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Yesterday and Mañana

This month two alumni rooted on campus bring contributions to In Luce Tua, the first arguing for teaching a greater understanding of foreign lands to the rising generation of Americans and the second pleading for a bit of sympathy for that receding generation of Americans whose lot in life was to find their native land progressively foreign to them.

The first columnist, Judith Griessel Peters, was born and raised a New Yorker. Following a family tradition—her parents met at the Valparaiso University freshman orientation in 1931—she came “out west” to the University to major in French and Spanish and was graduated in 1961. Upon graduation she was awarded a National Defense Education Act Title IV doctoral fellowship which she took further “out west” to the University of Colorado for her graduate studies in Spanish and Comparative Literature.

In 1965 she and her husband Howard returned to the University to teach Spanish in the Foreign Language Department. They foresaw their return to the University as a brief one, perhaps until she finished her doctorate in 1968, all the while intending to settle “back east” nearer to their family homes. Now, fifteen years later, home is Valparaiso where Dr. Peters continues to teach Spanish and Howard is presently Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. What time Dr. Peters manages to salvage from teaching and serving on numerous University committees is invested at home just north of Valparaiso where she and Dean Peters raise fruit, vegetables, and two children, Elisabeth and Nevin.

The second columnist, Alfred R. Looman, was graduated from the University in vintage 1942 and pursued graduate studies in English at the University of Chicago. He served in the Navy in World War II and the “police action” in Korea and is now a retired Captain in the United States Naval Reserve. In the late '40s he returned to the campus to take up student personnel work for the University and is presently Dean of Student Services. In a reckless moment in 1964 he appointed the present Cresset editor as an Admissions Counselor.

Dean Looman and his wife Jane are parents to three sons—David, James, and Robert—all of whom are now alumni of the University. No stranger to our pages, Dean Looman wrote his popular monthly Ad. Lib. columns for us from 1956 to 1969, when that Admissions Counselor became editor of the Cresset. The editor yields to no man Dean Looman’s right to solicit sympathy for his generation. All he asks is that his generation consider the greater burden put upon the succeeding generation—whose fate it was to be reared by “the most put-upon generation of all.”

The Cresset welcomes alumna Peters and alumnus Looman to In Luce Tua.

The Editor

IN LUCE TUA

Mexican Oil, Intra-Historia, And General Education

Judith Griessel Peters

Even the casual peruser of international news is aware that the United States has found a new playmate, or rather suddenly discovered one living in the house next door. Our government wants desperately to play ball with its neighbor Mexico. The only difficulty is that Mexico won’t come out and play. Even a friendly, toothsome smile has failed to warm the affections of this potential playmate, perhaps because reluctant Mexico suspects that its friendly, grinning neighbor isn’t interested in being friends at all, but only needs Mexico’s toys in order to play a game whose winner has already been determined.

Mexico’s President, José López Portillo, has advanced several immediate reasons for his country’s reticence to cooperate with the United States government. Mexico is gravely concerned about our current harsh policy regarding the presence of thousands of Mexican “indocumentados” in the U.S. work force. López Portillo has also cited the need for the U.S. to exercise some discipline in its use of energy so that Mexican oil would not be squandered by an affluent (by Mexican standards, anyhow) and indifferent populace. (Spanish-speaking peoples have always seen the initials USA in the light of their Spanish meaning—the third person singular of the verb “to use”—he uses, she uses, it uses.)

Although these reasons provide some basis for comprehending the coolness between our two nations, there is also a complex interweaving of historical, economic, and very human factors of long duration that shape present-day diplomatic realities.

We read in our history texts of the Mexican War, the first full-fledged war fought by the U.S. on foreign soil. The entire southwestern United States is testimony to the fact that we won that conflict. But there are also testimonials to that war in the land of the loser. Throughout Mexico, monuments to the “niños héroes” occupy central squares and parks. These child heroes were young cadets of the fortress-like military school at Chapultepec in Mexico City who wrapped themselves in the Mexican flag and leaped to their death on the rocks below rather than surrender to the forces of General Winfield Scott besieging Mexico City. These statues remind Mexicans constantly of the war that forced them to cede almost half
of their country to the U.S. Our southern neighbors would be quick to agree with the wry sentiment expressed by Senator Hayakawa's remark last year at the time of the congressional debate over the sovereignty of the Panama Canal Zone. He did not see why we should return the land to Panama. "After all, we stole it from them fair and square."

From the Mexican point of view, U.S. usurpation of Mexico's riches simply underwent a metamorphosis from military power to economic power following the Mexican War. By the turn of the century such was the magnitude of U.S. and foreign control of Mexico's natural resources, that the popular saying went that Mexico was a mother to foreigners and a step-mother to its own people. This attitude is forcefully brought home by the frescoes of the great Mexican revolutionary artist Diego Rivera, who frequently depicted decadent, greedy capitalists amusing themselves in nightclubs or poring over ticker tapes, while outside the poor clamored for bread.

Hand in hand with history, human nature in a collective sense has determined a great portion of the Latin American attitude toward the U.S. Mexico is constantly confronted by the undeniable fact that the United States has made phenomenal material progress and that the development of Mexico and its sister Hispanic nations has been slow and sporadic. In the wealth of introspective literature that tries to search out Spanish-America's unique identity, men of letters have advanced the theory that the Latin countries are the land of spiritual and intellectual values, while the United States embraces only the goals of materialism. In his essay Ariel, the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó likens the spirit of Latin America to ethereal Ariel, while the U.S. is characterized by base Caliban. Octavio Paz, the brilliant poet-interpreter of the Mexican soul observes, "Reality—that is, the world that surrounds us—exists by itself here, has a life of its own, and was not invented by man as it was in the United States."

Yet for all its railing at U.S. materialism and utilitarianism, Mexico views its northern neighbor with a mixture of envy and reluctant admiration. One of Mexico's foremost contemporary authors, Carlos Fuentes, crystallizes this attitude in an interior dialogue between the fictional entrepreneur Artemio Cruz and his unmasked self. Artemio has just concluded a deal with several U.S. businessmen and is gloatting over the terms he has forced them to accept, when his unmasked self reminds him:

You have lived with regret for the geographical error that has prevented you from being one of them. You admire their efficiency, their comforts, their hygiene, their power, their strength of will; and you look around you and find intolerable the incompetence, misery, dirt, the weakness and nakedness of this impoverished country that has nothing.

Fate has juxtaposed the United States and Mexico, and Mexico is compelled to identify itself in terms of comparison and contrast with its Anglo-Saxon neighbor. The old denominations of the "have" and "have-not" countries may have been exchanged for Third World euphemisms, but the realization by the have-nots that they are what they are has not disappeared with the new vocabulary.

The feeling of impotence has been exacerbated in the last decades by the advent of nuclear arms. In a discussion several years ago with Mexican friends, they stressed to me that we in the U.S. have no concept of what it is like to live next to a country that controls a nuclear arsenal. "Your quarrel is not our quarrel," they pointed out, "but your fate will certainly be our fate in a nuclear war." Helplessness, embarrassment, resentment, frustration, vis-à-vis a country whose attitude toward them, rightly or wrongly, has been perceived as haughty, condescending, deprecatory, or indifferent—these are the inner elements that motivate the recent moves in Mexican-U.S. diplomacy.

And suddenly the U.S. needs oil, and Mexico has it. For once the shoe is on the other foot. The leverage and bargaining power has shifted to the other side. Suddenly in this one area the have and the have-nots have reversed roles. Is it surprising, then, that López Portillo has asked a premium price for Mexican oil? Does it amaze or offend us that he took the opportunity to chide the U.S. publicly for its wastefulness? We are finding it uncomfortable to be the international child on the receiving end of the sort of paternalistic scolding that it has generally been our prerogative to deliver.

The Mexican Ariel and American Caliban

As a Spanish professor by trade, I have watched the wooing of Mexico with high interest and a great deal of mixed feeling. I, too, am a citizen of the United States, and bridle at being called to account by upstart foreign governments. Yet after years of viewing the international scene through the perspective of Spanish American authors, I can sense the thrill of pride, of restored self-esteem, of jubilation that coursed through Mexico and through all Latin America, as López Portillo, with stately dignity reminded President Carter of Mexico's uneven treatment at U.S. hands, only to be answered by Carter's now famous and incredibly gauche detailing of the saga of his bout with "Montezuma's revenge" on a previous visit to Mexico. The collective cheer of congratulation that rose figuratively from the throat of Latin America must have been matched in volume only by the laughter at Carter's ineptitude.

Yet in the long run, the glory of momentary triumph, the I-win-you-lose of diplomatic one-upmanship, underscores one more sad time the fact that international relationships in this world are based on pride and pragmatism, not on understanding and compassion. It is naive
The United States needs oil, and Mexico has it. The bargaining power has shifted to the other side. Suddenly in one area, the have and have-nots have reversed roles.

to wish for, to strive for an international climate based on knowledge, insight, and (I almost blush to say it) love? Is it absurd to suggest that the university, and perhaps especially Valparaiso University, has a responsibility to open some intercultural doors to our students, who may themselves soon be the policy makers and shapers of international realities? I think not.

During the past year I have been serving on a committee that is attempting to renew and strengthen the general education courses at the University. We are not unique in this attempt, as concern for general education is currently a national academic preoccupation. A trend that is apparent across the nation is that while the stated goals of general education—the preparation of the whole person for a useful and fulfilling life through understanding himself and his society—have not changed substantially, the curricula that purport to fulfill those goals, have, in the recent past, altered a great deal as a result of a response to changes in society. Consequently there is currently a great emphasis on the skills and specific knowledges needed to achieve immediate vocational goals, and less emphasis on the realm of ideas. Perhaps Rodó would tell us that Ariel has had to cede some ground to Caliban.

This trend caused me to reflect on the area of my own discipline that falls into the "general education requirement" category, the teaching of lower-division foreign language courses, and I found it serves as an excellent case in point. Until the late '50s, the purpose of learning a foreign language was chiefly to be able to read the literature of another culture. Language as a skill and language as liberal learning were virtually one and the same, since the skill of reading led directly to the goal of understanding the culture of another country through the ideas expressed by its great authors. Language was taught primarily through reading masterworks and translating them to English, accompanied by a study of grammar based on translating devilishly intricate sentences laden with grammatical pitfalls (a subjective evaluation, no doubt) from English into the foreign tongue.

Sputnik, however, radically changed the goal of language teaching and learning. From the day the fateful rocket zoomed skyward, communication became the byword of foreign-language teaching. To speak the new language was the essential goal, and new methodologies were introduced to achieve it. The era of the oral pattern drill dawned, and grammar was learned not through slow, painstaking translation, but by rapid-fire oral substitution of grammatical elements in fill-in-the-blank sentences whose blank never stood still. The sister of the pattern drill was the to-be-memorized dialogue, which, in reality, was the memorization of a series of patterns of speech, the theory being that the alert student would infer grammatical principles from the memorized patterns. Grammatical explanations were kept to a minum, and students were discouraged from asking analytical questions and urged to concentrate on memorization.

I still hear passages from the text we used in the early '60s at the University of Colorado echoing in the recesses of my mind.

In the ensuing years the other three skills of language learning, understanding, reading, and writing, have crept back into the picture, along with some excellent materials for the fostering of those skills. The demand of a decade ago for "relevance" gave birth to imaginative adjunct materials to stimulate and direct student interest in discussion, and it is a rare language learner today who does not emerge from even the very rudimentary level of instruction already a veteran of in-language discussions of topics of immediate interest to him, such as drug abuse, or the gap between teenagers and parents.

_Sputnik Skills at the Expense of Spirit_

I would submit, however, that the sputnik era, which flung foreign language teaching into a transmission of the skills of communication caused an essential element of the spirit of communication to be left behind. The skills became an end in themselves. The oneness of skill and liberal learning, the "humanities" aspect of language learning, was split in two. Skill became the object of lower-level, requirement-fulfilling courses. The humanities—ideas, culture, literature, the understanding of what Unamuno would call the _intra-historia_ of another way of life—were left for intermediate or upper-division language students.

I believe that the time has come for a reconciliation of skills and the essential goal of those skills, of the practical and the humanistic, even on the most rudimentary level of language instruction. It is time to remind ourselves that words are only a tool for fruitful communication. Unless they are spoken or received in a climate of insight and understanding, there is no real communication taking place.

I have used my own area of study as a case-in-point, but the implication of this example extends to most of the disciplines involved in the general education process. If we were to examine the diplomatic relations between The United States and Mexico concerning Mexican oil, there is no discipline that could not use its skills and knowledge to shed light on understanding what is truly taking place and why. The social scientist, the natural scientist, the historian, the theologian, the artist, the literary critic, would all be involved in the process of understanding, of revealing _intra-historia_. Let's get down to the business of _intra-historia_, then, so that we can communicate with words that strike the chord of understanding because they are spoken with insight, compassion, and yes, even love.
Laura Lee always wore those large skirts
that at the time
I assumed were worn by women
since women began
which, at fourteen, you naturally assume
means all the women who ever lived
but Laura Lee was special
because her eyes were always
half open
and I couldn’t tell if she
was looking at me
or at the ground
and I used to crane my neck and head
downward
to see into her face
which would blush red
against those white cheeks
and her eyes would flutter open
and I never knew that Mr. Uffelman
was standing by my desk
those stalwart wing-tips growing
beneath my desk,
William Craigmiles putting his hands
into his mouth
and rolling his eyes behind Mr. Uffelman’s back
and Laura Lee becoming a sunset
and me with my head down
looking up into her blue, blue eyes
and the class holding its breath—
I think we are still there,
no one has moved
and her eyes are opening
now.  

IN LUCE TUA II

Some Sympathy, Please,
For the Most Put-Up
Generation of All

Alfred R. Looman

Much of what follows will be of little interest to anyone
under the age of 55. It is not that these remarks require
one to be of a certain age or maturity level to be under­
stood, but rather the tone and content may approach
generation-aggrandizement and as such might prove to
be a bit cloying to those who are younger. For it is my
thesis that those of us who are 55 years of age or older
belong to a generation which has been subjected to more
change, more assaults on the mind, the heart, the spirit,
and the emotions than any generation in the history of
mankind.

Change has always been with us, but its pace has been
slow with some few exceptions. The Renaissance period
was one of those exceptions, but the change that took
place extended over a period of 300 years. And there was
the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, but
that change primarily was in the economy. In no other
period has change been so rapid and so all-pervasive as it
has been in the last few decades. No one over the age of 55
needs to be convinced of this fact, and perhaps a few
examples will convince those somewhat younger.

Those in our generation were born during or shortly
after World War I and became conscious of the world
around us in the ’20s. It was a world at peace but the
feeling of patriotism following that war was still strong.
Armistice Day was a major holiday complete with parades
and speeches. Now you can’t find it on the calendar.
On that and on every other patriotic holiday, flags flew from
almost every house in town.

The high pitch of patriotism of the ’20s survived the
Depression and came to full fruition during World War
II. Never before had our nation experienced such
solidarity, never before had national purpose been so
clear and so completely accepted. We were on the side of
right, and serving in the armed forces was considered a
privilege by most. Those who did not serve in the military
suffered through rationing and other deprivations at
home with very little grumbling. Even the Korean Con­
flict, which followed so shortly after World War II and
which few understood, received popular support, for the
feeling of patriotism was still strong in the land.

And then came Viet Nam. Most of us in our generation
had by that time been taught and had experienced a high
It is my thesis that those of us 55 years of age or older belong to a generation which has been subjected to more change, more assaults on the mind, the heart, the spirit, and the emotions than any generation in the history of mankind.

type of patriotism. Most of us had served in the military forces in World War II and our wives, sisters, and mothers had worked in factories or performed other work to support the war effort. We had always been willing to accept as right any action our country decided to take. Then we who had waved flags and sung patriotic songs on our way to the annual parochial school picnic came face to face with a generation that burned the flag instead of waving it. We who had been brought up to serve our country willingly now met the generation with the slogan “Hell no, we won’t go.”

Even when faced with the knowledge of what our government was doing in Viet Nam, it took a long time and a period of anguish and great soul-searching to admit our country was doing something wrong. What a change in attitude in only a few decades.

While outside events may have precipitated the pace of change, part of the change was our fault. In between the World Wars, we lived through the Great Depression. None of us who experienced it will ever forget that time when almost half of the population was unemployed, a time when people were starving in what we had known to be a land of plenty. True, most of us did not starve nor did we lose status by being poor since everyone else, relatively speaking, was also poor. Since we were young then we never grasped the full gravity of the situation, but the feeling of fear and insecurity was transmitted to us by our parents and others. And we were scarred for life. While the scars may have healed to a great degree, the scar tissue has remained and we have continued to be a security-minded generation.

Over-compensating for our experience, we vowed when we had children of our own, they would never be deprived of what we felt we had been deprived of. So we gave our children what they wanted and in so doing spawned a generation that has or wants everything. And now we have been trying to find accommodation with a youth that neither scrimps nor saves in order to increase their earthly goods, but goes right out and buys it and puts it on their credit cards. Perhaps the unkindest cut of all is that no one in that younger generation exhibits any interest in sitting around and listening to our experiences in the Great Depression.

Perhaps the change that has hurt us the most is in the stability of the family and in the loss of the feeling of roots. For centuries before our generation came along, most people were born, raised, worked, and died in the same town. If you were born in Glasgow, Rome, or Chicago that is where you expected to stay for the rest of your life. Few went off to college and those who did came home after graduation. Family roots were deeply imbedded, for we were surrounded by grandparents, aunts, and cousins. The family unit was strong and discipline was strict. We were not unmindful of the fact that if our parents didn’t catch us doing something wrong, our relatives might.

With World War II men who had seldom been out of their home country and never out of their home states now found themselves in training camps far from home, and, eventually, on duty on the other side of the world. Women, as their part of the war effort, went to work, filling jobs in which women had never worked before.

When the war was over the mobility of our society continued. Men who had now seen the world were no longer content to spend the rest of their lives in Podunk, and the women who had found working to be exciting wanted to continue. Instead of staying in their home communities, fathers moved from one location to another as a means of progressing in their careers. The sons and daughters, upon graduation from high school or college, continued the general diaspora of the family. Yes, our generation started and continued that mobility and, consequently, we are the most aware of what has been lost. For we had known a society that was quite different, one that was far less mobile and volatile.

From One Man’s Family to the Diaspora

Along with a feeling of roots, we have lost some other desirable societal traits. Since we have now moved into that age bracket, the trait our generation misses most is respect for one’s elders. When we were growing up our respect for our grandparents was almost Chinese in character. This veneration for elders generally was assumed and any lack of such respect was met with immediate reprisals. But when I was young I would no more have thought of being disrespectful to my elders than I would have thought of suggesting social dancing at our Walther League meeting. With that background, how were we supposed to adjust to the turmoil of the student movement in the late ’60s and early ’70s when our youth treated college presidents as if they were dolts and considered anyone over the age of 30 as senile or, at the very least, highly suspect?

The scientific and technological advances occurring in our lifetime have been mind-boggling, but they have also been the easiest to accept. In the area of communications, for example, my first experience with the “wireless” was my cousin’s crystal set, which, with a lot of maneuvering brought in a series of whistles and crackles which he identified as KDKA, Pittsburgh, or WLW, Cincinnati. Then came the radio with three dials which required a lot of fiddling around to bring in a station. A few years later only one knob was required and we all thought we were at the zenith of the radio communications.
What seems strange now, looking back, is that we as a family could sit around a radio and be highly entertained by such programs as “Amos and Andy,” “One Man’s Family,” and “Kay Kaiser’s Kollege of Musical Knowledge.” But that was a great training ground for one’s imagination. We have adjusted very well, however, from those days of looking at a wooden box to today's watching of a color TV where we can view a program bounced off a satellite in space.

Automobiles were just coming into their own when we were young and, in fact, most of us can still remember horses and wagons on the streets of our towns. We can recall the thrill of racing down a country road in a Model T Ford at 25 miles per hour. True, the car had to be cranked by hand and had a variety of idiosyncrasies, but repair costs were low and gas was 12¢ a gallon.

**From Kay Kaiser’s Kollege to Computers**

The airplane was so new that everyone ran out of the house to watch when one flew over. It does not make me feel any younger to know that a copy of the first plane I rode in, a Ford Tri-motor, is now on display in the Smithsonian as a relic. In what seems like no time, we moved from jet planes to travel in space, and it took a while to convince some in our generation that the landing on the moon was real and not something staged in a TV studio.

The advances in science and technology in our lifetime are too numerous and too vast to cover here. Many of them have changed us and our lives much more than we realize; the computer is one good example, and that came along at just about the time I had finally mastered the punch and pull of an adding machine.

But our generation has accepted these changes with good grace, though, unlike our children who accept all of these machines and devices as normal and even understand how they work, we are inclined to still view them as miracles.

These have been just a few of the radical changes that have occurred in the last half century. One that perhaps should have been covered had space permitted is the change that has taken place in sexual mores. For if you want to know what has really bugged our eyes and whitened our hair more than anything else, it is the change in attitude toward general decorum, sex, and marriage.

You may not believe it from the tone of many of the remarks above, but these are not the words of a cranky old man who hates kids or any deviation from the status quo. Quite the contrary. I believe there has been progress in much of this rapid change and I enjoy, and perhaps envy, the youth of today. And I also believe that we will continue to experience change at a rapid rate. So if I have sounded rather querulous, it is only my attempt to solicit for my generation any sympathy that may be out there, before someone younger comes along and tries to stake a claim for his generation as the most put-upon.
Coming to *Gulliver’s Travels* from *Tale of a Tub*, the student of Swift’s work is aware of curious anomaly: the paucity of religious satire in this, Swift’s greatest satire. While it may be reasoned that Swift said everything he had to say about religious abuses in *Tale of a Tub*, it seems clear that, by saying little about religion in *Gulliver’s Travels*, Swift says a great deal. In Lemuel Gulliver we have a very modern man who places his faith not in those Christian ideals to which Swift himself, as a priest of the Anglican church, was completely committed, but in Reason, in the ability of the human being to achieve a perfect state. This being the case, Gulliver is the sort of creature the early Romantics hoped to develop, one so chasms into which all of us seem to hurl ourselves regularly; and he can avoid reliance on government as he avoids reliance on the church. What need can perfect beings have for such institutions as exist for fallen humanity?

In “Part I” of the *Travels*, Gulliver supplies a scanty but adequate biography of himself. He is in the unenviable position of being “the third of five sons” of the owner of “a small estate in Nottinghamshire”; thus, his income proving inadequate, Gulliver could afford but three years at “Emmanuel College in Cambridge,” which he left before completing his degree. Such money as his father later sent him he “laid... out in learning Navigation, and other parts of the Mathematics, useful to those who intend to travel.” He continued his education in Leyden, where he “studied Physic two Years and seven Months, knowing it would be useful in long Voyages.” He spent his leisure time “in reading the best Authors, ancient and modern, being always provided with a good Number of Books; and when I was ashore in observing the Manners and Dispositions of the People, as well as learning their language, wherein I had a great Facility by the Strength of my Memory” (p. 4). Gulliver, then, has a better-than-average education, albeit one directed of necessity to the mechanical, to mathematics; he is adept at languages, and he is an adept observer. But, as indicated by his spectacles, which, as he says, “I sometimes use for the weakness of my eyes,” he can only observe things outside himself. An introspective man he is definitely not, and that failure to look within is the source of his major problem, his eventual madness.

Nor is he in the least romantic (“romantic” with a small “r”). Of his marriage he says only that, “being advised to alter my Condition, I married Mrs. Mary Burton, second Daughter to Mr. Edmund Burton, Hosier, in Newgate Street, with whom I received four Hundred Pounds for a portion” (pp. 3-4). There is no mention made of poor Mary’s personal attributes, only, so to speak, her name, rank, and serial number. Gulliver leaves his wife with it, would seem, but little regret, on May 4, 1699, to embark on the first of his major voyages.

**Human Limits and the Critter Motif**

Forced by a storm to abandon the ship, Gulliver records that “We therefore trusted ourselves to the Mercy of the Waves,” and “I swam as Fortune directed me.” Hopeless though the situation seemed, Gulliver trusted himself to “Fortune,” not to God. In “Part II,” when first he meets the huge Brobdingnagians, Gulliver remembers: “All I ventured was to raise mine Eyes towards the Sun, and place my Hands together in a supplicating Posture, and to speak some Words in an humble melancholy Tone, suitable to the Condition I then was in” (p. 63). Again he relies exclusively upon his own abilities.

Throughout the *Travels* Swift includes numerous reminders of the inadequacy of human ability and the limitation, both physical and moral, of human beings. In Lilliput, where he is the giant, he must “ease myself with making Water; which I very plentifully did, to the great Astonishment of the People, who conjecturing by my Motions what I was going to do, immediately opened to the right and left on that Side, to avoid the Torrent which fell with such Noise and Violence from me” (pp. 8-9). There are similar scenes, the most notable being the fire in “her Imperial Majesty’s Apartment,” which conflagration Gulliver extinguishes with his own water, much to the disgust of the Empress, so angered that she

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An Associate Professor of English at Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania, Jay H. Hartman holds his A.B. from Dickinson College, his M.A. from Tulane University, and his Ph.D. from Lehigh University. Dr. Hartman’s specialty is English literature from 1660-1800, and he is primarily interested in Restoration comedy and the writings of Jonathan Swift.
"could not forbear vowing Revenge." In Brobdingnag, where he is appropriately dwarfed, he hid himself "between two Leaves of Sorrel and there discharged the Necessities of Nature." Critics disturbed by what they consider Swift's graphic depiction of bodily functions would do well to remember that Swift is primarily concerned with illustrating human limitation.

Human limitation is nowhere better stressed than in "Part II," where Swift uses the technique cleverly designated by Aline M. Taylor as "the critter motif." The giant Brobdingnagians are initially unsure whether Gulliver is a miniature human or merely a varmint. Gulliver remembers how the giant "considered a while with the Caution of one who endeavours to lay hold on a small dangerous Animal in such a Manner that it shall not be able either to scratch or bite him, as I myself have sometimes done with a Weasel in England" (p. 63). Gulliver is fearful, apprehending "every Moment that he would dash me against the Ground as we usually do any little hateful Animal which we have a mind to destroy") (p. 63). Catching her first glimpse of Critter Gulliver, the farmer's wife "screamed and ran back, as Women in England do at the Sight of a Toad or Spider."

Gulliver is the sort of creature the early Romantics hoped to develop, one so thoroughly guided by Reason that he need not rely on government and the church. What need can perfect beings have for those institutions which exist for fallen humanity?

Likened to insignificant vermin in Gulliver's Travels, human kind very often act accordingly. In Lilliput Gulliver gives a detailed description of "the rope dancers," who "performed upon a slender white thread, extended about two foot and twelve inches from the ground."

This Diversion is only practiced by those Persons who are Candidates for great Employments, and high Favour, at court. ... When a great Office is vacant, either by Death or Disgrace (which often happens), five or six of those Candidates petition the Emperor to entertain his Majesty and the Court with a Dance on the Rope, and whoever jumps the highest without falling, succeeds in the Office (p. 20).

Thus do men—and women—vie for offices.

Again in Lilliput, party faction is satirized in the high heels (the Tory party) and the low heels (the Whig party). Not surprisingly, "The Animosities between these two Parties run so high, that they will neither eat nor drink, nor talk with each other" (p. 28). Religious differences are satirized in the dispute between the Big Endians (the Roman Catholics) and the Little Endians (the Anglicans), a dispute that hinges upon the proper way "of breaking Eggs before we eat them." Gulliver speaks for Swift—and for all right-thinking men—when he concludes "That all true Believers shall break their Eggs at the convenient End: and which is the convenient End, seems, in my humble Opinion, to be left to every Man's Conscience, or at least in the Power of the chief Magistrate to determine" (p.29). Gulliver's tolerance is not shared by the Lilliputians (who are, obviously, the English in miniature). Lilliputian history tells of "six Rebellions" on account of religious differences, "wherein one Emperor lost his Life [Charles I], and another his Crown [James II]" (p.29).

Nowhere in Swift's satire more biting, or sharper, than in "Part III," the voyage to Laputa, a country whose name translates "the whore." Laputa illustrates Reason misapplied. In this land, theorizing counts for every thing, practical application for nothing:

It seems, the Minds of these People are so taken up with intense Speculations, that they neither can speak or attend to the Discourses of others, without being roused by some external Taction upon the Organs of Speech and Hearing: for which Reason, those Persons who are able to afford it, always keep a Flapper (p. 124),

the servant who, shaking a bladder filled with dried pease, rouses the speculators from their dream-like trances. Without a flapper, the theoretician is "in manifest Danger of falling down every Precipice, and bouncing his Head against every Post; and in the Streets, of jostling others, or being jostled himself into the Kennel" (pp. 124-125).

During his first two voyages, Gulliver had been adequately supplied with clothing by his hosts. Not so in Laputa. The tailor "first took my Altitude by a Quadrant, and then with Rule and Compasses, described the Dimensions and Out-Lines of my whole Body; all which he entered upon Paper, and in six Days brought my Cloths very ill made, and quite out of Shape, by happening to mistake a Figure in the Calculation. But my Comfort was, that I observed such Accidents very frequent, and little regarded" (p. 127). So besotted with mathematical theory are the Laputans that "Their Ideas are perpetually conversant in Lines and Figures. If they would, for Example, praise the Beauty of a Woman, or any other Animal, they describe it by Rhombs, Circles, Parallelograms, Ellipses, and other Geometrical Terms ... " (pp. 127-128). No wonder the theoretician's wives find it both necessary and easy to choose gallants. No wonder that "Their Houses are very ill built, the Walls bevil, without one right Angle in any Apartment; and this Defect arises from the Contempt they bear for practical Geometry; which they despise as vulgar and mechanick . . . . " (p. 128). Gulliver is both shocked and amused to discover that "Imagination, Fancy, and Invention, they are wholly Strangers to, nor have any Words in their Language by which those Ideas can be expressed; the whole Compass of their Thoughts and Mind, being shut up within the two . . . Sciences" (p. 128), mathematics and music. As A. L. Rowse says of Laputa, "It is not an unfamiliar picture at the universities today." 3 In Laputa Reason has gone berserk.

But Swift's most telling technique for satire is, obviously, his manipulation of size. In "Part I," in which Gulliver is twelve times as tall as his hosts, the Lilliputians

are seen in all their human pettiness. We consider them—and all their political machinations—as seriously as we do children playing at being adults, and that is about as seriously as Gulliver considers them. Gulliver is lenient in his punishment of the group of Lilliputians who thoughtlessly shoot their puny arrows at him. But the Emperor shows no such leniency to Gulliver, condemned to be blinded for his bizarre method of extinguishing the fire in the Empress's apartments, and for conspiring with the Blefuscudians (the French), the perennial enemies of the Lilliputians. Such injustice and foolishness Gulliver sees clearly. But he does not see everything clearly. Gulliver vigorously and unnecessarily defends the reputation of the Treasurer's wife who, according to gossip, having visited the giant for amorous purposes, had had her good name sullied. Could anything be more unlikely than an affair between a giant and a woman six inches tall? Having been created a Nardac (or Duke) for single-handedly capturing the entire Blefescudian fleet, Gulliver reminds his readers that he outranks the treasurer, "only a Clumglum, a Title inferior by one Degree, as that of a Marquess is to a Duke in England," forgetting that his title, carrying with it neither land nor income, is about as hollow as a life peerage of today.

Gulliver speaks for Swift—and for all right thinking men—when he concludes that all true believers shall break their eggs at the convenient end, which convenient end seems in his humble opinion to be left to every man's conscience to determine.

Yet in discussing Lilliputian statutes, Gulliver remarks:

In relating these and the following Laws, I would only be understood to mean the original Institutions, and not the most scandalous Corruptions into which these People are fallen by the degenerate Nature of Man (p. 38).

The important phrase is "the degenerate nature of man," for in "Part II," the Voyage to Brobdingnag, Gulliver is confronted with his moral superiors, with beings whose size indicates that they are not so fallen as the Lilliputians. In Brobdingnag he is called "Grildrig" which means "little man." Here he shows just how degenerate, how little and petty mankind can become, has become. For his child-nurse, Glumdalclitch, he is but a toy, a doll; for her countrymen, he is but a freak. Brobdingnagian scholars are unsure what Gulliver is: one thinks he "might be an Embrio, or abortive birth," but other scholars reject this theory. Unable to agree, the scholars can only label him "Lusus Naturae," a freak of nature.

Because of his size, Gulliver is constantly on the defensive. Shortly after being acquired by the royal family as a kind of novelty, Gulliver talks with the monarch, explaining "the Manners, Religion, Laws, Government, and Learning of Europe." He admits "that after I had been a little too copious in talking of my own beloved Country, of our Trade, and Wars by Sea and Land, of our Schisms in Religion, and Parties in the States; the Prejudices of his [the King's] Education prevailed so far, that he could not forbear taking me up in his right Hand, and stroaking me gently with the other; after an Heartiy Fit of laughing, asked me, whether I were a Whig or a Tory" (p. 79). In Lilliput, Gulliver could see the ridiculousness of British institutions; in Brobdingnag, his moral vision is impaired by his own reduction in size, and he is content to attribute the enlightened monarch's laughter to "the Prejudices of his Education." When the king proceeds to disparage British institutions, Gulliver recalls that "my Colour came and went several Times, with Indignation to hear our noble Country, the Mistress of Arts and Arms, the Scourge of France, the Arbitress of Europe, the Seat of Virtue, Piety, Honour, and Truth, the Pride and Envy of the World, so contemptuously treated" (p. 79).

The little man has every reason to blush, for he does not present a true picture of Britain but a panegyric of the most inaccurate sort: the House of Lords contains peers who are "the Ornament and Bulwark of the Kingdom, worthy Followers of their most renowned Ancestors, whose Honour had been the Reward of their Virtue; from which their Posterity were never once known to degenerate" (p. 97). The bishops, who also sit in the Lords, "were searched and sought out through the whole Nation, by the Prince and wisest Counsellors, among such of the Priesthood as were most deservedly distinguished by the Sanctity of their Lives, and the Depth of their Erudition; who were indeed the spiritual Fathers of the Clergy and the People" (p. 97). Questioned by the King, who sees with ease through Gulliver's gilding, Gulliver is apparently temporarily shocked into speechlessness by the King's conclusions: "But, by what I have gathered from your own Relation, and the Answers I have with much Pains winged and extorted from you, I cannot but conclude the Bulk of your Natives to be the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth" (p. 101). This handsome reply aptly brings into final prominence Swift's use of animal imagery in "Part II."

The Satire in the Manipulation of Size

Swift makes clear that, while the Brobdingnagians are morally superior to Europeans, they are not pre-lapsarian men; they are troubled by disease. Gulliver sees "a Woman with a Cancer in her Breast," "a Fellow with a Wed in his Neck," "and another with a couple of wooden Legs." Most distressing to Gulliver's microscopic sight are "the Lice crawling on their Cloaths" (p. 84). The moral superiority of the Brobdingnagians is seen partly in the King's assessment of European institutions but mainly in his indignant and horrified reaction to Gulliver's offer of gunpowder. This enlightened but outraged monarch

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...professed both to abominate and despise all Mystery, Refinement, and Intrigue, either in a Prince or a Minister. ... He confined the knowledge of governing within every narrow Bounds; to common Sense and Reason, to Justice and Lenity, to the Speedy Determination of Civil and criminal Causes; with some other obvious Topicks, which are not worth considering. And, he gave it for his Opinion; that whoever could make two Ears of Corn, or two Blades of Grass to grow upon a Spot of Ground where only one grew before; would deserve better of Mankind, and do more essential Service to his Country, than the whole Race of Politicians put together (pp. 103-104).

**From Days of Giants to Dwindled Man**

Gulliver learns the Brobdingnagian language from his nurse, who uses as a primer “a common Treatise for the use of young Girls, giving a short Account of their Religion . . .” (p.73). Gulliver learns the language but ignores the religion. He finds and reads a book which treats of the Weakness of Human kind; and is in little Esteem, except among Women and the Vulgar. ...This Writer went through all the usual Topicks of European moralists; showing how diminutive, contemptible, and helpless an Animal was man in his own Nature . . . He added that Nature was degenerated in these latter declining Ages of the World, and could now produce only small abortive Births in Comparison of those in ancient Times. He said, it was very reasonable to think, not only that the Species of Man were originally much larger, but also, that there must have been Giants in former Ages; which, as it is asserted by History and Tradition, so it hath been confirmed by huge Bones and Skulls casually dug up in several Parts of the Kingdom, far exceeding the common dwindled Race of Man in our Days (p. 105).

Gulliver reacts . . . like Gulliver. Ignoring his own little­ness and the Brobdingnagians’ bigness; ignoring his recent kidnapping by a monkey, symbol of fallen man,3 who took Gulliver “for a young one of his own Species,” Gulliver nonchalantly concludes “how universally this Talent was spread of drawing Lectures in Morality, or indeed rather Matter of Discontent and repining, from the Quarrels we raise with Nature. And, I believe, upon a recent kidnapping by a monkey, symbol of fallen man, he would have known of the holy writ, he would have known of the dozen or so references to giants in the Old Testament. For example, Genesis 6:4 says that “There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.” Additionally, Gulliver could have had from the Bible example upon example of the weakness that led to and followed upon the degeneration of humanity.

In “Part III,” Gulliver has little difficulty in his intercourse with the Laputans, in part because in size they are much like himself, and in part because their “intellec­

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...pursuit is so absurd as to make an accurate assessment of them quite easy. But when, in “Chapter X,” he hears of the immortal Struldbruggs, he is ecstatic, thinking of the glorious things he would do if immortal. For instance, “These Struldbruggs and I would mutually communicate our Observations and Memorials through the Course of Time; remark of the several Graduations by which Corruption steals into the World, and oppose it every Step, by giving perpetual Warning and Instruction to Mankind; which, added to the strong Influence of our own Example, would probably prevent that continual Degeneracy of human Nature, so justly complained of in all Ages” (p. 168). Gulliver’s Romantic rhapsodizing ends, alas, when he learns that the Struldbruggs do not remain perpetually young; they just live on and on and on, “sans eyes, sans teeth, sans hair,” sans mental faculties. His three voyages have taught Gulliver little or nothing about the moral nature of mankind.

**He gave it for his opinion that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, grow where only one grew before would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together.**

“Part IV,” the voyage to Houyhnhnmland, forces Gulliver to choose, as none of the earlier voyages has forced him to do, between two opposing creatures, the savage Yahoos and the sophisticated Houyhnhnms. On the one hand, the Yahoos look very much like human beings, for “The Hair of both Sexes was of several Colours, brown, red, black, and yellow.” In their likes and habits they sound all too human: they are avaricious, collecting, hoarding, and hiding “shining Stones of several Colours”; they are petty for, according to Gulliver’s Houyhnhnm master, “it was common when two Yahoos discovered such a Stone in a Field, and were contending which of them should be the Proprietor, a third would take the Advantage, and carry it away from them both; which my Master would needs contend to have some Resemblance with our Suits at Law . . .” (p. 213). They are sexually promiscuous, as Gulliver learns to his dismay when a female Yahoo pursues him with intent to rape; the Yahoo leader “had usually a Favourite as like himself as he could get, whose Employment was to lick his Master’s Feet and Posteriors, and drive the Female Yahoos to his Kennel . . .” (p. 214). The leader “usually continues in Office till a worse can be found; but the very Moment he is discarded, his Successor, at the Head of all the Yahoos in that District, Young and Old, Male and Female, come in a Body, and discharge their Excrements upon him from Head to Foot” (p. 214). They have “a strange Disposition to Nastiness and Dirt,” and they are given to psychosomatic illnesses. Seeing such unpleasant characteristics among the Yahoos, Gulliver naturally turns to the Houyhnhnms, “those excellent Quadrupeds placed in opposite View to human Corruptions” (p. 210). By
design Swift strips the Yahoos of any civilized human virtues. These savages have nothing to raise them above the animals, not love, not art in any form, not kindness, not generosity, not religion.

In its etymology the word Houyhnhnm signifies "the Perfection of Nature." Houyhnhnms are the reasonable result of Reason completely developed in a living creature. In their lives as in their institutions and arts, they represent the kind of perfection a Romantic philosopher like William Godwin thought men could in time become through education. For them, "the Use of Speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive Information of Facts" (p. 195); and philosophical speculation, plotting, scheming—these are unthinkable uses of language to them. Nor does their language "abound in Variety of Words, because their Wants and Passions are fewer than among us." They firmly believe that "Reason will in Time always prevail against Brutal Strength" (p. 196). After three years in their country, Gulliver is drawn down steep Hills, and over hard stony Grounds .... And where-ever there is any Want (which is but seldom), it is immediately supplied by unanimous Consent and Contributions" (p. 220). Sickness is unknown to them; and when death comes, friends and relations of the deceased express "neither Joy nor Grief at their Departure; nor does the dying Person discover the least Regret that he is leaving the World, any more than if he were upon returning home from a Visit to one of his Neighbours" (p. 224).

**Cursed Yahoos and Sterile Houyhnhnms**

Small wonder, then, that Gulliver, repelled by the Yahoos and yet convinced that he is one of them, is attracted to the Houyhnhnms, who have come to represent to him "the way, the truth, and the life." He is filled with self-loathing: "When I happened to behold the Reflection of my own Form in a Lake or Fountain, I turned away my Face in Horror and detestation of myself; and could better endure the Sight of a common Yahoo, than of my own Person" (p. 228). And yet, judged by human standards, how sterile the Houyhnhnms' lives appear, free as they are from folly—and love. This sterility is reflected in their literature, which usually contains "either some exalted Notions of Friendship and Benevolence, or the Praises of those who were Victors in Races, and other bodily Exercises" (p. 223). Houyhnhnm literature sounds as uninteresting as that produced in contemporary totalitarian states.

Gulliver sees little difference between himself and the accursed Yahoos, save that he wears clothing and they don't, and that he is possessed of a modicum of Reason. Consequently, he is careful never to let the Houyhnhnms see him without his precious clothes; and he becomes hyper-critical of anything that does not strike him as reasonable. So twisted does he become, that, when his shoes wear out, he replaces the leather "with Skins of Yahoos dried in the Sun." When the Houyhnhnm assembly decided that Gulliver must be expelled from their country, he made himself "a Sort of Indian Canoe, but much larger, covering it with the Skins of Yahoos well stitched together, with hempen Threads of my own making. My Sail was likewise composed of the Skins of the same Animal; but I made use of the youngest I could get, the older being too tough and thick." He stopped "all the chinks [of his canoe] with Yahoos tallow" (p. 230). In attempting to emulate the most rational of creatures, he has succeeded only in becoming the basest of men and not unlike the personnel of Nazi concentration camps, whose atrocities included making such things as lamp shades from the skins of their victims. Thus the most extreme form of Gulliver's madness, his rejection of human kind, now becomes clearly evident.

**In attempting to emulate the most rational of creatures, Gulliver succeeds only in becoming the basest of men, not unlike those Nazis who made lamp shades from the skins of the victims of the concentration camps. Gulliver's madness is his rejection of man.**

Upon his return to England, Gulliver considers himself a Houyhnhnm, albeit a degenerate one. In the material prefatory to "Part I," he renounces "a Paragraph about her Majesty the late Queen Anne," for he considers it unseemly "to praise any Animal of our Composition before my Master Houyhnhnm" (p. xxii). He uses the phraseology of the Houyhnhnms, admitting that he has been forced to "say the thing that was not" (p. xxi), the Houyhnhnm term meaning "to lie." He laments the fact that, although his Travels have been in the public's hands for more than six months, "I cannot learn that my Book hath produced one single Effect according to my Intentions" (p. xxiii). He is so misanthropic as to avoid contact with humanity, even his own family, preferring instead the company "of those two degenerate Houyhnhnms I keep in my Stable; because, from these, degenerate as they are, I still improve in some Virtues, without any Mixture of Vice" (p. xxiv).

Swift was aware of human folly, ridiculed everywhere in his satires. But he does not, I think, record any folly greater than that of Lemuel Gulliver, a man who, ignoring the traditional Christian faith, turns instead to Reason. He can neither accept traditional values nor forgive human kind for being, by nature, weak and imperfect. As Swift suggests, Christianity accepts; and, more importantly, it forgives.

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promising” for the new President and that, all in all, he ought to do “very well indeed.” Things haven’t quite worked out that way, and the reasons why bear looking into.

Almost everyone concedes that it’s not all his fault. This is not a good time to be President of the United States. Many of the elements involved in the two great related crises of our time—energy and inflation—lie outside Carter’s direct control. He did not, after all, create OPEC or the oil shortage, and inflation, the causes of which are multiform and complex, bedevils not just America but the overwhelming majority of all nations.

More generally, Carter has to deal with the hugely inflated expectations modern democratic electorates bring to political life. It has not always been the case, as it is now, that men and women in every conceivable permutation—individuals, groups, classes, genders, races—looked instinctively to government to cure whatever ills beset them. We want government not simply to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, and promote the general welfare (as we used to be to expound on what a good, kind, and decent people we good, kind, and decent people we are and what an ungodly and disorderly world we find ourselves in). We want it to right all that is wrong in an untidy world and within our troubled souls.

Could an earlier age ever have supposed, as we do now, that it is among the functions of government to guarantee the “quality of life”? Carter must by now fully appreciate that the concept of “overload” is not a fantasy of timid or reactionary spirits but a prevailing condition of politics. The demand for justice has extended beyond the goal of rough social equity to that proposition that government should see to it that life be no longer unfair. And in the American system, it is the President upon whom all these grandiose expectations get dumped.

As if all this were not bad enough, Carter must operate within a political system that has seldom worked so badly as it does at present. American political parties have never been as effective as those in most democracies, but in recent times they have been “reformed” into near uselessness. The very idea of an appeal to party unity—not to say discipline—is quaint to the point of eccentricity. In addition, the Congress acts, in its post-Watergate sensitivity, as if the constitutional provision for the separation of powers precluded any cooperation whatever with the President. It cannot lead, it will not follow, and it seems currently incapable of moving in any direction at all.

Then there is the public. It is cranky and unpredictable, swept by erratic populist impulses that have no coherent ideological focus and which resist easy management or soothing. The spread of “single-interest” politics is simply the most obvious manifestation of a political impulse at once intense yet not easily harnessed to broad programmatic purposes. (It is not surprising that the President seems less inclined than he used to be to expound on what a good, kind, and decent people we all are.)

In the face of all this, many of us are moved to feel at least some sympathy for Mr. Carter and to suspect that his disastrous popularity ratings reflect the general disarray of the political system as well as his own failings. America is not yet an ungodly nation, but there are times when it seems that way. Jimmy Carter is governing in unpropitious circumstances.

Yet if it’s not all his fault, it’s not all just bad fortune, either. We are naturally suspicious when Senator Kennedy appears ready to base his campaign against the President on the uncomfortably vague charge of failure of leadership, yet we also suspect that there’s something in the indictment. Carter is a decent, intelligent, and capable man, but his force of personality is insufficient to incite us to follow him around the block.

As this article is written (late October) Jimmy Carter’s political prospects are not good, even if they are not yet desperate. Senator Edward Kennedy has just confirmed what everyone was quite certain of already, that he does indeed intend to run for the presidency; and most observers expect that the race for the Democratic nomination will be intense and likely to be frustrating. Writing just after his election three years ago.

I am among those who failed to foresee Carter’s difficulties. Writing in these pages just after his election (“Jimmy Carter’s Prospects,” November/December 1976) I suggested that conditions looked “generally

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This is not a good time to be President of the United States.
It is not surprising that the President seems less inclined than he used to be to expound on what a good, kind, and decent people we are.

That Georgia drone suggests steadiness, but offers no inspiration. Charisma we can do without—it is a highly problematic quality in a democratic leader—but we want something more than a pious chairman of the board.

His personal qualities aside, Carter has led an administration that has bungled beyond the acceptable norm. The White House staff is notoriously weak and has served the President badly. In domestic policy, Carter has done little to coax legislative results from an admittedly fractious Congress. He seems only recently to have come to understand that it no longer makes sense for him to pose as an outsider to the Washington scene. He is the establishment, and he ought to start acting like it.

In foreign affairs, the President's instincts are moderate and more often sensible than not, but the execution of policy has often been extraordinarily maladroit. Aside from the problem that Cyrus Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski seem frequently to be running not just separate offices but separate foreign policies, the administration's response to international developments has too often been impromptu and lacking in clear design.

Whatever one's view on the issues involved, for example, it is difficult to label the government's handling of the problem of Soviet troops in Cuba as anything other than amateurish. As has so often been the case, the administration found itself waffling about, reversing course, and acting as if it perceived the train of events simply as one damn thing after another. In the end, we couldn't be sure if there had been a crisis, or, if there had, what precisely it had been about.

What's wrong? If Carter is neither unintelligent nor incapable, why does his administration so frequently flounder about? The answer, I'm increasingly convinced, lies in Carter's ideology, or, more accurately, in his utter lack of one.

When he first began to impinge on the national consciousness back in 1975-76, Carter's disinclination to ideological fervor served as one of his more attractive qualities. He recommended himself to most Americans as free alike from the zany leftism of the Sixties or the hard-line reaction of that zaniness that had brought the Nixon administration to grief. Here, we thought, was a reasonable and decent man who had a good sense of himself, who was unassociated with the political fevers of the previous decade, and who could offer leadership that was confident without being arrogant and at least moderately liberal without being utopian.

Many of us predicted that he might, with his amiable populism and his quiet patriotism, offer liberals a way out of the morass of negativism and moralism into which they had stumbled in search of the New Politics.

**A politics that has no ideological content is essentially rudderless.**

Certainly there continues to be much to be said for a politics of the center. America is a middle-class, heterogeneous, and complex society, and any leader who hopes to be President of all the people must locate himself somewhere in the extensive middle of the national political spectrum. It seems still to be the case that most Americans instinctively suspect presidential aspirants who strike too ideological a note in their political appeals. We tend to like our politics heroic in tone but moderate in substance.

For most of us, the memories of the political firestorms of the late Sixties and early Seventies are enough to provide defense against the blandishments of radicals of Left or Right.

Yet at the same time, a politics that has no ideological content is essentially rudderless. It is one thing for a politician to wind up in dead center because of a conjunction of forces, quite another for him to reside there because that is where the managerial imperative leaves him. We don't want our politicians to be ideologues, but we do want them to have discernible political instincts which we can use to locate them and ourselves in the political universe.

As far as one can tell, Jimmy Carter doesn't have an ideological bone in his body. He simply responds to issues as they arise and as his immediate needs dictate. He has no orienting set of political impulses by which to measure specific issues and out of which to construct a coherent set of policies. His temperament is so entirely managerial as to leave him devoid of any informing framework of political belief.

Thus his political waverings result not from indecision but from the particular—and shifting—requirements of the moment. One day, when he wants to mobilize the public behind his energy policies, he engages in populist attacks on the oil companies; the next, when he is trying to show why decontrol of prices is necessary, he speaks in the manner of an orthodox Republican explaining the operations of the marketplace.

During the mini-crisis concerning the Soviet troops in Cuba, he seemed to alternate between hawkish and dovish pronouncements according to his responses to the previous day's news summaries.

In a manner similar to the rules of Keynesian economic policy, Carter engages in an endless countercyclical public policy process. Public affairs, like the economy, must regularly be adjusted through managerial fine-tuning. The difference between this process and the normal game of political pragmatism is that the pragmatists know they must adjust their beliefs to political necessity, while Carter has no beliefs to have to adjust. He is not an opportunist; it is his luxury that he does not have to be.

Ironically, what would seem to be
an infinitely flexible approach to policy doesn’t necessarily work out that way. Carter often digs in his heels on policy positions. Much of this is no doubt simply a function of a strong-minded personality. But one also suspects that he can be certain of the rightness of a position—at any given moment—precisely because he is sure he has come to it not out of ideological preconceptions but from a combination of rational appraisal and moral integrity.

He knows he is a good man; he believes he is a rational one; and so it is easy for him to identify his position, as he so often does, with an objective public good that lies above and beyond partisan or ideological motive. When Carter’s views shift, it is because, in his own mind, conditions have changed to redefine the public interest, but that interest remains always consistent with his own position. All this means that for all his intelligence, Carter’s absence of ideological urges, when combined with his managerial instincts and his insistence on moral standards, makes for a view of the political process that is both naive and somewhat arrogant.

**Carter is no longer an outsider. Now he is the establishment and ought to start acting like it.**

If this analysis is correct, the fundamental problem of Jimmy Carter’s presidency is its lack of a defining core, of any clear sense of direction or goal beyond the vague conviction that American policy, domestic and international, must always be marked by a sturdy rectitude. That is not enough, particularly since the administration has been unable to produce a level of managerial competence that might lead us to overlook its absence of coherent purpose. Few will fight hard for Carter’s re-election, because few can see just what, beyond the man himself, they would be fighting for. The old bromide tells us that where there is no vision the people perish; that may or may not be true, but in this case, the failure of vision might well cause a President to perish.

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### Addendum to the Gospel of Mark 14:50-52

\[\text{Though I awoke Passover night with song my mother's friends exploded at their feast, I only turned and slept again. But long past dark, the torches shocked me and a beastly sound of mob. I heard the clubs. Outside, men with bloody aprons circled round the rabbi. Soldiers grabbed at friends who tried to disappear. And did. One thick hand found my shoulder. I let him grab my linen stuff while I ran naked into Kedron brook. Curses saved me then; they'd had enough: they took the master—by the law and book.}

I write his life. I, John Mark, include my young and naked self in gratitude.\]

Sister Maura
The Bible and the Word of God

Part Three of Three Parts

Henry P. Hamann

The Bible Between Fundamentalism and Philosophy

The Bible is the permanent record of the speaking God. The personal Word of God, Jesus Christ, through whom God spoke in a final definitive way, is not directly approachable by us. No one hears the Word of God from him any longer, but the Word of the Scripture is the permanent abstract of the Word of God spoken by Jesus Christ.

So far in these lectures we have been concerned with erroneous ways of looking at and assessing the Bible, with movements away from a sound and appropriate view of it. The one movement makes too much of the divine side of the Bible; not absolutely, of course, because one can never make too much of God, but through its accompanying neglect of the human side. The other movement makes too much of the human side; not because man is unimportant, but because it sees nothing but the human side. From the point of view of the Christian faith, the latter error is far more serious than the former. However, there is still a more excellent way, which is the subject of this final lecture.

I shall begin with a theoretical statement, and the greater part of the lecture will be an exposition of that statement: That the Bible is truly the Word of God cannot be given up without loss of the Christian faith.

That the Bible is the Word of God, all of it, must be held together with the other assertion that it is, all of it, word of men. A certain analogy exists here between the Word of Scripture and the personal Word who is Jesus Christ. As Christ is God and man indivisibly associated in one person, so the Word of Scripture is both human and divine in an indissoluble unity. Everything about the Bible shows its humanity: the origin and genesis of the individual writings; the collection of the various and very different compositions into one definitive library; the transmission of the text of the various writings down the centuries, which shows all the errors and mistakes that characterize the manual copying of any written material; the translations from the original languages, which after all make up the way in which the Bible comes to most people by far.

That the Bible is the Word of God must be held without falling into the mistake of making Bible and Word of God identical, as if the two expressions were completely coterminous, Bible conveying the same connotation as Word of God, and Word of God the same connotation precisely as Bible. As a matter of fact, Word of God is a far wider term than Bible. Bible is part of the Word of God.

Word of God is applied repeatedly to the oral statements of men of God, of the many prophets in the Old Testament, of the apostles and others in the New.

Word of God must also be used to describe the oral words of Jesus himself, just as he is the personal Word.

We can go even further and declare that all proclamation of the gospel down the years by successors of the apostles and their successors down to our own age is properly designated Word of God. This statement embraces every form in which this proclamation takes place: speaking, signing, in pictures, in sculpture, in the symbolic carvings on cathedrals, churches, and other ecclesiastical buildings. The minister should have the conviction every time he preaches that he has proclaimed the Word of God. The spoken word is or can be as much the Word of God as the written word.

Granted the unity of the word of Scripture with all the other forms of the Word of God, the Scripture is Word of God in a special way which makes it characteristically different from the other forms. It is permanent, approachable, readily available, and as the permanent form of the word of the prophets, Jesus Christ, and the apostles, source and authoritative norm of all preaching and teaching in the church of God. This definition needs some clarification.

The heart of the Biblical revelation is the history of great acts of God for the salvation of men. Up to a point it is a recital of God's interference in the course of history to bring about his saving plans and purposes. The Christian faith is based on, rooted in, a history. Take that

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history away, and there is nothing left in the Bible that you could not find elsewhere. This fact about the Christian faith has led men to see the revelation in the history, in the acts themselves. Revelation, however, does not attach to the deeds, the history in itself. Revelation occurs when God speaks to the deed. Revelation of God is the speaking of God. Word attached to the history—this is the decisive factor.

Now the Bible is the permanent record of the speaking of God to these great acts of his. The Word spoken in revelation of the hand and act of God in the historical events of the past, that Word is kept, preserved as the same Word by the Scriptures, the written Word of God. All the spoken words of the prophets as they spoke forth the Word of God are no longer available for us. The same is the case with the spoken words of the apostles and of Jesus himself. Even the personal Word, Jesus Christ as the person through whom God has spoken to men in a final, definitive way, is not directly approachable by us. No one hears from him the Word of God any longer, no one has since the time of the apostles. The Word of the Scripture, in short, is the permanent abstract of the Word of God spoken in their day by the men of God of the Old and New Testaments, Moses, prophets, psalmists, apostles and evangelists, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

That the Bible is the Word of God must be held without falling into the mistake of making Bible and Word of God identical, as if the two expressions were coterminous.

As such it is the original Word of God. No one can penetrate behind it to something still more original, still more basic and fundamental, still closer to its source, God himself. Neither liturgy, nor tradition, can take the place of the Scripture as original Word of God. Accordingly, although to identify Bible and Word of God, as though these two entities are coterminous, is to fail to do justice to the many forms of the Word of God, the Bible effectually turns out to be the Word of God in a very special sense. It is therefore also source and norm of all teaching and preaching.

Sermons, exhortations, and essays produced by men and women of the church are Word of God only insofar as they are in keeping with the teaching of the Bible. For authority, true authority, we have to go beyond them to the Scriptures. All teachers and teachings in the church can be criticized and set right, as the Bible cannot be. It is possible that some great teacher can present a biblical truth more sharply and more incisively than the Bible does—for instance, Luther's view of man in his sin is probably more profoundly expressed than the Bible expresses it—but it does not for that reason displace the Biblical statements, but it is rather to be assessed as Word of God by the biblical form.

In all this, the Bible is the witness of the Spirit to Christ. As the Bible itself asserts in a number of places, we speak rightly of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Every true witness of Christ by whomsoever given is also the witness of his Spirit. And, of course, this inspiration extends over the whole of what is the Scripture. Of course, inspiration is verbal, for that is how we think, in words, and of course how we speak. There is no other inspiration of verbal material possible.

That the Bible is the Word of God in the way I have now outlined cannot be given up without loss of the Christian faith. Imagine the situation if the words of Jesus and of the apostles had not been committed to writing. Tradition of these things down the years by word of mouth would by this time have transformed them beyond recognition. Heaven knows, we have enough confusion as it is in theology, as it has developed down the centuries and how it stands at the present; for not only the common man but also the trained theologian is hard put to find his way through it all. Dr. Sasse had a fine comparison for the whole state of affairs I am trying to convey to you. He used to liken tradition where there is still a written Word to a balloon firmly anchored to the ground. It might be carried here and there by the wind, it might go through some violent gyrations, but it can't get too far away. The correction and stability offered by the Bible is always there. The case is different with a balloon unattached and unanchored. There is absolutely no check to its movements. The winds carry it far away from the place where it left the ground and there is no assurance that it will ever see the place again. So is tradition without a written Word of God.

The question is bound to be asked at this point: What is the difference between your position on the Bible as the Word of God and the position taken by Fundamentalism? There is a difference, so I think, but it is granted, first of all, that this position shares a number of convictions with the Fundamentalist position. Both positions would maintain that the Bible is in all its parts the Word of God; that the Bible has unity; that it is the authoritative source and norm of faith and morals; that it is verbally inspired; that it calls for faith in certain propositions as well as faith in a person. But the differences between Fundamentalism as I have described it and what I have just presented are there, too, and it will be necessary to indicate clearly what they are.

The first and most important difference, I should say, lies in the relation between all the incidental aspects and features of this library of books and the central Christian gospel. The tendency in Fundamentalism is to see in all the many assertions so many individual truths, all of which are valuable in themselves, all of them important, all of them revealed Word of God, and, sometimes not always, all of them of more or less importance as Word of God. The view of the Bible presented in these lectures sees the whole Bible as related to its centre, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and work of God in him. A sentence of Jesus from the Gospel of St. John hints at this position: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (John 5:39). True study of the Scripture is study that
never loses sight of the Christ of whom the Scriptures all treat, and without whom they would have no particular value.

It is but an extension of the point of view just mentioned, if I point out, secondly, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes a determining principle of Scriptural interpretation. This claim must be understood correctly. The Gospel does not tell us what the Bible in any place must mean, but it does tell us what it cannot mean. It is not possible to derive the sacraments, their nature and purpose, from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No direct line leads from the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the command to baptize or to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of Jesus and so receive his body and his blood. On the other hand, however, the Gospel does indicate in various ways what the Sacraments cannot be, and how they should not be regarded. So, in many another instance, the Gospel of Jesus Christ keeps the expositor from adopting some explanation of a certain passage because of its plain inconsistency with the Gospel.

It is not possible to derive the sacraments from the Gospel of Christ. No direct line leads from the Gospel to the commandments to baptize or break bread in memory of Jesus.

A further difference between Fundamentalism and the stance being defended today is seen in the divergent ways in which both think and speak of the matter of inerrancy. The Fundamentalist feels threatened by every claimed error or apparent error and discrepancy in the ways in which both think and speak of the matter of inerrancy. The Fundamentalist feels threatened by every claimed error or apparent error and discrepancy in the sacred text. These aspects of the Bible do not bother me or my kind. They are interesting matters for themselves.

The view of the Bible as the Word of God presented in this lecture also gives philosophy or human reason its proper place in relation to the Bible. Something has been said on this head already, chiefly on the negative side, to reject human reason as source and norm of the Christian religion or of theology. To make the circle of argument complete, it is necessary at this point to say something also on the positive contribution of human reason to a sound use of the Bible.

The Cresset
The Question
Of the Ordination
Of Women

The Cresset was pleased to publish the position papers of Theodore Jungkuntz and Walter E. Keller on "The Question of the Ordination of Women" in its December, 1978, and January, 1979, issues.

In response to reader interest, the Cresset is further pleased to announce that reprints of both position papers in one eight-page folio are now available for congregational and pastoral conference study.

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Reason is imperatively necessary as the means to understand what the Scripture says and to present what it has to say to the understanding of men generally. God gave his Word (and still gives it through the Scriptures) in human words. As human words, as human language, the Word of God is written and is spoken in all the logic of human language. Speech is a complicated means of communication between man and man. Its logic has been thoroughly investigated in language after language. Most of us know this logic in our mother tongue in a practical way, but a real logic, a real exercise of human reason is going on all the time. So the Bible makes use of language logic, and with that of almost all the kinds of logical argumentation that the human mind uses: the argument from the less to the greater, from the greater to the less, the argument from analogy, the reduction to the absurd.

**Proof for the Word of God is not historically possible, but it is historically possible to disprove its assertions. Similarly, inerrancy cannot be proved, but it could be disproved.**

To understand the Word of God in the Bible, to comprehend all the various kinds of literary forms made use of there, human reason and logic are absolutely necessary, and all of us, but especially those who teach exegesis and homiletics, know how difficult most people find it to really understand and comprehend a given piece of prose or poetry. The same use of human reason is needed to convey the truth of the Bible, the Word of God there, in a clear and understandable and attractive, interesting way to others, whether by preaching, teaching, or even in a purely conversational way.

I think, further, that a good case could be made for the value of philosophy as a *praeparatio evangeli*, as a preparation for the Gospel. Not in any positive way, but in the negative way of showing how all attempts of the human mind to attain to the final truth about God, about life, its meaning, the salvation of the human being now and in the future, about the good society, whether these attempts take the purely logical path, or the ethical, or the mystical, finally lead to the conclusion that the solution is impossible; that the final answer is *ignoramus et ignorabimus*, we don’t know, and we never shall; that we need a revelation from God; we need the God who speaks. In this way, philosophy will play the same role as the Law of God in preparing the human being for the message of the Gospel. To develop this thought at length would be an attractive task, but one which I cannot pursue any further at this time.

In conclusion, I should like to pay a tribute to the late Thomas F. Staley and the laudable purpose he had in mind with the establishment of the Foundation which bears his name: the fostering of evangelical witness by and among college students. I consider it a privilege to have been invited to give these lectures to you at Valparaiso University and pray for the continual peace in the full Hebraic meaning of the term for this institution of learning.

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**Scroll Painting Grand Shrine at Ise**

The day rolled open slowly. No wind allowed a flag to hang limp—an unspoken call in a voice box. Hope, grounded in reality, made no unwise promises. Hope waited, leaning against the wall of the heart.

So we pilgrimed through the gate, washed in the waters of purification, stumbled on crusts of rock, climbed wide stone steps. And waited. The shrine curtain stirred. Whose breath? Who speaks? Only the wordless God who loves adventure, who can play with his child. No wonder the scroll will seem untouched

when I show it to you saying: all this happened at the Grand Shrine of Ise—one quiet day.

Sister Maura

*Photograph By Thomas Strimbu*

*The Cresset*
The Reality-Effect
Of Third World Cinema

Ethnography in Ceddo and Ramparts of Clay

Richard Maxwell

In Roman Polanski's Chinatown, one of the most memorable hard-boiled detective pastiches to turn up in the 1970s, there are two dirty secrets: John Huston has committed incest with his daughter and he has manipulated, not to say exploited, the Southern California water supply. Water is more interesting than incest—at least in this film. To a large extent, Polanski's double subject saves Chinatown from itself. The movie draws shamelessly on the conventions of 1940s cinema. Like its villain, Chinatown is incestuous. Centering the plot on a genuine political issue brings what might have been a horribly self-indulgent film into contact with social, economic, and geographical realities. The murky landscape through which Polanski's characters move gains an historical dimension: we understand that it has been shaped by the allocation of pre-cious, limited resources.

Most American films in the seventies have not been so luckily conceived. We all know by now that art has a life of its own, that a genre or an aesthetic tradition develops as much out of its own internal logic as by reference to the external world. The point has been made brilliantly by several generations of literary theorists—Northrop Frye preeminent among them. In the film world, it has made marketing as well as aesthetic sense to breed movies from movies of movies. Mel Brooks and George Lucas can testify to that. What would these men—or the large audience that supports them—make of the modestly-budgeted films that trickle out of obscure, sometimes unreachable countries in the Third World? The question is not altogether answerable, for however fine such films may be, they are never put into commercial release on any significant scale. To see Ceddo (from Senegal) or Ramparts of Clay (from Algeria by way of France), you have to make an effort. The effort made, you may find that these films cast a good deal of light on the American film industry and its current predicament.

Chinatown surprises an audience by staging the collision of an ingrown genre with a geopolitical actuality. Put this shock into a category of its own—call it a reality-effect—and you can begin to see how third-world cinema might function for an American audience. What Polanski does in an almost overrefined way, third-world cinema can accomplish more urgently and directly. Coming down to specific examples now, the two films mentioned above generate three closely-related kinds of reality-effect:

1. The films use archaic idioms—primordial religious and epic conventions—with a kind of authenticity unavailable to American cinema just now.  
2. The films set modern against heroic forms of consciousness, so creating an immediate sense of how a society struggles to define itself within the constraints of history and geography.  
3. The films allow an American audience the shock of exposure to a drastically different society. I want to elaborate a little on the first two points, then consider the extraordinary effect of all three taken together.

Ceddo was made in 1977; it em-broiled its director, Ousmane Sembene, in a wrangle over linguistics, religion, and free speech. The movie was banned in Senegal—it still is, so far as I know—but has won a good deal of acclaim outside its native land. Ceddo is an extraordinary work because it has something like a genuine epic feeling to it. The film is set in an indeterminate past, sometime before outside intrusions had broken up the traditional village society of Senegal. The first half is devoted largely to a series of councils among members of the ruling class in a feudal social order. Sembene dares to give his characters long speeches, and he wins his dare. Instead of dragging, the council scenes become Homeric. They let us understand, in dramatic form, the tensions that are threatening to pull this society apart. There follows a series of single combats between the kidnapper of a princess and the warriors who try to rescue her. These combats have a matter-of-factness about them that Homer again would have appreciated. The film culminates in a bid for power by the Imam, the Islamic advisor of the royal family. The Ceddo—which is to say, the common people of the village—are to be forcibly converted to Islam. This outcome is prevented by a somewhat melodramatic last-minute plot reversal. The kidnapped princess has managed to return; siding against her family, she quite simply shoots the Islamic advisor—killing him.

The conclusion is illuminating in that it emerges from an analysis of the village's economy that has been built up from bits and pieces in the course of the film. Slaves go out (through a cooperative arrangement between a French slave-trader and the ruling elite). Guns come in. Guns play a significant role in Ceddo, qualifying—for one thing—the ethos of the warrior caste: pace Star Wars, technology never permits the full survival of traditional military heroi-

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ism. The abrupt assassination of the Imam thus allows the film to end on an immediately triumphant but ultimately equivocal note. The princess's action will not allow the Ceddo to return to their traditional way of life—not for long anyway. Neither Islam nor the West can be kept from making a mark on this vulnerable African society. Senegal today is eighty-percent Islamic, which may have something to do with the film’s difficulties in getting released.

_Ceddo_ was filmed in a sub-Saharan Senegalese village. Many hundreds of miles to the northeast is the Algerian village where Jean-Louis Bertucelli made _Ramparts of Clay_. Bertucelli, a French director, does not belong to the society which his film analyzes. This fact goes a long way towards explaining some important differences between _Ceddo_ and _Ramparts_. _Ceddo_ is alternately talky and action-packed. Sembene tells a story which is conspicuously _made up_, and yet the fictive quality—the sense of an artistically-shaped tale—never disrupts our sense that we are learning in a significant way about the origins and the nature of a particular society. Bertucelli, on the other hand, seems afraid to impose on his film any conspicuous patterns of artifice. Human speech is rationed—it appears mostly in a few special moments of the film. Speech is replaced by “natural” or at least non-human sounds: a creaking well, a desert wind, a single car in the desert, a helicopter above, the cry of a sheep as its throat is slit. The lack of dialogue is matched by a suppression of plot. There is in fact a story in the film: it concerns a village strike against the powerful mining company which employs practically all of the local men. The story is downplayed, however. Bertucelli is trying to create a sense of immediate contact between the society he portrays and the European/American audience for whom the film is presumably designed. We are supposed to feel as though we’re right there in the village—to forget that we’re seeing a film.

One can respect Bertucelli’s try for a documentary flavor, yet _Ramparts_ is finally interesting for the qualities it shares with _Ceddo_. As Sembene uses epic convention and emotion, so Bertucelli uses religious ritual. The extended prayers (not dialogue, not language in the usual sense) reveal the directly-felt structure of this community. The animal sacrifices are presented less as an object of study (though the film is based on an anthropological treatise) than as a practical action for the villagers to take during their time of crisis. In both _Ceddo_ and _Ramparts_ modernity disrupts a traditional society; in both films a woman uses technology to fight off the forces that are disrupting the village.

These films move between art for art’s sake and art as a description of the world.

Bertucelli presents us with a mysterious, somewhat alienated villager—a sort of anti-heroine—who removes the bucket from the local well, thus cutting off the water supply. The soldiers who have been called in to stop the strike have to give up their effort. The village has won its battle, yet at the end the protagonist flees. Bertucelli is more explicit than Sembene about the impending doom of village society, and he is also less nostalgic for this closely-knit communal life. The young woman has used technology (this time a very traditional kind) to work off the military action that would have forced the villagers back to work. The _kind_ of cleverness that inspires her also alienates her from her people. She heads off into the desert, towards oblivion if you like, or towards the westernized society which she has just defeated.

_Ceddo_ and _Ramparts of Clay_ can use archaic idioms effectively because these idioms are an authentic part of the societies being described. The heroic debates and combats of the one film, the prayers and sacrifices of the other, give these directors a way to move between social reality and aesthetic form, art for art’s sake and art as a description of the world or even an exhortation to act in it. It is difficult—is it impossible?—to achieve this sort of synthesis in a contemporary Hollywood film. For many of us, after all, reality is now felt as an intrusion—whether upon television, upon carefully-cultivated political myths, or upon any of the protections with which the modern industrial state surrounds us.

Here is where these third-world movies can serve as a useful example. Both Sembene and Bertucelli have achieved an extraordinary crisis-crossing of intentions, of states of consciousness, of realities that conflict and so intrude upon one another. To a large extent this crisis-crossing occurs _within_ the films, when the traditional villagers stand against invasions from the outside world and when a woman (are women supposed to be leaders in these societies?) acts decisively and dramatically to repel the invading force. We feel a society break apart, pull together, then face an implied and perhaps inevitable transformation. The succession of shocks seems to continue in our minds long after the films are over. This long-term effect stems partly from an intrusion not within the film but between the film and the audience.

“An ethnographic film,” writes David MacDougall, “may be regarded as any film which seeks to reveal one society to another.” _Ramparts_ by intention, _Ceddo_ by political circumstance, have both become ethnographical films. The western audience gets the shock of feeling itself in contact with a genuine traditional society. This society intrudes upon us, just as our surrogates within the film intrude upon it. The reality in the movies is a process, not an object of imitation. It is a breaking of barriers. American movies need not be “ethnographical” but their turning in upon their own aesthetic conventions tends to prevent revelations with this particular impact. Our film tradition is the weaker for it.

books

the energy crisis and the problem of transformation

A critical response to the report of the energy project at the harvard business school

review essay

steven Schroeder

energy future


Energy Future has been widely hailed as a potential shaper of energy policy in the United States for the remainder of this century. The importance of that policy and our attitude toward it, as well as problems within the report itself, suggest the need for a careful critical evaluation.

I propose to begin that evaluation here with a brief methodological reflection on the approach elaborated by Juan Luis Segundo in The Libera-
tion of Theology and in the series of public lectures and seminars at the University of Chicago entitled “Faith and Ideologies.” That starting point is prompted not only by a desire for methodological clarity on my part but also by the categorical assertion made in the report that conservation “is not a theological or ideological issue” (p. 139). Both the desire for clarity and the report’s assertion make clarification of the meaning of “faith” and “ideology” (as well as implications of excluding “conservation” and “the energy crisis” from those realms) crucial for an adequate critical understanding. On the basis of that methodological clarification, it will be possible to proceed with a specific analysis and critique of the Harvard study.

Segundo’s approach consists in understanding “faith” and “ideologies” as fundamental anthropological dimensions. This means specifically that human beings operate with “a world of meaning and value” (a faith) and envision a “system of efficacy” by which that world may become operative (an ideology). This approach is supported by reference to social theory, particularly that of Marx, Mannheim, and Bateson, as well as by concrete analysis of the way in which human beings perceive and describe their world. The point, briefly stated, is that there are no “facts” without “values” just as there are no “values” without “facts.” The act of seeing is an act of construction and an act of selection; as such it involves anthropological dimensions of both faith and ideology. Perception itself necessarily involves a vision of “world” which is a “world of meaning and value,” and action involves a vision—whether explicitly formulated or not—of the way in which that “world” may be implemented. What is essential is Segundo’s insistence on “faith” and “ideology” as equally fundamental anthropological dimensions of existence. The two thereby become mutually illuminating (and mutually critical) concepts that facilitate consideration of the problem of changing the world.

In addition to “faith” and “ideology,” a third concept, “transcendent data,” is essential to Segundo’s method. These data represent “empirical” statements about the world that are empirically unverifiable, necessary for the viability of “ideology,” and directly related to “faith.” The idea of transcendent data is formulated as a consequence of the inevitable relationship that exists among “ideology,” “facts,” and “faith”; the very data on which ideological implementation depends are at least partly dependent on the faith toward which such implementation is directed. Thus “faith” can redefine the way one sees the world, just as the way one sees the world can redirect faith; and “ideology,” standing as a bridge between the two, is at once determined by changes in their shape and determinative of that shape.

The importance of all this for the critical evaluation of Energy Future stems from the fact that, in spite of the assertion cited earlier that conservation is not a theological or ideological issue, the report itself begins with choices that are clearly in the realm of faith and commitments that represent an obvious ideological alignment. The editors flatly state in the introduction that they do not “advocate basic changes in the way the society is organized” (p. 12), and they repeatedly offer evidence of their commitment to capitalism and the market economy in their “solutions” to the “problem.”

But the most serious problems may be that the problem itself is never adequately posed and that the “theological” and “ideological” commitments of the participants make it impossible to pose it adequately. In terms borrowed from Marx’s Grundrisse, 3

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The "energy crisis" is not a shortage; it is a crisis of our political system. The problem is not how to preserve the "American way of life" but rather how to live together in a way that does not threaten the existence of life on earth.

The presuppositions of the Harvard project represent socially imposed and socially transformable limits perceived as sacred boundaries. The problem, in other words, is a paralysis that results from an absolute commitment to the status quo and an arbitrary refusal to include transformation of the status quo as a possible "solution.

That problem, it should be noted, is at once "theological" and "ideological"; it is intimately concerned with matters of "faith," the world of meaning and value of those affected by the problem and those reflecting on it, as well as with questions of "ideology," the system of efficacy by which values are to be made operative.

In fact, one could argue that Energy Future as a whole is an ideological apologetic that grows directly out of a reassessment of "transcendent data" on which the faith and ideology of Western Capitalism depend. The energy crisis, first acknowledged by the West at the time of the OPEC oil embargo and chronicled by the Harvard project in "The End of Easy Oil," represents most essentially a crisis in the way the nature of the world is "objectively" described. As the Harvard project suggests, the oil embargo made it necessary to reassess the availability of imported oil and the dependence of the Western economy on petroleum products. It is at that level that the Harvard project operates. From the prevailing assumption that petroleum is readily available and that Western control of petroleum supplies is unquestioned, there is a shift to the realization that petroleum supplies are limited and that control is in the hands of OPEC. Such a shift, accompanied by continued commitment to the faith and ideology of Western Capitalism requires incorporation of "new" data and redefinition of the world within existing boundaries. In other words, nothing basic is changed; "ideology" and "faith" remain the same while data is reshuffled and reinterpreted to reflect the new situation.

The report begins with a rather clear, almost schematic, presentation of "faith," "ideology," and "transcendental data." Near the end of the introduction, the editors affirm their desire "to see the system prosper and in a vital way" (p. 12). This comes immediately after the rejection of basic changes cited earlier. Taken together, they represent a statement of faith or a description of a world of meaning and value that is representative of the standard of living, the conditions of ownership, and the distribution of wealth that prevails in contemporary Western society. Essentially, they represent a commitment to the American way of life as it is currently defined. Along with this statement of faith and the commitment which it implies, there is a statement of ideology which asserts the way in which the faith is to be implemented: the editors maintain that their commitment to the system "means greater reliance on the free market" (p.12). All of this suggests that the presuppositions of the study include a faith in competition and private ownership as means to promote the general welfare. More precisely, it suggests that they are not only "means" but also "ends." In other words, competition and the free market are the means by which the "system" is to prosper in a vital way; but they are also the system that is to prosper. It is not surprising that such a stance at once implies and depends on the "empirical" statement that "genuine alternatives for energy do exist" (p.12). Alternatives are necessary if the "free market" is to exist at all, and their clarification is necessary if it is to decide the issue. So alternatives exist as "data" that are simultaneously "empirical" and empirically unverifiable; they are both product and foundation of the faith and ideology of the report.

Rather early on, the editors state their purpose as a hope that the study can "redefine the terms in which the American energy debate is being waged" (p.13). This is understood primarily in terms of a clarification of choices that is consistent with the statements of faith and ideology already cited. The point is to clarify alternatives that are assumed to exist because the free market is the means by which "faith" is to become operative and that must exist in order for the free market to be the means by which "faith" is to become operative.

All of this takes on ultimate significance because the "crisis" is described in terms of a threat to the object of faith: "the energy crisis is a crisis of our political system" (p.13). What is at issue is the credibility of the "system" as well as the viability of its continued existence. But since its viability and its credibility are assumed as matters of faith, the problem is to make clear the choices that must exist as preconditions for that faith.

This means that the "problem" comes to be viewed as a shortage and the "solution" as a "new" energy source: "To the extent that any solution at all exists to the problem posed by the peaking of U.S. oil production and the growth of imports, it will be found in energy sources other than oil" (p.5). It is this statement of the problem, resulting from the initial "theological" and "ideological" selections of the study, that leads directly to the structure of the report as a series of alternatives, some of which are rejected and some of which are supported. And it is this perception of the problem that makes conservation another energy source rather than an alteration of lifestyle.

What is perhaps most amazing is the fact that this prosaically conventional way of "posing the problem" within the boundaries of the existing system could grow directly out of the pious hope expressed earlier, that "Specifically, this involves rejection of domestic oil, natural gas, coal, and nuclear energy as short-term alternatives and support of solar energy and conservation as short-term responses to the shortage.

The Cresset
What is perhaps most amazing is that the Report’s prosaically conventional way of “posing the problem” within the sacred boundaries of the present system grows out of its pious hope that the terms of the energy debate can be redefined.

the terms of the debate could be redefined. But what should be clear is the fact that such an outcome was inevitable from the time at which the initial ideological and theological selections were made. Because the “system,” a socially imposed and socially transformable limit, was treated as a “sacred boundary,” the possibility of posing the problem in a way that would redefine the terms of the debate was effectively precluded.

Two examples from the Harvard report may serve to pose the problem in a more concrete way. The first involves the meaning of “value,” and the second involves the choice of representative “cases.”

It becomes clear early in the report that the meaning of “value” is to be assumed, presumably because there is no room for alternative definitions within the boundaries of the existing system. The first evidence of this comes on p. 10 in the description of the “domestic debate” on natural gas: “Should it continue to be regulated, with price based on cost of production, or should it be deregulated, with price based on value?” Although “value” is undefined in this question, its meaning becomes clear from the context. To begin with, “value” and “cost of production” are clearly distinguished; more importantly, the distinction is made on the basis of relationship to regulation. “Value” is clearly a function of the free market while “cost of production” is not. Value is thus clearly connected with competition but not clearly denoted as extrinsic.

The most immediate problem posed by this stems from the fact that a result of competition, a social product, is treated as a “real” quantity rather than as a convention. That problem results from the ambiguity derived from failure to distinguish “value” as utility or “use-value” from “value” as price or “exchange-value.” It is crucial precisely because exchange-value, as a social product, is an extrinsic property, while use-value, as a function of utility, is not. The danger is that what is extrinsic may come to be treated as intrinsic and vice versa.5

This is reflected in the tendency to accept the automobile as a necessity present, e.g., in the Peugeot commercial that begins with the phrase, “Ob­viously, you can’t give up driving…”6 In Energy Future a similar problem arises because the automobile is seen as a necessity in the context of the American way of life, and that context is in turn assumed as a matter of faith. The point here is to suggest that the “value” of an object which derives from its social definition and application may be confused with a value that is inherent in the relationship of an object with human beings.

That may not appear particularly important in such abstract terms. But its importance becomes obvious, e.g., when the confusion results in a simple equation of the “value” of refrigerators, shoes, or oil with that of bread as in the Mobil Oil advertisement or in the movement to tie the price of a bushel of wheat directly to that of a barrel of oil.7

The confusion is not quite so dramatic in Energy Future, but it is dramatic enough to allow the simplistic statement that “The OPEC price hike . . . did increase the value by some $800 billion of the proved U.S. reserves of some 42 billion barrels of crude oil and 250 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of natural gas. That amounts to about $10,000 for each American family” (p.217). Such a statement is misguided at best and blatantly misleading at worst. That the price of oil has changed dramatically does not alter the utility of American reserves in the least; that should be perfectly clear. But as long as “value” remains ambiguous and undefined, clarity is rendered difficult if not impossible. What is obscured is not only the social derivation of value but also its social transformability.

The second example, as was already indicated, concerns the selection of cases in the report. It is interesting, to say the least, that South Africa is chosen as an example of efficiency in the liquefaction of coal while Dow Chemical is chosen as an example of energy efficiency. One should probably have serious questions about the ethical notion of “value” which allows unreflective and unapologetic selection of a racially repressive government and the originator of napalm as models of efficiency.

The problem is that initial selections make it impossible for the Harvard group to fundamentally question the system that includes South Africa and Dow Chemical. The meaning of “efficient” takes no account of the nature of the product or the mode of its production except insofar as these affect the energy consumption involved in the production process. Dow Chemical has effected remarkable “savings” in energy in its war on BTUs; but it has done so, one could argue, in the process of producing things that should not have been produced in the first place. “Efficient” production of napalm or agent orange is a contradiction in terms. How can production that destroys life and the means of its continued existence be termed “efficient”??
But that is a question that can only arise if the problem is acknowledged as being "ethical," "theological," and "ideological" from the beginning. The point is that the system itself is the problem and that any radical "solution" depends on its transformation.

Needless to say, this does not represent a blanket rejection of the "empirical" findings of the report. That domestic oil, natural gas, coal, and nuclear energy are not sufficient to maintain consumption at current levels is, I think, a sound conclusion. What is at issue is rather the relationship between "conservation" and social transformation.

The Harvard study begins with the presupposition that social structure is not to be transformed and ends with the perception of conservation as an alternative energy source to be utilized within that structure. But if social structure itself is taken as problematic, it becomes possible to question the possibility of addressing a "social" problem by means of "individual" ownership and decision making. The "energy crisis," as the Harvard study suggests, is a crisis of our political system. But this is most directly true because it represents a threat to the social existence of human beings as well as the survival of other living things. The crisis is not a shortage; it is a conflict between a lifestyle and a pattern of decision making that places individual freedom from constraint and self-interest above social well-being and ecological survival, and a problem that threatens to destroy social well-being, the possibility of ecological survival, and, along with them, the possibility of "freedom" itself.

What all of this suggests is the need for transformation; the problem is not how to preserve "the American way of life" but rather how to live together responsibly in a way that does not undermine social well-being and threaten the existence of life on earth. That, I think, is the point the Harvard study misses. And it is missing that point that makes redefinition of the terms of the debate impossible.
Catherine de Vinck: Poet Of Christian Liturgy

Review Essay

Richard Simon Hanson

She is known to a few small circles of friends—the monks at Weston Priory in Vermont, students and a few faculty at St. John’s in Collegeville, Minnesota, and at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa—and to individuals here and there. She has been the subject of a few feature stories concerning living artists and, in a recent issue of Critic, was labeled the most underrated living Catholic author. She has fought the inhospitable literary market by finding favored privileges at Alleluia Press, virtually created for publishing her works to the world by her versatile philosopher husband, José de Vinck. She is

Professor of Religion at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, Richard Simon Hanson teaches Bible, the history of Judaism, ancient religions of the Middle East, and the Hebrew language. He holds his Ph.D. from Harvard University and is the author of several books and articles in biblical studies and one book and several chapters and articles on archeology and numismatics. Professor Hanson’s interest in the poetry of Catherine De Vinck began when both served as writers for The Consultation on Common texts where he represented American Lutherans and she represented Roman Catholics.

January, 1980

Catherine de Vinck, a woman of great poetic gifts and passion.1 In 1948 Catherine and José made their way as late immigrants to the New World, leaving their beloved Belgium behind after enduring war and occupation by the Nazis. They found a rambling old house near the highway in Allendale, New Jersey, and made their home there. There they raised a family of healthy sons and daughters and there in the midst of her motherly household duties, Catherine has written day in and day out to produce the volumes now published and much more, that shall hopefully be published in the future.

Her first publication, A Time to Gather, was just what the title implies. It was an attempt to present the best of her poems to the public. It was a limited edition of a thousand copies done in laid rag-content paper with the finest of artistic printing techniques. (I came to know the author slightly before that first edition ran out and I purchased the last seven copies. I still treasure two of those seven.) In it are poems that show the variety of her thoughts and the amazing talents of a woman who could do such things in a language she did not learn until after reaching America in her adult years. A couple of brief samples will demonstrate.

The world hangs on a nail, limp like a rag; life is lemon-sour and death turns up everywhere painted on faces, on stones and mud, glued to bits of paper that float down the river-streets, blown into ballrooms, for comic-stripe people.

But, oh, look twice, look thrice; the moon-lamp sways in the wind, and if you step outside — where things breathe and grow — you will feel light falling like silk around your shoulders, see love poured through the articulations and sinews of the world, leaving no alternative than to say yes, to greet the stranger.

(p. 25 of A Time to Gather)


Let all my dresses be free-flowing like water, from the shoulders down; let all my thoughts be free-moving in open spaces, never under ceilings, behind doors or within the narrow of shuttered airless, rooms; let my love grow endlessly from leaf to leaf, from hunger to hunger, from relief to ever-greater plenitude: and let my life move deep and sharp, upward, to the beginning, the source, the eye at the center of the sun.

(p. 43 of A Time to Gather)

Much work and little publication followed that initial offering to the world. She shared her works with various friends and we encouraged her to publish more. What came at the end of that period was a masterpiece that will likely endure as the best of all her poems. It is a 32-page liturgy in honor of the Virgin and the Christ under the simple title, Ikon. In it she has moved through the great themes of creation, incarnation and the earthly life of the Christ, the passion, the resurrection and the ascension to make a statement about the Gospel that sweeps centuries of time into one single statement of our Faith and incorporates the Jewish tradition all the way to modern times.

The bulk of contemporary liturgies tends to be gimmicky and to smell of committee room smoke.

In a nearly breathless moment of my first perception of this dimension of the work I realized that to Catherine de Vinck, Jews and Christians have been and always shall be one. Again, an excerpt best demonstrates this awareness.

It is cold in the barren hills:
sand stones lizards scorpions baked into a dry world a small place lit by dung fires.

What perfumes walled your sleep
Lady,
what silks trailed in the wind
to cover your head?
What do we bring to your feast
we of the faithless tribe, shepherds
dubious kings, dwellers of
nervous cities;
what herbs, what garlands
what succulence for the sucking child,
what rainbow carpet
for the stairs of his wisdom?
GOLD FRANKINCENSE MYRRH
Here

at your feet
the ashes of Auschwitz
prayer shawls of old men, jewels
carved from the bones of Israel.
Here

your royal necklace, constellations
of David's children quivering
in the hiss of deep fires.
The seven-branched tree lifts
stems and flowers of smoke
drips with the wax of melted flesh.

"By the rivers of Babylon,
we sat and wept."

Next year in Jerusalem, next year
by the wailing wall we shall meet
in a passion of tears.
(pp. 4-5 in Ikon)

To my recollection, Catherine next
went to work on a version of the mass
that came to be titled simply, Liturgy.
In it I sensed her own need to make
statements about herself as a person,
as though she were saying to those
who had read her works, "You have
accepted my poems. Now, please, ac­
cept me." (Or was I only imagining
this? I had visited her home once in
1972 and in that visit I sensed that the
woman who wrote the poems was of
magnificently greater breadth than
her well-honed poems allowed. The
poems truly represented the depths
of her soul but there were simple
things in her life that had to be left
out. I think that she wanted the world
to know those things about her and
love them as much as the works of
her pen. The world? No, not only the
world but God himself.) In a daring
statement of the value of a redeemed
human soul she wrote lines for the
Credo section of her mass that likely
startle some who have tried to read
it.

I believe in my own existence:
my body breaks through the air
takes space, sets shadow and print
on earth water sky.
In the house of mirrors
at the fair
I saw my image
trapped in crystal
gliding on silvered walls
multiplied divided folded over and again
upon its own sum,
as the fanned mirror narrowed
and clicked shut.
I believe
in my own reality
—who is she, who, rising
from glacial depths of glass
has power of presence, of change,
of speech?—

Images of silver paper brass
lie:
but I see I am seen
I touch
I am touched
by arms mouth hair
by leaf feather fur;
I hear the caroling bird
clear like a bell
and my own voice scattering
words murmurs sighs
reaching the confines
of other worlds:
men women children
they say yes;
on their lips
in their eyes
I read yes, learn: I am.
And suddenly the idea of my own self
opens
ruffling myriads of petals
to disclose a golden center:
mystery beyond knowledge
sacred place temple
where the augury dwells.
(p. 260, Liturgy)

There was more of that assertion
of self in all the works that followed.
It was not an arrogant assertion, but
an assertion that a humanity that has
fallen as far as ours in the twentieth
century is still worthy in the eyes of
the Creator. It is a powerful asser­
tion of Gospel.

The assertion that man
diffused his power in mind
and matter and makes
them dance in their turn.

God is the dancer who
out of the lake, the bear comes forth,
shaking diamonds and fire,
sucking blood and milk
from my flesh,
while I, facing the West,
see the sun dying.
its rays like fishbones,
thin and sharp.
Within his embrace, belly-deep and soft,
I disappear
Where are my people, the voices
that woke me in the morning,
tree-children, naked dancers
with bodies glistening from the shower,
hair curly and scented?
I am alone, and the ice-bear groans,
in anger but in competent
power.

What wedding-bed is this?
The flame of absolute pain tears
my limbs, unlocks the labyrinth:
the treasure lies bare,
dripping sweat and honey.
Blue glaciers split under my touch
their needles piercing my breast,
reaching for the central heart.
I remember my fear, my sobbing terror
before the real time of his coming.
Now that he has broken through the
crust,
ascenting through the veins,
through all the channels of my being,
recognition stars: he is the lover
in silver skin, casting spells,
1ulling me to sleep.

(pp. 99)

The Bear
"The bear from the lake will come forth;
he will eat your flesh and make a skeleton
of you and you will die. But after three
days and three nights, you will find your flesh
again, you will awaken, and your garments
will fly towards you."
ESKIMO SHAMANISM

Out of the lake, the bear comes forth,
shaking diamonds and fire,
sucking blood and milk
from my flesh,
while I, facing the West,
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ESKIMO SHAMANISM
In an age which strives with so much restraint to be ecumenical, Catherine de Vinck confronts us with the boldness of a prophetess. Some of us struggle to think ourselves Lutherans together. Others, more daring, try to dialogue as Romans and Lutherans and Anglicans and Calvinists in one possibly catholic community. Some cross greater barriers that bring the East and the West together. This woman of poetic gifts beckons from a shore too distant for most of us to see as she asserts the catholicity of all things human from all ages of time and serves a Christ who is in all of that.

Somewhat unique among her works is A Passion Play. It has the form and stage directions of a play, but it could not perform well in a modern stage for the simple reason that there is little for the bodies of the actors to do. There is virtually nothing to be acted. Like classical Greek drama of old or the Book of Job from the Old Testament, it is made up of words and speeches rather than motions. Costumes are needed for the rapid identification of characters—masks would even serve well—but the best staging might well be a large chancel.

The subject matter is found in the passion narrative of the four New Testament gospels. The language is creatively modern and, at the same time, a gleaming of phrases and images from all the centuries of Christian experience. In the first draft of the play Catherine was so shy of tampering with the words of Jesus as quoted in the sacred text that she simply quoted them from the English translation most familiar to her. The result was disastrous. In the midst of figures that electrify the stage with colorful and daring speech, Jesus stood back as flat as a dusty old stage prop.

In the midst of figures electrifying the stage, Jesus stood back like an old dusty stage prop.

He spoke as the one character out of tune with our times. I hastened to write to her with this criticism as the main thrust of the letter. I suspect that she was a bit stunned by it, but in a letter which came back after some delay she thanked me for my boldness and for “permission,” as it were, to actually deal with the most important character of the drama. The result is a Jesus that should draw as much attention as the Jesus of the two popular musicals of our time, Superstar and Godspell.

Pilate:

To die young, is that your pleasure?
The dog answers its master’s call.
Who calls you? Of what archer’s bow?
Remember: I have the power to set you free or have you crucified.

Jesus (to Pilate):

You have power over me but it is not yours to keep.
How long before your hand turns into a bony shell, your fingers into pincers without meat or skin?
You are mortal:
the eagle on your shield begins to shed its bronze feathers.
The life you will — the villa in the hills, the servants
the chests of clothes and jewels already lie under rust and rot.
Can you look into the future and not know that towers topple
beetles march through the gaping door
roots wrench the stones, lift
stairs and roofs?
Where are you Pilate, where are YOU? In the center of this stage, with planet and stars wheeling about, with the sea
boiling on and on, and continents
overlapping to support what? Your power?

The Crowd (shouting):

If you release him,
you set yourself against the Emperor!

(p. 48, A Passion Play)

In her latest work, A Book of Uncommon Prayers and Readings, Catherine seems to be moving out with two obvious goals in mind: (1) a desire to develop and share the many thoughts that have been in her head for many years and (2) an urge to serve the Church with liturgies that can express our needs in our time. As a theologian and a churchman I am particularly grateful for the second of these two urges. The bulk of our contemporary attempts at liturgical language tends to be gimmicky, flat, or smelling of committee room smoke. Most of what is published by our denominational houses lacks both the integrity of the poet and of human honesty. It is this integrity that legitimates the work of Catherine de Vinck. Because she regards language as a gift, she labors at finding the best possible way to say all that she says. Because she feels herself to be a servant of the human race, she prays to know the needs of all human hearts and stretches herself to embrace all those needs in the poems that she writes.

I Am Sheltered

“The angel of the Lord pitches camp around those who fear him; and he keeps them safe. How good the Lord is — only taste and see! Happy the man who takes shelter in him.” (Ps. 34:7-8)

He is there

— around me
above and beyond
— the angel of the Lord:
a good workman in overalls and sandals
he pitches the tent wherever I am:
poles deep in the ground
ropes tied with all the proper knots.
In a child’s view of his power
he is colored gold, swims in the air.
To me, he wears
a collage of faces and looks:
grins like a boy
deep-sees, eyes in the sun, knowing
in what order and rhythm
the atoms dance to form
tree-shapes, the leaf’s sap.
I meet him often
in coffee-shops, airports, on the beach:
always
— above me
he sets up the tent
holds
a canopy of peace.

(p. 125, A Book of Uncommon Prayers)
The ponds are freezing today. Last night the red kit foxes circled our ponds and barked for a long time. We listened at the windows, our breaths covering the night and the blue snow with the moon sitting on the trees beyond the ponds. I think I heard you move behind me but I waited until the door shut and your car started up the white-rock gravel drive before I turned. You had forgotten nothing and the cold draft from the door brought clear, clean barks of foxes as they circled the ponds, sniffing and growling at the new ice.

Photograph by Thomas Strimbu

J. T. Ledbetter

Dear Editor:

Autumn in central Virginia always surrounds us with gold rather than brown. It's the searing flame of summer that refuses to die. Even in shirt-sleeves at football games you feel ludicrously overdressed, and not till Thanksgiving has the season convincingly changed.

The surprise this year—interrupting our 80-degree days—was a two-inch snowfall the morning of Wednesday, October 10. The leaves had not begun to turn, and the green branches heavy with snow fell all over town, bringing wires down and evoking letters to the editor either irate or abjectly grateful, depending on whether power was out for 72 hours or seven.

Autumn also brought Dave Stohler and his three “cutter” friends from Bloomington, Indiana, in the film Breaking Away, which, like the summer weather, stayed and stayed, week after week. Everybody liked the film, about town-gown conflicts, about growing up, about groping for iden-

Dean of the Echols Scholars and Associate Professor of English at the University of Virginia, Charles Vandersee is also Associate Editor of The Letters of Henry Adams to be published next year by Harvard University Press and wrote the “Introduction” to The Papers of Henry Adams microfilmed last year by the Massachusetts Historical Society.
I do not enter church at odds with God, as if church were the A&P and prices are up again.

... for their own reasons, honorable reasons perhaps, but as different from his own interests and duties as stone is from flesh. Their stones are cold, and the cutter can't draw near without a chill.

As you remember, nothing prevents Dave's father (the only genuine "cutter" among the main characters) from learning to conquer his discomfiture. Indeed, bicycling on the IU campus at the end of the film, he seems well on his way. What he has taken for coldness is latent warmth merely awaiting his touch and the sun of his attention.

On probing my "cutter" feelings in relation to the Lutheran liturgy, I discovered the analogy holding good only to a point. The chill I experience, Sunday after Sunday, is not something that my presence, and my knowledge, and my loving attention succeed in dissipating. It is the chill of theory, theory ungrounded in the reality of a Christian's relationship with his God.

To consider part of the problem: The liturgy begins with confession and absolution (casting down the barrier to God), as if this were necessary before we can praise, listen, offer, and pray. But the barrier does not, in the reality of experience, loom so threateningly. There is not some cold stone building in the neighborhood of our lives every day, casting long shadows. I do not customarily enter church feeling at odds with God, as if the church were the A & P and the prices have gone up again. I do not walk into the office at odds with the boss, or into the theater at odds with the film director. If I am working faithfully, if I care about films, I am not in regular agony over the perfect performance that eludes us all. The injunction "Be ye perfect" is zealous hyperbole, as are laws and commandments generally.

_Hier stehe ich._ I cannot on Sunday morning be the liturgical theorist of the zealot-hyperbolist and be at the same time a child of God. Regardless of the brokenness and alienation that canonized writers felt in themselves—some (David) justifiably—and that early liturgists of the Church thought appropriate, I cannot oblige.

Infrequently, like snow in early October, I feel a blinding sense of my inadequacy the past week, or my whole life. But winter has not come in October. In reality, I have been using my talents to good purpose, with appropriate effort. It is not meet, right, and salutary to dramatize myself with Pauline excess—the "chief of sinners" rhetoric—because I thereby deceive myself and try to deceive God.

We are not "miserable sinners," most of us, despite our submission to greed, deceit, and envy. Whatever we may discount in Genesis, it teaches plainly that God created us with rather limited powers of resistance. That is his inscrutable business, though to be sure, American enterprise handicaps us further. Immoderate advertising and promotion diminish our freedom to know our own minds and better selves, and God's will. But unless we are truly heroic sinners, giving—with gusto—our days to promotion, fashion, exploitation, competition, or the Mafia, we are probably sinners conspiring only in small ways with the imperfect systems of the world.

The conflict between liturgy and the Christian life is thus one objection of this cutter to the theory of liturgy. I must testify that each week I set myself to start over. This mechanistic roller coaster theology creates an ungodly God. It is as if violent unreasonable weather exactly every second Wednesday of the month were required to draw our minds to nature.

Fortunately, since God and I are not on such rigid terms, there are in His house on earth mansions as well furnished, if not so formally, as the highly liturgical flats. In Virginia in autumn, as leaves detach themselves, it's a golden time to think of breaking away.
Apologia
John Strietelmeier

After a six years’ tour of duty as Vice President for Academic Affairs of Valparaiso University, I returned last July 15 to my calling as a geographer and a writer. To my great joy, the editor of the Cresset was waiting for me upon my release and bore in hand an offer to write a column for our University’s review. He was willing to wait a decent interval for my rehabilitation—through my fall semester sabbatical—and proposed that my first column face the new decade in January. I quickly accepted; prodigal sons do well not to negotiate terms of acceptance.

So here I am. And the reason I am here, rather than in the opulent suite of the Vice President, was best expressed many years ago by Dr. John son, who observed that “when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.”

Back in the late Forties, Dr. O. P. Kretzmann recruited a squad of young Masters of Arts to reinforce his faculty in preparation for the student invasion which was soon to break upon the University. A number of us in that group were born in the years between 1917 and 1924. So the bells that rang in the 1980s were ringing, in a very special way, for us. The days of our years are threescore years and ten, and if, by reason of strength, they be fourscore, yet the University retires its faculty at age seventy. So we have entered our last decade of professional life, and the knowledge that we are this close to the end does concentrate the mind wonderfully. It comes down to the question: with time running out, what are you going to do with the time that is left?

It used to be, in the great days of the trans-Atlantic liners, that one spent the last day of a pleasant voyage remembering the crew with a kind word and a decent tip. Those of us who have had the good fortune to spend six decades in the Midwestern, Lutheran, academic, middle-class milieu have had about as pleasant a voyage as anyone has ever made, or is likely to make, on the tempestuous seas of this planet. And with the end of the voyage near, the time has come to remember the crew, the people in the boiler room and in the kitchens who did so much to make the voyage pleasant.

There are so many of them. Billions of the world’s people do the hard, day-long, back-breaking labor that supports my Midwestern, Lutheran, academic, middle-class life. They are the rule, to which a few million of us are the happy exceptions. Some say that we few are “op pressors” and the many are the “op pressed.” I think that such a distinction is both too facile and even false. But it is certainly true that the good things of this life are distributed very unevenly among individuals and among societies. My mind has been concentrated on this problem of the maldistribution of the earth’s abundance.

Two years ago, in his presidential address to the Association of American Geographers, Dr. Harold Rose proposed a Geography of Despair. The phrase has haunted me, for I am by training a social geographer and by conviction a Christian. I have seen in my lifetime a spreading of hunger, poverty, disease, and crime—the despair syndrome—into parts of the world, and of our own country, where it was unknown until recently. Neither as a geographer nor as a Christian can I ignore that development nor the silent cries of those whom it has overtaken.

I have no grandiose ideas of making any substantial contribution to the explication—let alone the cure—of this syndrome. But we always serve, not as we would but as we may. It is required of servants, not that they be successful but that they be faithful. And faithfulness seems to imply that one should be using whatever talents he has for whatever time is left to him. So that is why I am returning to geography.

I do not, of course, propose to abuse the generosity of the editor and the patience of my readers by harping on the geography of despair every time I write for the Cresset. Even with its despair, this little blue and white planet of ours is the glory of the galaxies, at least as far as we know now, and there are many things on it worth noting and talking about—some of them even humorous or playful. So I shall cheerfully accept the editor’s invitation to speak as the spirit—and perhaps occasionally even the Spirit—gives me utterance.

What this means in terms of specific topics for future columns I do not yet know. Judging by past performance, I shall most probably be drawn to those questions which Faith addresses to public affairs. This is probably as good a time as any, therefore, to give fair warning that I am no great admirer of the status quo. I think that the prevailing secular humanism of the Western world has brought us to a dead end, and that we must look again to our roots—the Jew to the Covenant with all of its implications, the Christian to the Gospel with all of its imperatives.

If we don’t, this may be the last decade not only for my generation but for Western civilization. That is a thought that should concentrate all of our minds wonderfully.