring negotiations

between the contending parties, with the hope of arranging some form of coalition government or other power-sharing agreement. That proposal ignores the unlikelihood—one attested to by experience—of bringing any meaningful form of coalition between groups separated by civil fratricide and an immense ideological gulf. Beyond that, as the liberal *New Republic* pointed out recently, "if there is one thing in the world that Leninists do not do, it is share power." Any such form of "political solution" applied in Central America, *TNR*'s editors went on to argue, "would only make a present of El Salvador to totalitarians."

One last fall-back position remains for opponents of present policy. If we cannot defeat the revolution, they say in effect, then let us join it, or at least accommodate ourselves to it as best we can. Critics argue that we must cease viewing all revolutionary situations through the distorting prism of Soviet-American rivalry. Local revolutions, they say, have local causes. Indigenous revolutionary forces are not necessarily pawns of the Soviet Union, and by automatically labeling them as such, we only imprison ourselves in self-fulfilling prophecies. If the United States would instead present itself as a friend of these essentially nationalist revolutions, the argument goes, leaders of those revolutions would be the less likely to ally themselves with the U.S.S.R. and would be happy, despite whatever ostensible commitment to Marxist principles they may profess, to work out some sort of mutually-agreeable relationship with us.

This line of argument—be kind to Marxists and they will be kind to us—is as old as Marxist revolution itself and remains as insubstantial as when it was first applied in Russia in 1917. But that has not prevented its being successively invoked in China, Cuba, Vietnam and any number of other places. Its essential weakness is that it trivializes the nature of the conflict between Communists and non-Communists. Marxist regimes and movements, whatever their relationship to the Soviet Union, oppose the United States not as a result of specific actions or inactions on our part, but as an inescapable corollary of their worldview. America is the pre-eminent capitalist society, and any genuine Marxist, nationalist or not, will by definition oppose the embodiment of the evil his revolution is meant to replace. To deny that is to deny the integrity and seriousness of Marxist belief, and whatever we think of Marxists, we should not treat them as frivolous people.

American liberals may find it awkward or uncomfortable to accept the notion of their country as a counterrevolutionary society, but Marxists see that condition as axiomatic, and they are not about to change their minds simply because we announce our benevolent intentions toward them. The question is not whether we will be in conflict with Marxists—that, short of our acceptance of their view of things, remains a given—but what form that conflict will take and how it can be managed in a way that avoids either capitulation or endless, and finally catastrophic, military confrontation.

Which brings us back, long way around, to the problem of our choices in El Salvador. In point of fact, those choices are not nearly as agonizing as some would make them. In the first place, as already noted, El Salvador is in our near neighborhood, and we should not feel the need to apologize for wanting to prevent creation of another Cuba, another intimate Soviet friend, so close to our borders.

Secondly, the current regime there came into power by way of free elections in March, 1982 in which a substantial majority of the people participated. That government, in particular its military forces, has engaged in terrible violations of human rights—violations that must not be minimized—but it is not a government imposed on the people by an unrepresentative oligarchy. And new elections are scheduled for later this year, elections open to all willing to abide by democratic rules. El Salvador's past is sordid, but events are moving in the right direction.

By the same token, there is not in El Salvador as there has been elsewhere evidence that the guerilla revolutionary forces enjoy widespread public support. They lack a political base. If we hesitate to oppose Marxist revolutionaries in such circumstances, one wonders if we would oppose them anywhere. And it cannot be emphasized too strongly that such opposition would further not only our own interests but those of the people of El Salvador: on the basis of the historical record, a Marxist-Leninist regime would bring to that country not the progress and liberation it promises (and that some sentimental liberals still will themselves to believe in) but a collectivist tyranny whose manner of rule might range, in Irving Kristol's words, "from the hideous to the merely squalid." It is worth remembering as well that Marxist regimes, once installed, stay in place unless overthrown by force; they do not, as may be the case with authoritarian regimes of the Right, evolve in the direction of democracy.

Politics is choice, and sometimes the best we can choose is the lesser evil. In El Salvador that choice, while not pleasant, should not be all that difficult either. What is being suggested, after all, is not deployment of American troops, but provision of money and supplies. Our handful of military advisors there hardly prefigures the making of a quagmire. There is no necessary Vietnam analogy. One cannot imagine an American administration with a political death wish so strong as to commit large-scale American forces. All we are asked to do at the moment is not pull the plug on a regime that, for all its sorry record, shows promise of improvement (especially if we use our influence to nudge it in the direction of reform and respect for human decency) and whose only existing alternative is its best recommendation. If we cannot manage so minimal an effort, then those who worry about a national failure of will have a better case than most of us had imagined.

The Reality of E.T.

Meanings and Misunderstandings

Mark R. Schwehn

I

The extraordinary popularity of the film *E.T.* has already begun to interfere with our critical understanding of it. The first movie reviews were, it is true, uniformly favorable. But then *E.T.* became, in eight months, the largest-grossing motion picture of all time, surpassing even such recent box office bonanzas as *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark.* The critics then began to have second thoughts: later reviews of *E.T.* have been less and less positive.

In the meantime, cultural commentators have sought to account for the film's popularity by suggesting that *E.T.* is a paean to suburban living, a kind of extra-terrestrial benediction upon the American dream. Noting the film's frequent allusions to old Walt Disney favorites like *Peter Pan* and to the 1939 classic *Wizard of Oz*, these commentators have considered *E.T.* nothing more than a pastiche of traditional children's fantasy films. Some Lutheran viewers have offered more subtle interpretations. They have noticed, for example, that *E.T.* alludes more to St. Matthew than it does to Walt Disney. But they have therefore been disturbed by the fanciful and comic tone of the film. After all, the Jesus story is serious business.

All of these people are mistaken. Movie critics who think that if something is very popular then it cannot be very good need to be reminded of Shakespeare. Cultural commentators who think that if works allude to tradition then they must themselves be traditional works need to be reminded of James Joyce. And Lutherans who think that if a work is comic then it cannot be serious, much less Christian, need to be reminded of Luther. By "theology of the cross" Luther did not mean "theology of the disgruntled." And he would have been the first to insist that the Jesus story is finally a very serious divine comedy. In sum, contrary to the opinions of all of these people, *E.T.* is very good, very modern, and very serious.

Mark R. Schwehn *currently teaches at the University of Chicago. Next fall he will join the faculty of Christ College at Valparaiso University. His most recent contribution to* The Cresset, *"Of Virtue and Honorary Degrees," appeared last December.*

II

It is not difficult to see how some of the critics and commentators may have been misled. The emotional power of *E.T.* comes from its almost perfectly conventional plot structure. The comic action of the film moves from abandonment and alienation to reunion and social harmony. At the very beginning of the film, E.T.'s fellow extra-terrestrials must abandon him (her? it?) on earth in order to escape from several NASA agents. But E.T., as it happens, *can* go home again, thanks to the loyalty, the love, and the assistance of a ten-year-old boy named, appropriately enough, *Elliot*t. Elliott has also been abandoned in various ways at the beginning of the film. But, thanks to E.T.'s miraculous presence, Elliott obtains a new father, reconciles with his siblings, and wins the admiration of his cynical neighborhood cronies. Elliott can find his way home again also.

As E.T. and Elliott seek their respective homes, the bond between them deepens to the point that their metabolic functions become perfectly synchronized. The initial link between them is merely circumstantial: both are abandoned outsiders. Soon, however, they attain a state of empathetic symbiosis. E.T. and Elliott feel one another's feelings. Together they surmount the obstacles that threaten to prevent their respective re-integrations into idealized societies. Finally, the two become one in spirit. The film closes with what Northrop Frye called the classic last action of film comedies, an ending "symbolized by a closing embrace." The embrace between Elliott and E.T., however, does not suggest a physical consummation between two lovers offstage. Rather, it precedes a physical parting of the ways, even as it signifies an inner spiritual union. This comic resolution has cosmic dimensions.

Is this the stuff of modernism? One would think not, except for one striking fact. This film insists that E.T./Elliott's story is not an imitation of life but an imitation of art. By this I do not mean merely that *E.T.* constantly alludes to other fictions. I do mean that the film is quite self-consciously precise about the artistic patterns that inform it. During one scene, E.T. switches a television set from channel to channel. The three TV programs that he inadvertently selects represent, in order of increasing importance, the genres that shape the action of the film-cartoon farce, science-fiction fantasy, and romantic comedy.

As if to emphasize the point that life imitates art, the

images that E.T. sees on the television screen directly influence Elliott's behavior at school. And this is the *only* time in the film when Elliott is affected by E.T.'s *perceptions*. Elliott ordinarily feels what E.T. feels—fear, sorrow, fatigue, pain, and love. On this one occasion, however, Elliott acts out what E.T. visualizes. Since E.T. is visualizing slices of art, not slices of life, Elliott's action is an imitation of an imitation. In brief, *E.T.* is a modernist film, because it honors what is perhaps *the* modernist convention: it calls attention to the prevalence of convention by, among other things, flaunting its own conventionality.

Romantic comedies and comic romances have, of course, dramatized the interfusion of convention and nature, the ideal and the real, the imaginary and the actual, long before the twentieth century. But for premodern comedies, *the* paradigm of convention has typically been some art form, especially dramatic poetry and the dance. "All the world's a stage," says Jaques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It,* thereby supplying those social scientists who have sought to interpret most public action in dramatic terms with a kind of *idée fixe.* Contemporary cinema provides plenty of instances of this conception of life-as-convention and convention-as-art, e.g. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and the recent favorite romantic comedy *Tootsie.*

Though *E.T.* is also self-consciously *art*istic, its principal paradigm of convention is the game, not the art work. When we first see Elliott, he is being excluded by his brother and his friends from a game that they are playing. When Elliott asks to play, one of the older boys rebukes him: "You can't just enter this universe in the middle!" Thus, both Elliott and E.T. are not simply alienated: in a sense, they are both aliens. All of the children in the film constantly introduce phrases borrowed from their more formalized games into ordinary discourse. Elliott will not tell his brother about E.T. until the older boy swears that Elliott "has ultimate power." And when the skeptical neighborhood boys first see E.T. and come to believe in him, the whole scene takes place on a playground. One might say that the whole film is grounded, not primarily in art, but in play. Or, to put the matter a bit differently, the philosophical presences behind *E.T.* are not Plato and Aristotle but Wittgenstein and Austin.

III

People do not need to know about, much less read, either Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* or J. L. Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* in order to understand and enjoy *E.T.* We *do* need a philosopher like Austin to show us the many distinct uses that the word "real" has in ordinary language and to explain the philosophical significance of these distinctions. Indeed, Austin's witty analysis of the differences among the meanings of real as opposed to artificial (real ducks, not decoys), real as opposed to insubstantial (real oases, not mirages), and real as opposed to inferior (real beer, not the 3.2 stuff) supplies philosophical commentary that is ideally suited (as opposed to really suited?) to *E.T.* We do not need Austin, however, to show us how to use words like "real" in our many different but similarly conventional language games. That's child's play. And *E.T.,* not *Sense and Sensibilia,* shows us how easily children play the difficult and serious games of human life.

Consider Elliott's attempt to educate E.T. On the morning after E.T. and Elliott have found one another, Elliott tries to orient his alien friend to the cultural world around him. "This," says Elliott as he picks up a crumpled can of Coca-Cola, "is food . . . Coke . . . you drink it." Then Elliott shows E.T. an aquarium. "These are fish," Elliott explains. "The fish eat the food (here he sprinkles fish food into the tank), and the shark eats the fish (here he stirs an artificial shark on a stick into the water), but nothing eats the shark." After showing E.T. a series of mock battles between toy soldiers, some of which represent "real" warriors and some of which represent fictional ones, Elliott indicates a large metal peanut. "This-is-a-peanut-and-you-eat-peanuts-but-you-do-not-eat-this-peanut-because-this-peanut-is-a-bank-and-you-put-money-into-it." Finally, Elliott picks up a model car. "This is a car. You travel around in it." Throughout this orientation session, E.T. looks on with wide, attentive, but utterly uncomprehending eyes. When Elliott is finished teaching, E.T. shows how much he has learned by trying to eat the model car.

Even though Elliott has said, "This is a car. You travel around in it," he would never "really" attempt to drive the model car around the block. Nor would he try to eat the empty can, even if someone were to tell him what he tells E.T. while pointing to it—"This is food." Elliott is a child of civilization, not nature. He has long since mastered that complicated network of conventions that constitutes any and all culture. Indeed, he is almost suffocated by the paraphernalia of that most conventional of all American environments, the suburb. As such, this ten-year-old suburban veteran can move easily from one convention to another with no help at all from the likes of J. L. Austin.

E.T., on the other hand, cannot possibly grasp the meaning of Elliott's initial teachings, regardless of how intelligent the alien might be. We laugh at E.T.'s mistakes, because through them we discover how unintelligible our most routine practices must be to an outsider. Some of the funniest moments in modern American films involve E.T.-like mistakes. In Woody Allen's

E.T.'s last words should remind us of Jesus' last words to his disciples, and such similarities between E.T. and Jesus have led some to think that* E.T. *is a kind of Christian allegory.

What's Up Tiger Lily?, for example, a group of good guys plans to invade the bad guy's houseboat in order to recover the secret egg-salad recipe. One of them pulls out a blueprint of the houseboat and says, "All right, this is Wing Fat's house." To which another one replies, "You mean he lives right here on this piece of paper?"

E.T. is bound to make mistakes like these, because he apparently came to earth to study nature. As the early shots of the interior of E.T.'s spacecraft make clear, he and his fellow extra-terrestrials are on some sort of interstellar plant-collecting expedition. E.T. is therefore wholly unprepared to understand Elliott's culture. He and Elliott do not share one another's thoughts, because they *could not* share such things. Concepts and meanings depend upon cultural contexts; feelings presumably do not.

E.T. is not the only creature in the film who is comically confused about cultural "realities." Immediately after Elliott's friends first see E.T., Elliott informs them that E.T. needs them and their bikes to transport him to a nearby spaceship. "Well," queries one of the boys, still awestruck by E.T.'s alien appearance, "why doesn't he just beam up?" Elliott answers him abruptly: "This is reality, Gregg." This is one of the funniest moments in the film, and it is worth asking why. Gregg, it would seem, has always misunderstood *Star Trek*, the famous TV series in which characters like Mr. Spock and Captain Kirk travel to and from the starship Enterprise *via* a transporter beam that decomposes their molecular structures and then recomposes them at their desired destinations. Gregg has always thought of *Star Trek* as a kind of documentary, the sort of program that informs viewers about how creatures in technologically advanced societies (including presumably all extra-terrestrial societies) actually travel about. The audience sees Gregg's mistake and hence accepts Elliott's rebuke. But the audience cannot "really" accept Elliott's rebuke unless they, in some sense, make the same mistake about *E.T.* that Gregg makes about *Star Trek*. Thus, we laugh about Gregg, with Elliott, and at ourselves.

The last laugh of this sort might very well be on the movie itself, and on the culture from which it arose. There is one very nice scene in the film when Elliott's mother mistakes E.T. for one of her children's many stuffed animals. By now there must be a dozen varieties of stuffed E.T. dolls available to children in the U.S. But which of these is the authorized variety? How can we tell a "real" E.T. doll from a counterfeit E.T. doll? Where are you, J. L. Austin, now that we "really" need you? Nor is this all. The Atari people have proven to be the best movie critics. Apparently noting the importance of both television images and children's games to the meaning of the film *E.T.*, they were quick to manufacture an E.T. video game. Hegel was right. Cultural history does possess an inner logic of its own. Life is the continuation of philosophy by other meanings.

IV

The fine humor of *E.T.* should not blind us to the film's religious seriousness. Much of the action takes place during Halloween, the hallowed evening. Several characters, upon seeing E.T. for the first time, exclaim, "Oh my God!" Misty cinematography gives the whole film an aura of enchantment, magic, and wonder. *E.T.* may or may not be a religious film, but it surely intends to show us something important about religion. In particular, it seeks to help us understand revealing truths about religious language, religious stories, and religious belief.

The film's teaching about religious language begins at the end of the "education of E.T." scene, a sequence that has swiftly dramatized the problematic relationship between language and "reality." After E.T. tries to eat the model car, Elliott realizes that his new-found friend must be hungry. He then speaks the most important words in the film. We will hear these same words two more times before the film is over. Just before he leaves the bedroom to get E.T. something to eat, Elliott says to him, "Stay! I'll be right here." The context of the imperative "Stay!" makes it clear that Elliott is addressing E.T. rather like he would address the family dog. He means simply, "You remain in the bedroom. I'll be in the kitchen nearby."

The next time we hear these words, E.T. is dying. "Stay," he tells Elliott. "I'll be right here," Elliott replies. The words are the same, but they now bespeak matters of life and death. E.T. does not want Elliott to follow him into death. Elliott in turn wants to assure E.T. of his continued presence. Finally, just before E.T.'s spacecraft ascends into the heavens, Elliott pleads with him to remain on earth. "Stay," he asks. Then, by way of response and by way of consolation, E.T. promises his friend, pointing as he does so to Elliott's forehead, "I'll be right here." The gesture, the expression, the speaker, the context, the composition of the scene: all of these things make clear that these words now have religious significance. The vocabulary, even the phrasing, is the same as it was during the two previous scenes, but we are now witnessing a different language game. Even so, we do not doubt for a moment that E.T.'s promise to Elliott is as true as Elliott's earlier promises to E.T.

E.T.'s last words should remind us of Jesus' last words to his disciples, and such similarities between E.T. and Jesus have led some to think that *E.T.* is a kind of Christian allegory. It is true that E.T.'s "I'll be right here" means something very much like Jesus' "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." It is

E.T. lives all right—in the film and in the minds of millions of human beings. But E.T. does not live eternally, and he will not return to judge both the quick and the dead.

also true that, like St. Matthew's Jesus, E.T. performs healing miracles, dies, rises from the dead, and ascends into the heavens. Nevertheless, *E.T.* is decidedly not an updated version of Matthew's gospel. E.T. is unlike Matthew's Jesus in many more ways than he is like Him. E.T. teaches nothing, and he proclaims nothing. He arrives on earth amidst a crowd of extra-terrestrials like himself. In some ways E.T. is more like Peter Pan: he makes children fly. In other ways, he is more like one of Milton's good angels: he fails to distinguish between appearance and reality (as when he tries to heal Elliott's brother's fake wound).

What then is the point of these multiple and diverse allusions? They form no coherent pattern. They do, however, indicate family resemblances among disparate things, resemblances that we might not otherwise notice. In some respects religious narratives are like certain classic fantasies. And these in turn and in other respects are like children's games, like Halloween rituals, like ordinary life.

These convergent "sub-universes," as William James called them—the world of sense experience, the world of abstract truths, the world of illusions, the world of physical things as science understands them, and the world of the supernatural—collectively inform what James called our "sense of reality." It is therefore preposterous to criticize *E.T.*, as some have done, for intermingling "fantasy" with "reality." To register such a criticism is to miss the point of the film. It is rather like criticizing Elliott for stirring in an artificial fish with the real ones.

We are now getting close to an account of why *E.T.* has been and will be such an incredibly popular film. *E.T.* has, of course, renewed our sense of hope. But all really good comedies, fantastic or not, do that much. This film has done something much more important: it has justified hopefulness. Or, to put the same point in terms that James would have used, *E.T.* has secured our right to believe. In doing so, the film has continued a project that philosophers as otherwise diverse as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Austin, and James himself have shared.

It should go without saying that *E.T.* does not legitimate religious hope through philosophical argumentation. There is no attack upon Descartes here, no systematic critique of the correspondence theory of truth, no detailed account of the relationship between language and reality. There is instead a fluent weaving together of childhood fears, convenient fictions, formative stories, everyday cultural practices, and ordinary language games. It is finally the comedy that moves us, but along the way we are shown, not told, that everything we do and think and believe is *in some sense* conventional. And if everything human is in some sense conventional, then everything human is *in some sense* real. As we watch E.T. and Elliott finding home again, our own sense of reality becomes complicated and enlarged. We finally enjoy becoming reconciled with our own deepest longings.

E.T. might well secure our right to believe, but it does not tell us whether we should believe, nor does it tell us in what or in whom we should hope. Everything may be conventional, but not all conventions are the same. Thus, we have the mistakes that provide the humor in *E.T.* Thus too, we have a host of comic or tragic fictional characters, ranging from Don Quixote to Madame Bovary, who are remembered for their tendency to mistake one convention for another one. It would make no sense here, in other words, to believe *in* E.T. To do so would be rather like thinking that *E.T.* is a documentary of American suburban life. E.T. lives all right—in the film and in the minds of millions of human beings. But E.T. does not live eternally, and he will not return to judge both the quick and the dead. The E.T. of *E.T.* is just the title character in a comic fantasy film. This tautology is well worth remembering. As for the Christ revealed in Matthew's gospel, well . . . That's reality, Gregg.

Where Two or Three

Two women stood disputing in the rain
for ownership of something ripping green
between them, while St. Chrysostom's bells
were tolling noon and traffic shrilled
and few of us who stopped to watch
linked umbrellas publicly.
Without much
show we cheered the underdog (smaller, older,
palsied, wearing proper violets on her
hat) with body english for awhile, until
the other's fuschia boot resolved it all.

She fell as formlessly as sand against
the curb, despising us with cries spent
vainly on the air we huddled from
like Virtues calcified, like manikins

bivouacing frozenly beneath a canopy
of tears
and might have died from apathy
but for the boy's deserting us at last,
his Raphael eyes still hoping, fearless
as he lifted her.

Lois Reiner

Putting On One's Neighbor

A Reading of Luther on Vocation

Frederick A. Niedner

(Editor's Note: The following essays by Professors Niedner and Eifrig were originally prepared as working papers for the conference on "Luther and the Laity" held at Valparaiso University, April 24-27, 1983.)

Rituals of commemoration attendant to the observance of anniversaries tend to encourage hyperbole. Thus, one should not be surprised in this 500th anniversary year of Luther's birth to hear the reformer lionized with words like those of biographer A. G. Dickens, who sized up Luther's accomplishment as "the propounding and setting forth with demonic energy a system of ideas which tears a whole civilization asunder and alters the course of western history."[1] Whether Luther tore civilization asunder by the power of his ideas is debatable. That Luther and his ideas changed civilization is undeniable, however, and one of the most significant things Luther altered was the understanding which individual human beings have concerning their work and its meaning.

It is a commonplace to credit Luther and Calvin with having generated what today is called the "Protestant Work Ethic," something Lance Morrow summarized in a *Time* essay as a scheme in which "the worker collaborates with God to do the work of the universe, the grand design."[2] Whether Calvin would recognize his contribution to the understanding of work in that summary is questionable. Calvin's most distinctive teaching on the subject of work suggested that the success which resulted from hard, faithful working at one's vocation was a sign of one's place among the elect. The American version of the Protestant Work Ethic has traditionally had a Calvinist tone to it. For example, President Reagan's 1982 Thanksgiving Day Proclamation claims unashamedly that the great abundance produced and enjoyed by the American people is a sure sign of God's favor and of the special role the United States plays in the divine scheme of things.

Luther, on the other hand, likely would accept Morrow's description as a summary of his teaching and preaching on the subject of vocation. In order to understand the summary as it applies to Luther's teaching, however, one must be aware of the ideas concerning human work which Luther opposed as well as the theological basis upon which he rested the concept of vocation which he so carefully and deliberately nurtured and disseminated.[3]

Success as Sign of God's Approval

Luther opposed the idea that the success of one's labors was a sign of God's approval. Neither did Luther accept the teaching of the medieval church that through one's work a person earned an identity and a place among the saved. He also rejected the conception of work as the method by which one paid off the debt of gratitude owed for salvation. Finally, Luther was fundamentally opposed to the notion that the call to holy orders or to a monastery was in some way a higher calling than that to non-ecclesiastical vocations. In Luther's opinion, all callings were of equal significance and importance to God.

On the positive side, one of Luther's clearest treatments on the subject of vocation is in the second portion of his *Treatise on Christian Liberty.*[4] There, after explaining that because of the sufficiency of Christ's death and resurrection a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none, Luther goes on to explain that a Christian is also a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. In describing that dutiful service which characterizes the life of the Christian, Luther makes some rather sweeping statements about all human activity and work. The primary point of the argument is that a baptized Christian no longer lives for himself or herself, but lives rather for the sake of others. Every act becomes an act

[1] A. G. Dickens, *Martin Luther and the Reformation* (Mystic, Conn.: Lawrence Verry, Inc., 1967), p. 14.

[2] *Time*, May 11, 1981, p. 93.

[3] On the deliberateness of Luther as he set about the task of altering the whole concept of vocation, particularly through the medium of scripture translation involving the various words for work, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 204-211.

[4] *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Volume 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), pp. 327-377.

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There is, despite the necessary distinction of the two kingdoms, a need to take note of some links which join those kingdoms so as to allow a wholeness for the creatures who inhabit both of them.

of service to the neighbor. The work one does with the hands is not for the support of self but for the purpose of having what is necessary for assisting those in need. Even the care of one's own body is something one pays attention to so that one is more often capable of service than in need of being served.

What Luther appears to be saying in the *Treatise* is that the Christian becomes a medium or channel, as it were, for God to use in the work of bringing blessing to all humankind. In Luther's own words:

> See, according to this rule the good things we have from God should flow from one to the other and be common to all, so that everyone should "put on" his neighbor and so conduct himself toward him as if he himself were in the other's place. From Christ the good things have flowed and are flowing into us. He has so "put on" us and acted for us as if he had been what we are. From us they flow on to those who have need of them so that I should lay before God my faith and my righteousness that they may cover and intercede for the sins of my neighbor which I take upon myself and so labor and serve in them as if they were my very own. That is what Christ did for us.[5]

The Christian who "puts on" his or her neighbor like Christ has first "put on" the Christian lives in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love. The Christian does not live or act alone, nor can a Christian's work ever be viewed apart from the grand design of God.

Part of Luther's teaching on Christian vocation is the thesis that God continues his active involvement with the creation by means of human vocation. Indeed, the dignity of every calling is to be found in the fact that it represents a collaboration with God to do the work of the universe. Gustaf Wingren summarizes Luther on this point by citing a comment from the *Commentary on Genesis:* "God himself will milk cows through him whose vocation that is."[6] Elsewhere Luther describes the whole textile industry, from the shearing of the sheep all the way to the sewing of woolen clothing, as God's work of providing clothes for the naked.[7]

Wingren notes that something very important happens when God shows his love to humankind through his called ones, namely, "if we note properly how much good God bestows upon us, both through his direct creation and through all his created orders, we shall know the truth that he forgives sins."[8] The implication seems to be that the world can see in the love which flows from God through the baptized a trustworthiness on the part of God. God can be trusted to forgive sins.

The association of vocation with the forgiveness of sins is complex. Wingren hastens to say that forgiveness of sins belongs not to the earthly realm of creation but to the heavenly realm.[9] He would not allow the distinction between God's two kingdoms to become blurred. It is possible and necessary, however, to describe just how the forgiveness of sins, which is the work of the church and of the right hand of God, affects the Christian as he or she goes about the business of the world, operating under the left hand of God in creation. More specifically, there is, despite the necessary distinction of the two kingdoms, a need to take note of some links which join those kingdoms so as to allow a wholeness for the creatures who must inhabit both of them. What follows is an attempt to spell out what the life of a forgiven forgiver looks like when it is lived out as a response to God's calling, specifically as Luther conceived of calling.[10]

Called to Become One of the Chosen

The first call from God to any human being is the call to become one of the chosen. In the words of 1 Peter 2:9-10:

> You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people.

The name of the people into which one is so called is "church," in Greek *ekklesia*, from *klesis*, which means "call." The people of God, God's called ones, are always called for some purpose and work, even as Abraham and Sarah, the first of the called ones, were chosen for the work of bringing blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3).

What specifically is the work involved in being agents of God's merciful purpose in the called community known as the church? There are a number of descriptions of that work in the New Testament, but the dominant portrait is the action of forgiving sins. For example, in John 20:19-23 the risen Jesus commissions his gathered disciples for their new work: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you," says Jesus, and then after breathing on them the Holy Spirit he charges them to go out to forgive and retain sins. Jesus was sent for the forgiveness of sins and now the community gathered in his name is likewise commissioned.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 371.

[6] Gustaf Wingren, *The Christian's Calling: Luther on Vocation* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), p. 9.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] The remainder of this essay is a revised version of part of an essay by the author entitled "Vocation as the Situation for Moral Discernment," in *Promise and Faith*, Second Edition, edited by David G. Truemper (Valparaiso, Indiana: Valparaiso University Department of Theology, 1981), pp. 98-102.

No matter how important or menial it may seem to others, to the baptized person work is never "just a job." There is a vast difference between having a vocation and merely having a job.

How does one forgive sins? What is the nature of that work? It sometimes appears to be magic. It is easy to say, "Your sins are forgiven." It is not magic, however, and the work entailed in the vocation of a sin-forgiver is not easy or simple. For Jesus to forgive the sins of humankind required that he join humanity in all of its sinfulness, in its futile and selfish striving for value and identity. He was vulnerable flesh and blood. He ate and drank with sinners. He knew and shared their condition and died their death, justly condemned as a blasphemer. Such is the method of forgiveness.

Taking the Sinner's Burden on Oneself

If you wish to forgive a sinner you must befriend him, you make his burden your own, you put yourself into his position. You share the fate of the sinner so that the sin, which is the product of that selfish futility which formerly separated the sinner from the forgiver, no longer stands between you. You bear it together and are reconciled, and the burden of the sin can no longer separate you nor crush either of you. The sinner is called out of the darkness of selfish futility into the marvelous light of community and identity.

That is how Jesus Christ accomplished the forgiveness of sins, and that is also the way in which his called ones, the baptized of his church, forgive sins today. Their vocation is not magic. It is work. Those who have been called out of darkness are in a sense called back into it for the sake of those yet caught in the darkness or threatened by it. They are not called out of the world, never to look back, but are called instead for the sake of the very world out of which they have been called. The vocation of the baptized, therefore, is precisely that of their Lord: They are called to be friends of sinners, no more and no less. As Paul would say, the Christian, like his or her Lord, is called to be the very reconciling righteousness of God in action (2 Cor. 5:16-21).

What all of this means is that the activities that are part of vocation for forgiven forgivers are not confined to those which take place when the community known as the church is assembled. The vocation of the Christian extends to whatever role in which one finds oneself. Baptized children, parents, and spouses are the agents of compassion and blessing in their homes, as there is no burden, no darkness, no pain, no quirk, no sin which cannot be carried together and therefore kept from becoming a barrier which alienates and divorces. Husbands, wives, and children are called to be friends of sinners, especially of one another.

The vocation of the baptized also extends into the marketplace. No matter how important or menial it may seem to others, to the baptized person work is never "just a job." There is a vast difference between having a vocation and merely having a job. A job is done for pay, of course, and perhaps it is also done in such a way as to merit the approval of one's superiors in the pecking order of the marketplace. A job may even be done with a great deal of personal pride in the quality of the completed product or service. But that is not yet vocation.

What is otherwise only a job becomes vocation when it is consciously and compassionately done for the purchaser or recipient of the product or service, even if that person may never be known to the worker. That is, work is vocation when the worker puts himself or herself into the place of the consumer or client, some other sinner who, perhaps, needs the product of the other's labor for his or her own service to still other sinners. Vocation gives purpose to work and meaning to life. To have vocation is to be an agent of blessing in the world and to have the gift of servanthood. It is a gift shared by all who have been called out of the darkness and futility of mere self-preservation into a life of value, identity, and purpose.

The vocation of Christians affects not only how and for what purpose they do the work they have chosen to do; it affects the choice of work itself. Not every type of work or job could become genuine vocation for every individual, and baptized men and women must still choose between such things as marriage, being single, and various lines of work. The choices are not easy because there are so many options available to people today and because there are many voices besides God's which call to us. It is not always easy to distinguish genuine calling from the call of peer pressure, the call of the glands, the call of habit or addiction, or the call of self-preservation.

Frederick Buechner has pointed the way through the tangle of choices toward vocation as follows: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."[11] Work which makes no use of an individual's abilities, which is never the occasion of satisfaction, or which harms the worker, could never become for him or her a part of the gift of vocation. On the other hand, just because some occupation delights a person does not mean that the world full of sinners needs that work to be done, and work which does not serve the genuine need of fellow sinners is not part of true vocation. In the end, where one finds a task which is personally satisfying, challenging, interesting, or just plain fun, and which also allows one meaningfully to serve one's neighbor, there is a person's vocation.

For most people there is no one, single place of voca-

[11] Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 95.

No matter how obscure to the world, the life of the baptized is still the righteousness of God in action. It is still a light shining in the darkness of the world's overwhelming need.

tion. There are in fact many tasks in this world which might be found at the intersection of gladness and the world's need. There is no single occupation to which any individual is destined or which is "the will of God" for him or her any more than there is a single man or woman in the world who is somehow destined by God to be his or her spouse. Such a view would lead to a rather fearful search by individuals for the work and the spouse which is the will of God for them. Rather, the will of God is that men and women be befriended and called from the darkness, and it is that will for which Christians pray in the Our Father, asking that such befriending be done through the one praying. There are many potential mates and many potential occupations in which a man or woman may find the intersection of gladness and need which locates vocation, for there are many situations in which God's redeeming will is exercised through an individual Christian.

Shifting Intersections of Vocation

It is quite possible for the intersection of vocation to shift at various times in a person's life. When the gladness ceases or the world's need is altered, the place of vocation shifts, too, and new decisions must be made. At that point the baptized person must once again choose from among the many places and labors in which he or she can be the righteousness of God in action, God's gift to the world. Having once found true vocation in some place or work does not destine one to permanent service there, especially should the intersection of need and gladness shift.

There are many people who reach the end of a career and seem never to have found the intersection. They have experienced no gladness and could never see their labors as legitimate service to anyone. Christians are not exempt from the apparent failure to find vocation, and they also often find themselves in what they consider to be menial work. Does that mean that for some there is no vocation, that even God could not use certain lives for the work of blessing? Not really. To the extent that, despite God's calling and forgiveness, the Christian still lives in the darkness of the selfish futility of self-preservation which clings to human nature, the Christian still represents the world in its desperate need.

And the world in its despair does not always recognize the forgiveness of sins or the compassionate agent of blessing when it sees it or uses it. The man who looks at his watch for accurate time a hundred times a day may never once acknowledge the care, even the love, which some watchmaker, whom he will never see, had for him. The same may be said of the world's ignorance of other such agents of blessing, from corporation presidents to the people who clean rest rooms. Thus, even for the called one, one's own vocation may remain hidden in the darkness, unnoticed by the world and sometimes even by oneself.

But it is nevertheless vocation, collaboration in the grand design of blessing, just as surely as the work of Jesus Christ was true vocation. The world did not catch on to his true identity or service in the darkness, at least not until after his death. Christians likewise may live and even die for the sake of the world without the world's noticing. But the promise of the one who called us out of darkness, the one who is friend of sinners, is that even such a life is not wasted, nor is such a death died in vain. No matter how obscure to the world, the life of the baptized is still the righteousness of God in action. It is still a light shining in the darkness of the world's overwhelming need, for ultimately genuine vocation is a gift and not an accidental discovery or a prize at the end of a quest.

The Pine

When unfamiliar footsteps dragged the lane
and grackles fractured midnight, shrieking
hexes on the valley, when, in tandem
with a motor's idling came the cracking
twigs and voices swimming in slow-motion
through the mist
the pine—a yellow ocean
filtering your frantic kitchen light—
reared between our separate terrors like
Stoics linking arms on neutral ground.

When invasions doubled and night-sounds
grew more ominous, they swelled into a wall
absorbing curses primed by bargain wine
and burning wood and, finally, the calls—
the paralyzing rings from one enraged
by our unlikely sisterhood.
Had he gauged
that by the pine, thickening between us,
and noted only children represented
our respective houses with their zealous
tunneling, would he have been so threatened
by our differences?
Now that you've fled
to higher ground, and I to this unneighbored
land, what do we listen for on windless nights
when sweeter sounds invade our starless skies?

Lois Reiner

Called Back Into the Darkness

A Response to Frederick Niedner

Gail McGrew Eifrig

When I studied theology as an undergraduate, my professor told us that essential to being a Lutheran is the ability to distinguish between law and gospel. We practiced this skill for months, pericope by pericope, developing a sensitivity to law statements and gospel statements so acute that we could be set off like theological Geiger counters by a given text.

Working on these reflections I only gradually became aware of my fundamental difficulty with vocation as it is usually preached and taught by Lutherans: it is almost always law. Fred Niedner's essay identifies quite clearly a gospel proclamation connected with vocation; what could be more centrally the gospel than to be called back into darkness for the sake of those who still dwell in its gloom? He says that a job is merely one locale for vocation to operate in, a "collaboration in the grand design of blessing" and as such is one of the many ways in which God allows the baptized to be a part of "the righteousness of God in action."

This is thrilling, and it may indeed be what Luther meant when he described vocation. But Lutheranism (by which I mean to designate the frail and essentially human vessel in which the truths of the doctrine are usually conveyed) has often meant and said something else. It has been for me the curb which says I ought not to do something, which convicts me with having made the wrong choices. When the term vocation is used, it pins me firmly into the ambiguity of conflicting obligations which is my own cross.

* * *

What I hear from my own history is a form of this Luther: Therefore every Christian should make it his sole purpose faithfully to serve God in the sphere into which God has placed him and to carry out whatever he has been commanded to do. Problems in this formulation abound: Into what sphere can I be said to have been placed? My life is a set of concentric spheres, if anything, a number of duties, roles, and tasks which demand contradictory responses. How long is one to serve faithfully when situations and spheres change? Is it unfaithful to leave one work and take up another? Is it serving faithfully to attempt to add another kind of work to the one first attempted?

* * *

Lutheran lay people almost always hear the word "vocation" to mean a church job, even if they instantly translate it into a broader meaning. Most preaching on the subject is designed at one level to address that misunderstanding and correct it. Nonetheless, the preaching is always being done by someone we in the pews know to have what we think of as a *real* vocation, so the message of the sermon is multiple at best. "You too," we hear, "selling insurance, washing cars, teaching algebra, doing laundry, have an authentic vocation." But we only partly hear this, because the source of the message confirms, by his very existence, its contradiction. Luther may indeed mean that all callings are of equal significance to God, but many Lutherans, I suspect, don't believe it.

* * *

Buechner's wonderful sentence is poetically satisfying, but it fails to provide any lasting nourishment. Who would not want to be where "deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet"? But most people spend most of their time working at jobs that keep them alive, and for most of them, being a source of blessing in your work seems scarcely relevant, may even be a joke.

Our best efforts are often corrupted by the marketplace itself; the countergirl at McDonald's may wish to be a blessing to you, but her smile is required, like the rest of her uniform. Part of her job is to sell you a dessert that you don't want or need, and you therefore meet her cheery smile and solicitous offerings with suspicion and resistance. What has then happened to the possibility for good interchange between human beings placed in these spheres by a God who wants cooperation in the great blessing of the world?

I assume that Luther's words would mean to the countergirl that she serves God best by being the best saleswoman she can be. If she suspects that there is something wrong about the whole process, something inherently false in smiling at people in order to get them to spend more money, what does the common teaching on vocation have to say to her? Change jobs?

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Since women know that to be a wife and mother is a vocation (Luther says so; it is a legitimate way of serving God faithfully) we find ourselves uneasy when we go into real estate or learn riveting.

Forget your doubts and exceed your quota? Serve the burgers but don't try to sell desserts? Where does the doctrine offer forgiveness for the wrongs one commits in trying to work well?

* * *

I have never heard a sermon in which vocation was identified with one's non-job activity, with the exception of the vocation of housewife. Our society seems to make it easier for men to take their job vocation with more seriousness than their vocation as father, husband, or friend. The term "seriousness" needs some explication; I do not mean by it that Lutheran men are careless or indifferent about their roles as husbands and fathers. But in my experience most know better how to serve faithfully in the sphere of teacher, lawyer, farmer, pastor, insurance salesman than in their non-work roles. In terms of priorities of time and energy, most would feel uneasy, dishonest, even corrupt for neglecting a duty connected with their work to engage in a duty necessitated by their vocation as forgiven forgiver in the context of family or friend.

The teaching on vocation has never been strong enough to teach most laymen how to distinguish which of the calls upon his energies should be listened to. Graphing the intersections of the deep gladness of your own heart and the world's hunger can result in any number of possible points on which one sees the need to expend energy. But "doing with your might" has generally been restricted to the segment of one's life with which one is professionally identified. "What are you?" "I'm a teacher," "I'm with a brokerage firm," "I pump gas." The Lutheran layman can say each of these things with a conviction—brought about by some level of teaching—that he is indeed serving God and his fellowmen in that capacity. But whether he is capable of saying "I'm a forgiver, a father, a friend of sinners" with the same conviction is doubtful.

* * *

Men have been curiously detached from the working mother controversy, considering that most fathers are in the same dilemma regarding their conflicting vocations. A woman who is a wife and mother has a vocation, and, if she's a well-trained Lutheran, she knows it. When she adds to that vocation another one, she experiences a conflict not different from the one her husband may be engaged in, except that she recognizes it every day, every hour. Every call upon her time and energy in one sphere hinders her faithful service in the other. Staying later in the afternoon to grade papers well (a plus for teacher vocation) means less time to help with homework and piano lessons (a minus in the mother vocation.)

One is encouraged in the popular press to create beautifully elaborate algebraic formulae to account for one's time; quality time with children has become a conscience-salving expression for many a working mother. But for women there is a persistent sense of doubt about who has done the placing, particularly in the "second" sphere. Since we know that to be a wife and mother is a vocation (Luther says so; it is a legitimate way of serving God faithfully) we find ourselves uneasy when we enter a real estate agency or learn riveting. It seems to us that perhaps we have done the placing there, and that it would be easier for us to "have as our sole purpose to serve God faithfully in the sphere into which God has placed us" if only we could know better which one it was.

* * *

Finally, another piece of personal history. Many years ago I was hospitalized late one night with a miscarriage. My husband took me to the hospital, admitted me, sat in the room with me for an hour or so of what looked to be a long process. Finally, weary and obviously grieving for me and the whole sad business, he said he simply had to go home to sleep—to be ready to teach the next morning. And I said, "Of course," really believing that his work, which we both know to be a vocation, required his presence in the classroom next day.

I told him to go, I believed that his work should take precedence over my need of him, and yet deep within me I resented that departure for years. Part of me knew it was a desertion, knew that any proper understanding of vocation would not have left me alone that night during the long and bitter experience of raw loss. But another, more conscious part of me refused even to acknowledge the legitimacy of my need to be husbanded. The fact that he, loving and caring about me, still felt that his duties as teacher had priority, was as much a matter of my faith as his. I suspect that I have not yet finished placing blame for the experience; I have merely shifted it to the clergy who had so thoroughly taught us how to regard the relation between our work and our lives.

If we misunderstood them, how did such a misunderstanding come about? Is there yet a possibility of finding, within the Lutheran teaching on vocation, some means for insuring that our responses will be to the greatest need, wherever it appears? And beyond that, can we use a doctrine of vocation to proclaim grace for the times when we fail, as human beings must, to measure correctly that urgent yet elusive intersection of heart's gladness and world's hunger?

A Campus Kind of Love

Dot Nuechterlein

One day when I had lots of better things to do but couldn't bear to tackle any of them, I counted the names of my present and previous students in the university directory. As is typical of many beginning teachers, I have had unusually large classes in the five semesters I have held my present position. As a result, one out of every eight students walking around my campus has sat in one of my classes—and since I believe in person-centered education, most of them have sat in my office and talked, as well. In addition, I am presently serving as an informal counselor in two freshman dormitories (one for males, one for females) in our school's Residential Ministry program.

In other words, I know—and talk to—a lot of students. We discuss many topics, from academics to sports to the state of the "real world" and what's in store for them when they hit the streets. But the thing is, there is a common theme underlying many of these conversations. Sooner or later we often get around to the really important stuff—personal relationships.

Not long ago a woman who graduated roughly twenty years ago spent a weekend on campus. After observing the current crop of students in their natural habitat, she said to me: "I doubt if I could make it if I had gone to college now; they are all so mature and self-assured these days."

Well, I am not so sure about that. Perhaps they do a better job of appearing confident to the casual observer than my friend recalls was true of her generation. But underneath that steady, brave front often beats a lonely, insecure heart. What matters most in life to many individuals, establishing mutually satisfying bonds with other human beings, is no easier today than it has ever been.

In truth, it may be more difficult. Despite the common supposition that today's kids are more casual about life in general and are therefore less uptight about their dealings with one another, I see anxiety and a sort of solitary sadness in many of the young adults I encounter. And it may be that their very casualness is partly responsible for this: for if we are blasé about our need for ties to others, they may well resist establishing ties with us. Putting an arm around someone is one thing, but touching souls is another altogether. Others have written of the restlessness and rootlessness of our era; it is difficult to conceive of long-term durable associations when everything and everybody seems to be in transition.

Yet the human heart longs for permanence. Psychologist Orrin Klapp has pointed out that everyone needs to be "special" to someone else; when others begin to view us as interchangeable parts, we lose our sense of significance. But have you listened to any pop/rock/country music lately? There is an almost unutterable yearning found in some of these songs for links and feelings that will last forever, a yearning made poignant by the realization expressed in others that commitments fade, lovers cheat or simply lose interest, and you can't really count on anyone's promises, not even your own. ("Deep in my soul I feel so lonely. . . . We've got tonight, who needs tomorrow?" is the lament of one might-as-well-live-for-the-present current hit song.)

Which brings us to sex. Once upon a time the cultural ideal was that a couple should experience love, marriage, and sex in roughly that order. People fooled around a good bit outside of marriage, as we know from the history of illegitimacy and prostitution, but at least everyone knew what the ground rules called for. Then social attitudes became more aligned with actual practice, and the progression accepted in many quarters seemed to be love, then sex, and then marriage. But today the message that comes through loud and clear from much of our popular culture turns everything inside out: have sex, then maybe fall in love, and then perhaps, remotely, try marriage, which may also turn out to be temporary. Thus, rather than building toward the most personal relationship possible between two beings, the hasty joining of bodies bypasses heart and soul and becomes an ultimately impersonal act with nowhere to go. Sex, as Erich Fromm puts it, "creates for the moment the illusion of union, yet without love this 'union' leaves strangers as far apart as they were before."

It is no wonder that many individuals, faced with an inherent desire for meaningful connections to others yet surrounded by an environment which guarantees the connections while destroying the chance for meaning, become fearful and build barriers behind which to hide their vulnerable selves. I think this happens to many people today, but it is especially true of the immature. For we are social beings, and the expectations of others exert powerful pressures upon us to conform to their standards. Only with maturity—at whatever age it comes—do we seem to learn how to fight back and to live out our own values, as the opinions of others be-

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God's love for us is the basis of human love, but that love becomes real for most of us in childhood as our parents demonstrate care, affection, and tenderness to us.

come somewhat balanced by the growth of self-direction.

In contemplating how relationships are formed and evolve it can be helpful to review theories about the development of the Self of an individual. According to the social philosophy of George Herbert Mead, we gain a self-concept, or an identity, through the process of interaction with others. As we see ourselves reflected in the responses they make to us from childhood onward, we come to experience ourselves as objects, and with a sense almost of detachment we can modify or create parts of our own personalities. The "generalized other" serves as the measuring stick against which we chart both our likenesses to and our differences from the rest of humanity.

The problem is that deep down in some secret spot, each of us knows: "I am not really what I appear to be." A few lone souls come to terms with the dilemma by deliberately separating themselves from the tyranny of group expectations; they try to present themselves to the outside as they think themselves to be on the inside. The price often paid for this strategy is alienation from much of the human race, never fitting in comfortably with others. Most people, however, choose the other route—they attempt to retain their connections with others by living double lives. They present an acceptably conformist face to the world while risking self-alienation within.

The only way to resolve the crisis fully for either type is to find someone who will come to see past the pose of non-conformity, or who will learn the secrets of the hidden Self, and will still be able to say: "I know what you really are, and I like/accept/love you anyway."

But, we think, how can I find anyone who will care about the true me when I'm not so sure I even like myself all that much? And, if I do manage to discover a likely candidate, how can I dare reveal my not-so-lovable self when it will probably turn the other person off, and I will be hurt on top of being lonely, which is much worse?

The issue is further complicated by the fact that everyone else is going through the same process; the person who might be accepting also needs to be accepted. So in the search to find, we must also seek to *be*; but since each of us is intrinsically self-centered the task is nearly beyond comprehension. How much safer it is to stay in back of the barricades.

Here comes a big truism—somebody has to break through the barriers and love first. For, as everyone knows, we learn to love and accept others by being loved and accepted. God's love for us is, of course, the basis of human love, but it becomes real for most of us in childhood as our parents demonstrate care, affection, tenderness, and all sorts of other good things to us.

However, I am coming to the conviction that the experience of parental love (and God's grace, as well) does not always serve as a model for other kinds of interpersonal relationships. Most parent-child bonds are so interfused with questions of discipline and training and authority and dependence/independence that children come to think of this as something wholly other than the kind they want to enjoy with special persons.

Defining Love by Classification

They are not entirely wrong, of course, for there are differing elements in love, or different types of love, depending on the individuals and situations involved. In sociology classes we study classifications and definitions of love. One system, the SAMPLE Love Profile, identifies these six:

*s*torge (companionate love, friendship)
*a*gape (altruistic love, unselfishness)
*m*ania (obsessive love, jealousy)
*p*ragma (practical love, sensibility)
*l*udus (playful love, no commitment)
*e*ros (romantic love, sensuality)

Our culture emphsizes that last one, romantic love. In contrast, researchers in love and marriage find that the longest lasting, most reciprocally fulfilling relationships tend to be those based on a combination of feelings, stressing storge, agape, and perhaps pragma, with or without eros. It thus may be that instead of hunting frantically for "love," individuals would be well-advised to create other types of meaningful affiliations, some of which may matter always, and a few of which might become the prelude to permanent commitments.

It is my belief, therefore, that the best way to attain full-grown, long-term relationships is to practice developing what might be termed fervent friendships. If more of us could broaden our definitions of love to accentuate caring, consideration, and kindness, rather than stressing sensuality and sexuality, the "hunger for human relatedness" some have written of could have a better chance of successful gratification. Certainly it would be easier to identify role models for such relationships, as they could take place with any two persons, regardless of age, sex, or other characteristics.

Three principles are essential to the unfolding of the intensive ties between individuals that become fervent friendships. The first is mutuality: both persons must want a relationship to grow for it to come about. While one-sided love is possible (and may even be frequent), it takes two to tango to the tune of camaraderie. If one reaches out and the other responds weakly or turns away, reciprocity is unobtainable, unless further overtures are answered more positively.

The second prerequisite to such friendship is an attitude of equality. No matter how different from one an-

other the pair may be, they must be able to perceive one another as being on the same level, or at least of comparable value. Persons who are not equivalent may indeed feel friendly toward one another, but bilateral emotion-based bonds will not grow in the absence of an egalitarian spirit.

Humans as Meaning-Seeking Beings

Finally, and most importantly, progressive self-revelation on the part of both participants is fundamental to the formation of such a relationship. G. H. Mead reminds us that humans are meaning-seeking beings; yet meaning comes only through the social process, as we share with others the definitions, connotations, and significance of our words and actions. We seek to understand and to be understood—that is the basis of our humanity, that which separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom. We do that most fully, he says, we become our most true selves, in the company of those who permit us to disclose the inner core of our being. And this sharing between two former strangers can be what Fromm describes as one of the most exhilarating, most exciting experiences in life. Furthermore, not only do we discover what shapes someone else's nature, but as we lay bare the soul to another, at times we even surprise ourselves regarding our own attitudes and feelings. Self-revelation is thus a stepping stone to self-knowledge.

As mentioned earlier, it is also a perilous business. When I expose my secret self to another I become vulnerable; I voluntarily hand over to that person the power to wound me cruelly. If he chooses to misunderstand or to reject me, or if he is so self-preoccupied that he simply cannot be accepting of me, the gulf between us widens as I draw back in terror or in grief. Thus the pain of human interaction.

Leo Buscaglia, the modern day "prophet of love," proclaims the value of such risk-taking. To love, to care, to reach out, may indeed be to invite involvement and ridicule and distress, but it is also, he says, the only way to achieve our full humanity. For "it is not our toughness that keeps us warm at night, but our tenderness and vulnerability that makes others want to keep us warm."

We come back to the question of who makes the first move. Some psychologists postulate that parental love is triggered in part by the very helplessness and dependence of an infant. To be needed is a powerful motivator. But then, so is to need. The research done to date on attraction and love does not seem to give good clues as to how and by whom the process begins. Neither do studies based on personality theory: if the initial impulse to know another individual is based on compatible personality traits, one wonders how so many of us come to have such heterogeneous collections of friends.

It is instructive to look at what Fromm has to say about *The Art of Loving.* The ability to love another person, or many others, depends on respect for one's own integrity and uniqueness, understanding of oneself, and willingness to give of oneself to and for others. Love is not simply a strong feeling, it is also an act of will, and at root it is love of humankind, both ourselves and others. Love, the interpersonal union with another—whether achieved physically or spiritually and emotionally—is for Fromm the answer to the problem of existence. Unless and until we can achieve this fusion, we remain separate, anxious, and helpless in the face of our mortality. Love is an active force; it means committing oneself with no guarantee that this love will be returned; it allows the other to be a distinct being as he is, not an object to satisfy one's own needs. Love involves individuals who "experience themselves from the essence of their existence, that they are one with each other by being one with themselves, rather than by fleeing from themselves."

Such qualities presuppose a measure of maturity. And, come to think of it, I have noticed that student-relationship troubles tend to be most serious when one

I once knew a professor who advised a junior instructor: "Don't ever leave your office door open; students will just come and waste your time, and you will not get much research done that way."

or another individual is struggling through other growing-up difficulties. There are inevitable frictions brought about when changing persons try to adjust to one another; roommates must learn to put up with those whose ways are other than their own; parents do not always allow their young to become something other than what they have been. On top of all that, the burden caused by cultural expectations that intimate relationships necessarily include physical intimacy surely complicates the maturation passage for many.

The Experience of Fervent Friendships

How advantageous it could be if young people had many more experiences with fervent friendships before or during the period when they are actively mate-seeking. They would learn by practice that eros is not the only desirable, consequential bond available to them. Sex is a wonderful part of life, one of God's very nicest ideas, but it is not all there is to life. In addition, current folk wisdom notwithstanding, one need not have a picture-perfect face, a gorgeous physique, or a relatively recent birth certificate to know and feel connectedness with another.

Such friendly relations could only happen, though, if many more adults reached out and tried to form intensive, personal relationships with youth. I do not mean to suggest that this does not happen at all today, but too few of the students I know seem to have been involved with older people on any more than a superficial basis, except perhaps for parents or other relatives, and such ties are expected and therefore communicate a different message.

I am particularly concerned about the effects of the age stratification that is part of our structure of higher education. A great many college students spend the greater part of two or four or more years with most of their close associations limited to their peers—at the very time they are collectively wrestling with post-adolescent identity formation. Although some young adults are well-equipped to form satisfactory friendships and love matches, for many others their practicing on one another is truly a case of the blind leading the blind.

Yet at the end of their seclusion in the halls of ivy they are to be thrust out into a world made up mostly of people older than themselves. Instead of being prepared to take his place as an equal among co-workers and neighbors of all types and ages and status levels, with the myriad of professional and social roles normally played out in daily life, the recent college graduate often has little background for the true world beyond technical knowledge and vocational skills.

Recently I have heard complaints by several highly-placed executives that we in the university are turning out kids who can do everything required in the job market except the most important thing—understanding and getting along with people. We are quite proficient at dispensing factual information, but this is often at the expense of meaningful discourse. In Klapp's words, "the universities are felt to be dehumanized, subject to a split between what C. P. Snow calls the two cultures, and the student feels swamped with information that he cannot read fast enough, which he doesn't care about, and which gives him less time for 'art' and 'life.'"

Well, if students are to have the opportunity for more interaction with mature persons, and more access to relational experience, who should provide it?

Teachers, that's who.

It is my observation that institutions of higher learning have done an admirable job of supplying counselors who are available for consultation on personal, psychological, and career matters. However, we are in danger of producing a dichotomy along personal/academic lines, as though the two can be or should be separated. But do not we who inhabit the other end of the classroom integrate our own two worlds? Are we not real people, with emotions and feelings and attitudes, who just happen to be in the business of dispensing knowledge and passing along acquired wisdom? Yet so few students seem to have the chance to see us as whole persons—we simply do not share ourselves with them.

Of course the chasm between teachers and learners can be quite handy. I once knew a professor who advised a junior instructor: "Don't ever leave your office door open; students will just come and waste your time, and you will not get much research done that way." Then there are those who cannot risk personal involvement with their students for fear they will lose their objectivity; their professionalism, it seems, is inadequate outside of rigid boundaries. (Or perhaps they began teaching when they, too, were youthful, when they needed artificial means to create distance from those too much like themselves, and they have never updated the old pattern.)

Surely, though, the enterprise of teaching must suffer if attention is not paid to the recipients as well as to the subject matter. I wish all of my colleagues had the opportunity to spend some time in the dormitories or the fraternity and sorority residences. Perhaps they would be better able to fit their efforts into the context of students' real lives.

For we often give them a double message. On the one hand we decry the grade-greed so evident in this generation; we fear they value nothing but the almighty Grade Point Average and its utility as a vehicle for a good job later on. On the other hand, we inculcate that very behavior by overemphasizing achievement and by

not seeming to care about them as anything but walking intellects. If we give of ourselves to anyone in our classes, it tends to be the "stars," those we assess as worthy of special attention.

Not that achievement and challenge are meaningless. Knowledge is indeed important, and it cannot be denied that some students are unwilling to expend the energies and practice the discipline necessary to obtain education in its highest sense. (Someone has said that many students would be delighted if we read the telephone directory to them in class, as long as they got three credits for it at the close of the term.) Yet without doubt the key to true learning remains individual motivation; it is only when one invests him/herself in the endeavor that lasting value is attained. It sometimes seems that in attempting to force the reluctant pupils to learn, we lose some others because our methods endanger what it is we are all about. If we stopped judging so critically and impersonally and listened to their needs, we might be better at what we do.

Teaching Students How to Think

In 1951 Gilbert Highet wrote an article entitled "Teaching, Not Facts, but How to Think," in which he described the legitimate reasons why young men and women have difficulty absorbing what is being taught them. The immense distractions of love, unemployment fears, inflation, and so on, coupled with the fact that neither their minds nor their will power have been trained, mean that they often do not know *how* to learn.

> Very few students ever go through a course without wondering at least half a dozen times whether they ought to drop it. Very few students ever complete their education . . . without having several periods of distraction or discouragement or despair, when they almost decide it would be better to throw up the whole thing and take a job. . . .
>
> So when we teach the young we must remember that, for a good deal of the time, they are trying—not always with success—to think as we think. Our minds are trained to put two and two together. Their minds are not trained to put anything together except emotional experiences. . . . It is difficult to learn thinking, and we must be patient with them while they learn it.

Talking with and relating to students thus can improve both sides of the equation: faculty learning how to teach more effectively, students learning how to learn and how to live more ably. If a few such incidents lead to friendships, so much the better. At any rate, that has been my own experience. As a student I was privileged to have a close relationship—a strictly non-physical one, I hasten to add—with an older man. I gained a great deal from that alliance, not the least being to value myself enough to be dissatisfied with subsequent relationships that overrated eros at the expense of storge and agape.

Now I have served as the "older woman" for a few students of both sexes, and I have gained a great deal from them, also. These attachments may not remain strong; there is separation and distance ahead, and fervent friendship may settle into pleasant memory. (As parents know, one risk involved in loving the young is that they may outgrow us.) No matter—this type of love abides and remains meaningful. If we have learned to know ourselves and one another better; if we feel more firmly connected to the human race from having shared our lives and being "special" to each other; if we have taught one another how to encourage and comfort and care for another being; what more could be asked of a campus kind of love.

Letter from an African Poet

The poet from Africa
writes in an "oh, by the way,"
between lines,
that he lost his legs
a few months ago
in a train accident.

He is young
and the blood
pours more quickly
through its course.

It stays closer by his heart.
He writes with more fervor now.
He is lighter,
disinclined to fight,
soaring in fantasy.

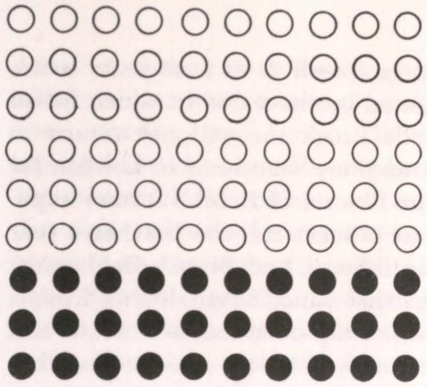
The white girl ("you")
a half-planet away
who wants to translate
his throbbing African dreams
("God bless you, God bless you")
seems closer now.
That is all.

He has paid, meanwhile,
some part of his debt to earth.
The creeping alligator of death
blinks, then slinks away these days.

"Otherwise," he writes,
"it's been an excellent year
over here."

Ruth El Saffar

Theatre



Plenty of History

David Hare's New Play Recapitulates the History Of Postwar Britain

John Steven Paul

Plenty reminds us that for all their differences historians and dramatists share certain tasks.

The attraction of historical subject matter for dramatists is ancient. Aeschylus, in *the* first tragedy, *The Persians,* imitated an historical rather than a mythological action. The premier dramatists of every age have followed Aeschylus' example in bringing historical subjects to their stages, most notably Shakespeare, for whom the medieval civil war between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians provided plots and characters for three *Richards* and five *Henrys.* And this is the essence of the appeal of historical subject matter: world-shaping characters and events, substantially invented, present themselves to the mind of the playshaper.

The historian and the dramatist share certain tasks in common, though their methods and purposes differ fundamentally. Like the dramatist, the historian selects human subjects, reconstructing them according to his own view. The historian inevitably emphasizes certain aspects of physical and psychological character. Like the historian, the dramatist chooses human events and transforms them into scenes, imposing his own beginnings, middles, and ends. The dramatist forms portions of human experience into what Susanne Langer calls "virtual histories." Both the dramatist and the historian make stories about human beings in action. Both are concerned with questions of form: How shall I make this story? Both are concerned with questions of choice: About whom shall I make this story?

Who's worth a story? R. G. Collingwood, the eminent historian and philosopher of history, writes that "it is the universality of an event or character that makes it a proper and possible object of historical study. Individual acts and persons appear in history not in virtue of their individuality as such, but because that individuality is the vehicle of a thought, which, because it was actually theirs, is potentially everyone's." In other words, individual lives emerge in historical chronicles because the intensity of their humanity renders them universally recognizable.

An inquiry into such a life yields insight into its times. Biography, then, is one method the historian has of elucidating the essence of a period of time; bits of a biography are the dramatist's only method. The dramatist needs a life to get at the times. If a suitable life presents itself, the dramatist distills it; if a suitable life does not exist, the dramatist invents one.

For his history play *Plenty* (currently playing at the Plymouth Theatre on Broadway), Englishman David Hare has invented twelve scenes in the life of one Susan Traherne. Susan and her scenes are fictional, yet in them is reflected, in Hare's mind, the essence of Britain during the period 1943-1962. "Plenty" is a reference to the postwar period, a hope for a vast and general improvement in the quality of life after the wartime deprivation. In the retrospective view provided by the structure of the play (more about this in a moment), the epithet "plenty" takes on a bitterly ironic ring, as the times continue to be marked by deprivation, not of a material, but of a spiritual and profoundly enervating kind. Though *Plenty* is about England 1943-1962, David Hare sustains our interest in his history by focusing our attention on his central character. Throughout the play, we are more attentive to Susan than to Britain.

Susan Traherne is the type of woman people castigate in the car on the way home from parties. She does things people just don't do; she says things people don't say—read "shouldn't" for "don't." Her status as a diplomat's wife stiffens the strictures on her conduct, and confers an exaggerated significance on any breach of those strictures. At a party at which her husband is hosting the Burmese ambassador, Susan castigates her husband's superior for Britain's role in the Suez crisis. Her raving causes the senior diplomat to leave and her husband to suffer professionally debilitating embarrassment. On another occasion, she insists they not return to his diplomatic post in Iran. The husband yields and is, consequently, reassigned to a desk in Whitehall, his professional advancement at an end.

In Susan Traherne, Hare has given the contemporary theatre its own Hedda Gabler, a pathologically unhappy woman: vital, passionate, and strong, and also quirky, cruel, and destructive. Thanks to actress Kate Nelligan's electrifying performance, Susan Traherne is someone we want to know more about.

Hare's play opens with a scene set in the glaring light of an Easter morning after a hellish Holy Saturday in 1962. The program indicates that the locale is the Knightsbridge district of London. Since it's the first

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David Hare has traced the progression of one woman's consciousness from a state of well-being, significance, and worth to one of weakness, servility, and waste.

scene, it is not entirely clear that the largish man lying on a bare mattress on the floor and suffering a terrific scotch-and-barbiturates hangover is Raymond Brock, nor is it clear that the woman preparing to leave this stately town house is his wife Susan Traherne. This same woman, however, appears in the second scene set in the black murkiness of a November night in 1943. Chronologically, Susan's story begins on a meadow near St. Benoit, France.

In 1943, at age 17, Susan Traherne is a British intelligence agent in Nazi-occupied France. We see her on the ground rendezvousing with operatives and gear dropped in by parachute. She works alone, entirely vulnerable, on an extremely dangerous and stressful mission that requires the total expenditure of her physical, intellectual, and emotional energy. She confronts life in the raw, without material comforts or emotional consolations. Hare reveals nothing about Susan before St. Benoit, 1943, about how she came to work for British Intelligence, or how she got to France. We know only that she accomplishes this mission, has undertaken and accomplished others, and that she is a member of an heroically successful resistance movement. Every history must begin somewhere; Susan Traherne's begins at St. Benoit, November 1943, her finest hour.

Four years later, Susan is pushing a pencil for an import-export business in London. It is evidently a responsible job and challenging by most standards. But Susan's heady experience in the resistance movement has left her dissatisfied with even the more satisfying pursuits of ordinary civilian life. While in Europe, she has met a minor official in His Majesty's embassy in Brussels, Raymond Brock—a British bureaucrat to be sure, but also bright, ambitious, able, and charming. Drawn to her vivacity, Brock takes a channel ferry from Brussels to visit Susan on weekends. Susan finds Brock's goodness appealing, his steadiness boring, and his desire for stability insufferable. She cuts him loose, and takes on a companion named Alice—beautiful and flaky, decadence incarnate—because Alice makes her laugh.

Susan's ennui evolves into an acute consciousness of her life's emptiness. She bargains with a proletarian friend-of-a-friend to father her child. After several dates a month for eighteen months there is no baby and more frustration. She changes jobs; out of import-export and into advertising, just in time for England's advance into the era of mass culture. Pandering to the masses makes Susan contemptuous of the masses, contemptuous of her job, and contemptuous of herself. When Mick, the hoped-for father subsequently discarded, appears at her office to protest her treatment of him, Susan fires a pistol a bit too close to his scalp. Some years later Susan recalls that only Raymond Brock's intervention kept her from spending considerable time in psychiatric hospital wards.

Several years after they originally parted, Susan and Raymond have married. After international trade, advertising, and unconventional liaisons, Susan presumably looks to Brock as someone who can help her fill the widening hollow at the center of her being—perhaps with money. For Brock is still good, able, charming, etc., but he is now also plenty rich. As for Brock's attraction to Susan: she is still vivacious, if increasingly demented, and in need, now, of help and support, whether she will admit it or not.

If there were happy years or months for Susan or Brock, Hare has not recorded them. The stage history of this married couple begins at the reception for the Burmese ambassador and the scene of her tirade about British foreign policy in the Middle East. Another offstage interlude of four years is followed by the scene in which Susan tells Brock she will not return to Iran (they have come to London for the funeral of Brock's former superior officer). It is now less than a year until Susan and Brock's final scene. In that time, Susan learns from a senior diplomat that her erratic and volatile behavior has stalled her husband's career.

Convinced now that material plenty has poisoned her, Susan begins to strip the elegant house of its furnishings, stashing them frantically into cartons. Brock senses, vaguely but correctly, that he has been used. After years of reserve and control, a flood of feeling breaks through his stoically stiff upper lip. In a soul-wrenching tirade, reminiscent of the proletarian Mick, he protests her treatment of him, and threatens to have her committed to a psychiatric ward. His display of emotional fire thrills Susan. But as she arms for a climactic argument, her husband ingests enough scotch and sleeping pills to *dis*arm himself. The next morning his wife leaves.

The light of the final scene reveals Susan on a sleazy Blackpool motel-room bed in the hazy aftermath of a frenzied, clothes-on coupling. The other voice sounds faintly familiar. Indeed, it is "Codename Lazar," the intelligence operative Susan received on that November night in 1943. In a final attempt to recapture the spiritual gratification of St. Benoit, Susan has arranged a rendezvous with her former comrade. But before long Lazar is telling her about his life of compromise, desolation, and tedium as an agent, not for an intelligence operation but for an insurance company. When Susan abruptly silences him, Lazar leaves in confusion and bitterness and she draws another deep drag on a reefer.

Plenty is a history of an individual human consciousness; that is, the playwright has traced the progression of Susan Traherne's conscious-

Hare's repeated use of political symbolism and historical references indicates that this individual consciousness is meant to mirror the British national consciousness.

ness from a state of well-being, significance, and worth to one of weakness, servility, and waste. Hare's repeated use of political symbolism and historical references indicates that this individual consciousness is meant as a mirror of the British national consciousness. Following Shakespeare and other Elizabethan poets, Hare has explored the corresponding events in the microcosm and the body politic.

Hare has given us his vision of England in the form of several representative characters. Ambassador Leonard Darwin and his deputy Raymond Brock are incarnations (nearly caricatures) of the British ruling class. They speak the King's English with reserve and they behave at all times with circumspection. They dress conservatively and repress deeply whatever feelings they might have. If Darwin and Brock represent the upper class, Mick represents the working class. He is an East Londoner with a thickly distorted dialect, a tendency to raise his voice, and a decided lack of taste in necktie and jacket ensembles. Finally, there is the parasitical Alice Park, neither privileged nor employed, contemptuous of traditional values and distinctions, decadent and destructive. Alice represents the reckless class.

During the years of the Brocks' absence in Iran, Alice attached herself to certain wealthy families who kept her as a tutor for their teenage daughters. On the occasion of the Brocks' return to London in 1961, Alice brings one of her charges round to their house. Alice has suggested that the girl might get money for an abortion from Susan. In the course of conversation, Susan alludes to the Suez affair. The girl looks ingenuously to Alice and asks "What is Suez?" Momentarily nonplussed at the girl's ignorance of this historically crucial event and at her tutor's failure to instruct her about it, Susan shrugs and writes out a check.

By *Plenty*'s end, Leonard Darwin has resigned from the Foreign Service and subsequently died. Raymond Brock is left a defeated, quivering ruin on the floor of his magnificent town house. Mick has been dismissed and forgotten long before. Susan is about to go off to yet another, perhaps final, disappointment. The only remaining principal character is the implacable Alice, and England, it seems, will be left to her and her kind, for whom history is bunk.

For David Hare, history is most certainly not bunk. That a sense of history is valuable, though painful, is one of the themes of *Plenty*. Yet the form of the play illustrates an important difference between drama and historical narrative. As a chronicle of human consciousness, *Plenty's* structure does not conform to the strict chronological sequence usually associated with the telling of history. The twelve scenes of the drama are ordered as if by Susan's mind as it reconstructs the history of itself. As she lies on the bed in the motel room, alone after Lazar's exit, her last vision of her husband pushes to the fore. He is chalky-pale and unconscious, lying amidst sheet-draped furniture and windows stripped of their drapery. Now, November, 1943 eclipses Easter, 1962, which in turn gives way to June, 1947 and so on until the progression from St. Benoit to Blackpool has been retraced and "Codename Lazar" has once again slammed the door behind him.

In the theatre, this mental reconstruction of history presents some problems for audiences. Most theatre-goers still expect a chronological ordering of scenes and they find anything else—despite clarifying program notes—to be disconcerting. Fleeting references to English and European history do not always register with American spectators, nor are representative English types as recognizable in New York as they would be in London. At intermission, the frustration of an audience which felt bereft of essential information (like Persians at a Greek tragedy) became audible.

English accents of varying thickness exacerbated problems in the communication of Hare's dramatic meaning. As Susan Traherne, Kate Nelligan undermined her own intelligibility by lapsing into an annoying stress pattern in which she accentuated and elongated the pen-

Plenty's backdrop offers a premonition of a history.

ultimate syllable of each sentence and swallowed the ultimate. Nelligan's speech habit rendered her portrayal of the universally recognizable Susan less accessible to her audience than it might otherwise have been.

If her speech was a bit dim, Nelligan's face was a luminescent canvas for the panorama of her history. Each stage in the progression, each new set of circumstances, each gradation in the shadows of her disappointment found lucid expression in her countenance. Nelligan's face appeared infinitely malleable—a particularly valuable faculty in a play whose scenes shift back and forth within a period of nineteen years.

In the final moments of *Plenty,* the scene shifts suddenly back to St. Benoit. It is August, 1944 and the war is over. Nelligan is dressed in a brilliant-colored shift; her face radiates youth, vitality, and shining anticipation of the years of plenty ahead. And, for the first time, the scenic backdrop has changed. Throughout the play, the audience has puzzled over a permanent backscene bearing the image of a waters-edge picnic with men and women in Victorian costume enjoying the shore on a summer day. On the sea beyond, boats under sail are engaged in regatta. A grand scene, but one executed exclusively in shades of gray and with the grainy texture of an old photograph. The color resolution is so minimal that the figures are only barely distinguishable. Now, behind the radiant Susan Traherne of the final moments is a new, sunlight-suffused vista of a green hillside and an azure sky above. Nature reflects Susan's brightest hope and Susan's face reflects Nature's brightest promise. Gradually and retrospectively, the truth of the gray seascape dawns: it was a premonition of a history about to be told. A premonition in retrospect.

Books

God's Grace

By Bernard Malamud. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 223 pp. $13.50

Bernard Malamud's novel: parable, polemic, & plea.

Prophets of doom are quite in vogue. The growing possibility of nuclear war makes their warning credible. Among the doomsday literary voices worthy of critical consideration is that of Bernard Malamud. Unlike many of the scientists, social critics, and philosophers who are addressing the nuclear peril with a shrill urgency, Malamud crafts an engaging parable which deftly and decisively strikes with the anger of a polemic and the pain of a final plea. *God's Grace* forces us to think about ourselves and our future or suffer the ultimate indignity of terminal indifference.

The story line of *God's Grace* follows the adventures of the sole human survivor of the thermonuclear war between the Djanks and the Druzhkies. This lone survivor is Calvin Cohn, who, it seems, was overlooked in a momentary lapse of Divine judgment. Cohn later comes upon a chimpanzee who has also fatefully survived the final flood of destruction. Man and his evolutionary precursor happen upon an island and begin to establish the foundation of a new society.

The story teller adds engaging layers to the parable, providing speech and a Christian identity to the chimp, a Jewish mindset to Cohn, and an assortment of apes, baboons, and other chimps to the population of the island. What unfolds is a masterful retelling of many tales: Eden, Noah, Sinai, Job, *Robinson Crusoe, Lord of the Flies,* and *Planet of the Apes.* Though its parts may seem disparate, the whole draws the reader through the labyrinth of illusions toward a devastating conclusion that demands careful consideration.

This reviewer is concerned with the questions raised in the parable and polemic. The questions are the real fruit of Malamud's labors and hopefully they will stimulate the critical introspection required to obviate the opening premise of the story—a thermonuclear war.

The parable's initial question is raised by the title, *God's Grace.* Religious tradition teaches us that grace is the spontaneous unmerited manifestation of God's love upon which redemption rests. Yet Malamud suggests by way of biting irony that it was a Divine error, not love, that saved Calvin Cohn. God speaks to Cohn and admits, "I regret to say it was through a minuscule error that you escaped destruction. . . . The cosmos is so conceived that I myself don't know what goes on everywhere."

We must begin with Malamud's irony that grace is an aspect of God's limited power. The cynical nature of this perception prompts us to ask about the value of salvation if its source is a flaw within God.

Malamud pushes his limited God into several interchanges with Cohn and these exchanges are among the most engaging passages in the book. God speaks with the sarcasm of a frustrated and tired Creator who has been forced to watch as man destroys himself. In a brilliant recasting of the Divine answer to Job from the Whirlwind (Job 38 ff.), Cohn learns of God's ultimate purpose for man. "I am the Lord thy God who created man to perfect himself."

Here Malamud asks his most potent theological question. Was the Divine purpose of creation to have man complete God's image in

In Malamud's key characters we find the old Jewish-Christian battle over a God who wishes service through the law vs. a God who loves and saves through that love.

the world? This question links the fate of both man and God to each other. To say that man needs God is obvious; but to suggest the converse, that God needs man, is very provocative. Malamud raises man's responsibility far beyond the scope of the Judeo-Christian ethic. Cain's question to God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" has been answered with the ultimate fratricide; more pathetically, God's creative purpose has been denied by man's failure to understand his own potential to share in Divine responsibility.

The passage in Exodus 3 in which God responds to Moses' request for the Divine name is usually translated, "I am that which I am." This is unfortunate, for it totally overlooks the use of the imperfect tense in the Hebrew which Rabbi Lawrence Kushner so insightfully renders, "I am Myself still becoming." This is quite close to Malamud's ironically limited God, a God who saves by error and castigates Cohn for man's failure to perfect the divine within himself. This is a God-man relationship worth pondering.

The polemic which *God's Grace* offers is a biting indictment of the glorious myth of the Judeo-Christian ethic. At the core of Malamud's incisive attack is a threatening set of questions about the inherent tension between Judaism and Christianity. The author's view is cynical and disparaging of both traditions, though Christianity receives more condemnation.

Calvin Cohn is the son of a rabbi who once considered the rabbinate and became a scientist. He holds on to a set of ethnocentric observances linked together by nostalgia for the past and the possibility that God might be pleased. Cohn's Jewish identity is set against the foil of the chimpanzee, who is named Buz and later Gottlob.

Gottlob has been raised as a Christian by his now destroyed scientist parent. Having been taught sign language, Gottlob has an operation on his larynx. Midway through the tale the chimp gains the power of speech. The dialogue between Cohn and Gottlob provides Malamud an opportunity to recast the public disputations of Medieval Jews and Christians.

It is more than coincidental that "Cohn" is Hebrew for priest and "Gottlob" is German for God loves. Hence, within the very names of Malamud's key characters, we find the old Jewish-Christian battle over a God who desires service through the law vs. a God who loves and saves through that love.

Malamud states his view starkly when Cohn responds to the chimp, ". . . neither Judaism nor Christianity, nor any other religion, had prevented the Day of Devastation." For the author there has been too much rhetoric, ritual, and meaningless piety for either tradition to have any eternal meaning. The Ten Commandments are recast into "Cohn's Admonitions." We note the polemical tone of the second statement, "God is not love, God is God. Remember him."

Malamud's attack is not without substance. The inherent exclusivist claims of both traditions have sustained separatist domains of religious truth. Jews and Christians have for too long stymied by their individual worldviews a shared vision of the sacred nature of life, a vision seemingly beyond the reach of both traditions. The cynical tone of the author raises the question

Writing Class: Senior Citizen Center

They are like photos sliding in frames.
They have come to the Center to talk, to write.
It is not easy. Where are the words? Times
they remember, they wear like a sprig

of sorrow. Years they knew simmer like soup
on the farthest burner. Take out a spoonful?
Gravely they listen to the woman who says: "Write
what you remember." The yellow pencil swollen

as their bones moves: "I had four
brother and eight sister. . . . My father
kill hogs and we wash them with pepper. . . .
We raise corn, cane, peas, greens. . . ."

The teacher reads back the words.
"Good. Good." They nod. They feel
under heart-arrest: a sagging rocking chair,
winter-chewed hedges, skinned squirrels,

chilblains, the grandmother, sand-scrubbed floors,
. . . where are the words? "The onliest
way to tell is to pick it—the way we pulled
blueberries when momma sent us out with a pail

when I am the eleventh child in Carolina."

Sister Maura

In Alice Walker's extraordinary new book, *The Color Purple,* we see a writer writing, and then we realize that a writer is writing about a writer writing.

whether any diminution of that inherent tension is possible.

Malamud's polemic culminates in an inverted retelling of Genesis 22, "The binding/sacrifice of Isaac." Unlike the Biblical narrative the author has the son, Gottlob, sacrificing the father, Cohn; and more pitifully, this time God remains silent and does not prevent the sacrifice.

The use of this Biblical tale should raise many questions to the critical reader, the most urgent being the silence of God. Is Malamud suggesting that the failure of traditional religion will produce the ultimate destruction of humanity? The author concludes with a final appeal to humanity. This reviewer finds the last glimmer of hope within that faint plea.

The plea comes in the closing sentences of the story. The author provides Cohn his final Jewish dignity when an ape who has been silent throughout the book recites the *Kaddish,* the mourner's prayer. Cohn receives the appropriate liturgical service, and the reader is drawn into the *Kaddish,* the prayer for life, the doxology of God's power to exalt life. This nuance, which may be overlooked by most who do not know the *Kaddish,* suggests the author's attempt at consolation. All life as we know it may end because of man's inability to live within a community of honest harmony, but the life force which depends upon God shall continue.

The plea is clear: man must look beyond himself and his perception of the universe toward an eternal realm. Even Malamud's limited God cannot allow life to become extinguished as long as life is exalted. For Malamud and T. S. Eliot before him, this view of the end is pathetic because the final prayer or whimper is the key to survival, yet it can not be heard amidst the din of our hollow lives.

Bernard Malamud's *God's Grace* is a powerful parable, polemic, and plea. We would do well to strive for a world that will never allow the story to become a prophecy.

Joseph A. Edelheit

The Color Purple

By Alice Walker. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. 245 pp. $11.95

In this century the autobiographical impulse has found particularly strong expression in works by women authors. Among others, Virginia Woolf, Anais Nin, Maya Angelou, and May Sarton have created a new genre combining the personal-revelatory nature of the diary, the formal structure of autobiography, and the writer's consciousness of reader so evident in the letter form. The result is a fascinating hybrid in which the private self becomes public, but only by compelling the reader to assume the role of voyeur.

Alice Walker opens *The Color Purple* with these words: "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy." So fourteen-year-old Celie, black and barely educated, begins her journal, a series of letters to God, who needs to hear what his children in this small Southern community are doing to one another. She plunges directly into her secret, which involves rape, incest, her own pregnancy, and her mother's impending death. She writes of the two children she has by her supposed father, who gives them both away; her arranged marriage to Albert; the loss of her sister, Nettie; her own ugliness and paralyzing docility; her love for her husband's lover, Shug Avery.

The events of the narrative, sensational though they might be, are of secondary importance in this piece. It is the character's growing awareness of self, her incredible resilience, and her compulsion to write it all down that make this such a remarkable reading experience. We see a writer writing, and then we realize that a writer is writing about a writer writing. We see an artistic spirit which poverty and circumstance cannot obliterate. We see a person who does not know the ending of her story as she begins it. The possibilities inherent in the form are tantalizing and Alice Walker explores most of them.

Halfway through the novel, Celie, married against her will to a man who wants only a housekeeper, a mother for his children, and an occasional bed partner, discovers that he has hidden all of her sister's letters. She opens them one by one and reads that Nettie not only has managed to find Celie's children, she has also become a missionary to Africa by living with a minister's family and helping to care for their two adopted children. Unbeknownst to the parents, Nettie is actually the children's aunt.

Celie's letters change as soon as Nettie's letters begin. Unlike her letters to God, Celie's letters to Nettie often end with "Amen." In her second letter to Nettie she says, "I don't write to God no more, I write to you. . . . All my life I never care what people thought bout nothing I did, I say. But deep in my heart I care about God. What he going to think. And come to find out, he don't think. Just sit up there glorying in being deef, I reckon. But it ain't easy, trying to do without God. Even if you know he ain't there, trying to do without him is a strain."

It is with other women that Celie feels most herself. With her sister, with Shug Avery, the flashy singer Celie's husband has loved for so long, with Sophie, the step-daughter-in-law who slaps the mayor's wife for an insulting remark and is beaten, jailed, and humiliated in return—with these women Celie is able to share herself and be understood in return. It is the women who seem to hold together the pieces of

We have been allowed to look into a world made.

Alice Walker's world. The men endure, but the women actually create. Through song, through sewing, through gardening and farming, through writing, through childbearing, the women in this novel participate in mythic actions which bring into being that which has never been before. The women are life-givers and this connects them to each other and to God.

Celie's final letter is, once again, to God. "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God. Thank you for bringing my sister Nettie and our children home." In praise, in thanksgiving, Celia's final entry is another story—of the day her sister returns thirty years after they had said good-bye. Relationships are restored, ties re-established, community reinforced. The story finds its ending, which is yet another beginning.

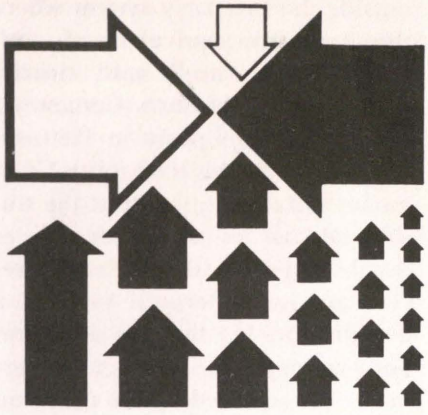
But the story is not over yet, for while Celie was writing her letters, Alice Walker was writing her novel about Celie. So the final words are the author's: "I thank everybody in this book for coming. A. W., author and medium." She dedicates *The Color Purple* "To the Spirit: Without whose assistance neither this book nor I would have been written."

Just who wrote this book anyway? Celie? Nettie? Alice Walker? or the Spirit? Who is the reader? Nettie? Celie? God? Alice Walker as medium? And how and where do we fit into all of this?

We have been allowed to look over Walker's shoulder into a world made. Celie is taught by Shug that to celebrate the splashes of purple in a summer field is to praise and thank the Maker, who constantly uses his art to capture our attention. Alice Walker has seen those splashes and responded with her own color purple. She has captured our attention. To read her is to praise her.

Jill Baumgaertner

The Nation



Antipolitics

New Movements Threaten Current Political Systems

Albert R. Trost

The Western democracies have seen a spate of elections in the past year. Election results from Spain, West Germany, Australia, France, Ireland, Sweden, and the United States have been fairly well covered in the press. Indeed, most people have probably been overwhelmed by the torrent of election returns. It is hard enough to digest the results from our own elections in November. The rest may be a blur.

Is there a pattern in all of these elections? This is a question that particularly occupies the attention of political scientists, who, like all social scientists, attempt to discern general patterns in the mass of data with which they are confronted.

The elections in all the parliamentary systems—Spain, West Germany, Australia, Ireland, and Sweden—resulted in affirming the voters' disenchantment with the party that had been governing, removing them from power and replacing them with parties that had been in opposition. The elections in France for local governments and the midterm election in the United States did not give the voters quite the same clear and explicit chance to vote on the national government. However, in both France and the United States, the results could reasonably be interpreted as votes against the political party in power.

These elections are part of a longer-term trend in Western democracies, noticeable since the mid-1970s, of giving a political party one term in office and then replacing it with the opposition. West Germany had resisted the trend until this past March. However, there is a political current running in these countries with deeper significance than the election results alone show. Suzanne Berger, in an influential article in the Winter, 1979, issue of the journal *Daedalus* ("Politics and Antipolitics in Western Europe in the Seventies"), calls this current *antipolitics.*

Antipolitics movements stand against the whole political system, against the "rules of the game," often even advocating the dismantling of the state apparatus itself.

It is characterized by low regard for the state and political institutions, especially the traditional political parties. Besides the regular displacement of the governing political parties, it is also characterized by the rise of new parties, movements, and political personalities who stand against the whole political system, against the "rules of the game," often even advocating the dismantling of the state itself. In Western Europe, the focus of Suzanne Berger's article, this antistate, antiparty attitude can also be seen in the recent surge of groups advocating the decentralization of political power or the formation of smaller-scale political units. The Welsh and Scottish nationalists in the United Kingdom illustrate this trend, as do the Basques and Catalonians in Spain.

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Much of the discussion of antipolitics has focused on the various nationalist movements in Western Europe and on the ecological and anti-nuclear movements in several European nations. The Greens in West Germany have become the defining antipolitical force. They have refused to cooperate with the traditional political parties, including their ideological neighbors, the German Social Democratic party. They have called for the dismantling of the majority of traditional political institutions, including the current system of education. Even though they now have representation in the German parliament, their preferred tactic is direct action. Their recent success in the March national German elections (5.6 per cent and twenty-seven seats) demonstrates that they have some appeal beyond alienated students and intellectuals.

Antipolitics has not been as much noticed or commented on in the United States. This is not because its manifestations are absent in this country. In fact, they are clearly present. They are little commented on because the antipolitical current is so hard to distinguish from the populist tradition in America. For almost a hundred years we have had parties, movements, and leaders who have been antiparty, even anti-state. The line runs from General James B. Weaver, Populist Presidential candidate in 1892, through George Wallace and merges into the antipolitics of the present.

In fact, almost every politician in our country recognizes the value of an anti-party, antipolitics, anti-Washington appeal. It wasn't only George Wallace who ran that way in 1968; Eugene McCarthy did so as well. The George McGovern campaign in 1972 and the subsequent attack by his supporters on Democratic party rules belong in the same tradition. Jimmy Carter, especially in his run for the Democratic party nomination in 1976, employed a populist appeal.

Though McGovern and Carter demonstrated the attraction of a populist appeal by a major party candidate in the United States, it is outside the two-party system where the American equivalent of antipolitics shows itself most clearly. The candidacy of Barry Commoner and the Citizens party in 1980 can be placed in this category. Commoner's protest was against the traditional parties and "politics as usual." On a smaller scale, the recent success of Bernard Sanders, a Socialist, in his bid for a second term as mayor of Burlington, Vermont was achieved by an attack on the traditional parties and the existing economic system. It must be noted, however, that not all third-party candidates in American represent this antipolitics trend. Many are simply disgruntled because they have failed to achieve office or recognition within one of the major parties.

Neither Barry Commoner nor Bernard Sanders has attracted much support nationally. One must move even farther outside the traditional system of party competition to find the most significant manifestations of antipolitics in America. Two movements—one on the Right, the other on the Left—seem especially important. One of them seems to be declining in strength, the other increasing.

The New Right is a movement still significant as a political force, but it has declined a bit from the summit of 1980 and 1981. Though it failed to capture the Republican party and has not explicitly tried to create a political party of its own, the New Right does reject the ideologies and the brokerage style of politics represented by the two-party system. In a revealing recent statement, Richard A. Viguerie, a New Right leader, said, "A true populist is for less government in our daily lives, not more. A true populist believes government spending should be cut, America's defenses should be second to none, and the unholy alliances between big government, big banks, and big education should be smashed, not enhanced." The use of the label "populist" is peculiarly American, as is the nationalistic defense appeal; otherwise, however, this statement could be affirmed by almost any antipolitics group in Europe. Through the following of some television preachers and a sophisticated direct-mail fundraising system, the New Right is still an antipolitical force to be reckoned with.

On the Left, the nuclear freeze movement, with roots in the anti-Vietnam War protests, environmental action groups, and the Citizens party, seems to be gaining support, much of it antipolitical. At

their most recent convention in St. Louis in February of this year, groups involved in the movement reviewed their accomplishments. They had managed several Washington demonstrations of very impressive size. Nuclear freeze resolutions were on ballots around the country in the November elections and passed in 9 of 10 states, 28 of 30 counties, and 24 of 25 cities.

The leaders of the movement recognize that referendum campaigns and lobbying before Congress for nuclear freeze resolutions are difficult challenges for their movement, primarily because so many participants in it disavow traditional political activity and the traditional party system. The February convention in St. Louis seemed resolved to overcome this abhorrence for the system in order to achieve the movement's objectives. The group's dilemma is not unlike that of the Green party in Germany, whose recent success in gaining representation in parliament has compromised its antipolitical stand.

Defenders of traditional institutions, political parties, and ideologies should not be too elated by the seeming trend toward moderation among these antipolitical groups. Antipolitics will grow, not decline. The reputation of traditional political parties and their ideologies all over the world will not easily be redeemed. The causes of the antipolitical reaction are persistent. Most critical is the fear of the "end of growth," and its attendant problems of inflation, stagnation, and unemployment.

In recent years, the role of the state and its responsibility for the economy has consistently grown. The state is now widely held responsible for guaranteeing both economic growth and economic redistribution. Thus when growth and redistribution do not occur, as they have not since the early 1970s, the state takes the blame. Political parties also become implicated in the failures, especially when they have shared in the governance of the state, and antipolitics becomes antiparty as well as antistate.

Proponents of a particular cause advocated by antipolitical groups, such as that of a nuclear freeze or disarmament, should therefore be realistic about the broader agenda of some of these groups and leaders. For antipolitics people, disenchantment with traditional politics is not the result of the parties' stands on nuclear questions alone. Similarly, in the case of the antipolitics elements of the New Right, abortion is not the only, or even the central, issue. As Suzanne Berger puts it, the central issue is "that problems of distribution [can] no longer be 'solved' by increased affluence." The state, traditional parties, and traditional ideologies get blamed for this. This fundamental discontent has in turn opened up a whole range of priorities, choices, and values which we have long assumed were agreed upon. It may be that behind an attack on any one priority, choice, or value lies nothing less than a revolutionary impulse. The ultimate target could be our major parties, our republican constitution, or the state itself.

The broad nature of the attack is clear enough in many of the antipolitical groups, such as the Green party in Germany. What is still very elusive is what antipolitics people suppose should take the place of traditional institutions and ideologies.

Luke 2:41-51

Our son! My God, in all this throng
not one that answers to his name.
He is not among our kin
nor has he tarried with our friends.
Him whom we love, our firstborn, is gone.

Like salmon, returning to our spawning place
we swim against the current
of the homeward-going crowds.
The feast is over, and Jerusalem
has closed in upon itself once more.

Deep shadowy streets
echo our anxious steps
as in a fitful dream.
Where could he be? Who
may have taken him from me? How dare he
treat us so shamefully? I weep in my heart
at this, our first parting.

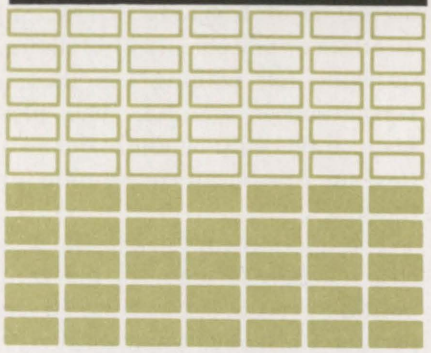
A circle of the wise huddles in the temple.
But whose young head shines up in their midst?
What youth is this whose answers turn the old
to babbling babes again? Is this our son?

Joseph, Joseph, hold me close.
Close up this tear that has already started
the shredding of my heart.

Our son, our firstborn, though we have found him,
is gone.

Ruth El Saffar

Campus Diary



Commencement Address

John Strietelmeier

Mr. President, Colleagues, Members of the Class of 1983, Ladies and Gentlemen:

G. K. Chesterton once wrote an essay on the topic: "If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach." In that essay he said that his one sermon would be about Pride. That is not surprising. Chesterton stood solidly and defiantly in the mainline Christian theological and moral tradition. And in that tradition Pride has always been considered the deadliest of the Seven Deadly Sins.

I am in something like Chesterton's situation. Commencement addresses are not technically sermons, but few of us can resist the temptation to use them sermonically to improve the character of the young. And since it is most unlikely that I shall ever again have so large, so intelligent, and so captive an audience of young people to exhort, it is only natural that I should use this occasion to warn you against that particular moral peril which strikes me as most immediate and most menacing.

I do not question the primacy which the Christian moral consensus gives to Pride as the chief agent of our alienation from God and from each other. Nor do I pretend that I have escaped that absorption in my self and my own interests which perverts even my worship of God into acts of self-idolatry. But this, if nothing else, we must say for Pride: it is a sign of life—life twisted and distorted, profaned and misdirected, no doubt, but still life. And folk wisdom is right: while there is life, there is hope—hope that He who once made us out of the dust of the ground may remake us out of the dust of our prideful humanity.

But there is another of the deadly sins which thoughtful people of my generation have come to consider no less menacing than Pride, perhaps even more menacing because it is in its very nature a negation of life. You have probably learned to call it Sloth, and to think of it as a kind of unfortunate but altogether understandable, perhaps even amiable, disinclination to work. The slothful person, as we have come to think of him, is someone who sleeps through the alarm, who procrastinates, who falls asleep at his desk, who speaks slightingly of the Protestant Work Ethic. Sloth, as most of us understand it, is personified by such folk figures—almost folk heroes—as Andy Capp and Dagwood Bumstead. And many of us honestly wonder why their deep aversion to work should be judged any more harshly than that total absorption in work which is the mark of the workaholic.

Actually, of course, it was not sloth in any such definition of the term that the old moralists had in mind when they drew up their lists of seven deadly sins. What we call sloth they called acedia. And acedia has to do not primarily with whether one is industrious or lazy, but with whether one thinks that it matters whether he works or not. The slothful man usually respects work and, indeed, admits his own obligation to get busy at it. He may even feel guilty about not doing it. The victim of acedia, on the other hand, sees little or no point in work. Webster defines acedia as a mental condition marked by apathy. Change "mental" to "spiritual" and it becomes immediately apparent why acedia is not only a sin, but a deadly sin. It is a surrender to the forces of death and disintegration.

I think that acedia is the besetting sin of religious people and intellectuals—two groups which otherwise have little in common.

Religious people are tempted by acedia because it seems accordant with ideas of a totally sovereign God working His will in a world which is doomed to destruction and from which the faithful remnant desire most of all to be released. What happens in such a world, many religious people say, is essentially beyond our capacity to influence in any meaningful, positive way. And so our best course is to "go with the flow," let happen what will happen, and trust God to make it all come right. Work, in such a view, becomes pointless, futile, vanity, a vexation of spirit.

The intellectual is tempted to acedia because it accords with views of purposelessness, entropy, and extinction. What happens on our little planet, many intellectuals say, makes little difference in the long run. The child who is saved from leukemia lives to die ultimately of lung cancer. And the sun itself, like all stars, must someday explode. So why sweat it?

That is a question which every one of us must finally answer for himself. For myself, I sweat it because, in great love and condescension, the Creator of all that is chose to give his human creatures what Pascal called "the dignity of causality." Indeed, He gave us His assurance that our labor is not in vain in the Lord. Which would appear to mean that, unlikely as it may seem, we have the power to make good things happen.

And if we can, we ought to.

Goodbye.