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Cover: Jerome Witkin, American b. 1939. The Use of the Suit: A Jesus For Our Time (Panel 1 of 5 panel narrative), 1986-87, oil on linen, 69 x 91 inches. Photo courtesy Sherry French Gallery, New York.


The Propp painting was shown at VU this fall in Propp's solo show. Witkin's 5-panel narrative was included in a concurrent show entitled "Revelation and Devotion: The Spirit of Religion in Contemporary Art," and depicts the experience of evil when only good was intended.

The Cresset
And Some Have Greatness Thrust Upon Them

Another book from Allan Bloom, and more words from the experts about what the educated ought to read if they are to consider themselves educated. Donald McCloskey, reviewing Bloom's book in the Chicago Tribune this week, makes a comment that it is "pathetic that Harvard, for example, prides itself on a 'core' that exempts students from having to learn anything about Socrates or Aquinas." The tone of these words rings with the scandalized gentility of the lady who learns that a friend is being married without the requisite two dozen hand-hemmed camisoles in her trousseau. "Mercy! exempt from Socrates and Aquinas...what can we be coming to!" It is yet another of the outcries of those who appear to believe that when the canon is threatened, civilization as we know it will fall.

Given the specifics of the phrase 'as we know it' we might well ask what we have to lose. Generations of people who knew something about Socrates and Aquinas have operated in the world without the world's experiencing thereby any perceptible increase of joy, or peace, or even sweetness and light. It would be churlish (meaning, of course, typical of someone who has been exempt from having to learn anything about Socrates and Aquinas) to comment that some of the power of great books, particularly in a curriculum, comes from the way they are regarded by people we have agreed to call great. Mortimer Adler, who is a kind of rabbi without a Torah, identifies another set of tablets, and proceeds to teach us how to study them with reverence. Of course he teaches about them with eloquence, and power, and skill, and lucidity. According to McCloskey, those terms apply as well to Bloom's teaching of the Republic and Richard II and Emile in this latest book, and I have no doubt that he is right. Further, I have no doubt that the works are great ones, and that they deserve and will reward disciplined study and attention.

No, the objection I want to raise to the tone of anguish as great texts are discussed is an objection to a limited idea of greatness, too readily assumed by the vocally adept academic elites with access to big publish-
what to study has been framed in the context of their demands for reality and relevance and the development of effective learning skills and so forth. Against these critics, intellectuals have countered with stronger and stronger demands for the great classics of the past, the immutable and stately rhythms of eternal wisdom. But both sides miss an important point. What we call the greatness of the great texts is only a partial record and a partial response to what was important in the life and thought of the past. We must listen to what they say about human life and history, and we must hear what it is they do not say. For greatness goes far beyond the words of the great.

If we were to teach ourselves about the past, we would begin to find ways to learn more profoundly the truths we say but do not mean when it comes to learning. As Christians, we can recite the Beatitudes, but we still shape our learning around the non-meek, the non-poor in spirit, the non-merciful, the non-peace-makers. I wonder about another version of greatness, and the impact it might make on our students.

Peace,

GME

Editor's note:

As The Cresset's contribution to the comment on Richard John Neuhaus's announcement of his conversion to the Roman Catholic communion, we are happy to have these words from Edward Gaffney, the Dean of the School of Law at VU. Mr. Gaffney, before studying law, served on the staff of the Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations, where he assisted in Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues.

Lead, Kindly Light: Newman and Neuhaus

Rarely at a loss for words, Richard John Neuhaus needs no one to explain his choices. A few words may still be in order from a long-time friend on the Roman side, as both communions seek the meaning in his decision, at once personal and public. Neuhaus is no Newman, but a comparison with the nineteenth-century Cardinal bears some exploration.

In 1845 John Henry Newman, a powerful intellectual leader in the Oxford Movement, left the Anglican communion and became a Roman Catholic. For both Newman and Neuhaus, the intensely personal choice of leaving the group in which they had received their spiritual nurture for half a century was difficult, made after years of deep spiritual reflection. In his famous hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light," Newman prayed: "Amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on... I do not ask to see the distant scene, One step alone enough for me." In an interview with Peter Steinfels of the New York Times, Neuhaus tells us that he wrestled with this decision — even resisted it — for a long while because his sense of vocation meant that "you should generally stay where God put you and do your duty there. For me that was as a Lutheran and as a Lutheran pastor."

For Newman the move to Rome was preceded in 1841 by the last of the Tracts for our Times, No. XC, in which he argued that the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England are basically Catholic. Once Newman came to doubt the soundness of that view, he withdrew from his pastorate at Oxford to write his probing Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, the publication of which coincided with his reception into the Roman Catholic Church.

Neuhaus' move was preceded in 1987 by an important volume, The Catholic Moment, in which he suggested that the tradition, size, and resources of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States uniquely equip it to provide a vital role of moral leadership in this country at this point in our history. Both before and after this essay Neuhaus has extolled the late John Courtney Murray for his singular efforts to achieve a morally informed public philosophy appropriate for our culture. This view of the potential contribution that Roman Catholics can make to our culture, however, was not the driving force for Neuhaus' decision to become a Catholic. Instead, he insists, he has joined the Roman Catholic Church because he believes that it is "the fullest expression of the church of Christ through time" and that he "could no longer give an answer convincing to others or to me as to why I am not a Roman Catholic."

Roman Catholics were latecomers to the stirring of the Spirit known as the ecumenical movement. But once the Roman church got the point of this movement in the Second Vatican Council, it has not withdrawn from the task of interfaith dialogue with other Christians. The work of bilateral conversations with communions stemming from the Reformation has been serious and fruitful. Roman Catholics and their Lutheran brothers and sisters have learned to appreciate one another's faith. Although this process is by no means complete, it is fair to say that the central convictions of the Reformers (justification by faith, the role of Scripture in the life of the church, worship in the vernacular, the priesthood of all believers) are now taken very seriously in the life and teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Neuhaus' move thus is by no means a slight on the Reformation, but a sign that—at least for some
Lutherans—the Roman Catholic Church can now be called their home because it is both reformed and catholic, truly evangelical and truly apostolic. For that very reason, this is no time for Catholics to indulge in smug triumphalism, as though all “right thinking” Christians must come to the same conclusion that Newman and Neuhaus reached. On the contrary, as George Lindbeck intimated in his open letter to Neuhaus in The Lutheran Forum, Catholics need to know that Neuhaus’ departure from Lutheranism may be especially painful to those Lutherans who have been working within Lutheranism to enable it to be fully evangelical and fully catholic (with a small c). Catholics also need to understand that many Lutherans might have lingering doubts about the power of the preaching of the Word of God and the celebration of the Sacrament in Roman Catholicism even after the reforms of Vatican II. If Neuhaus needed to be shown, I could take him to several Roman parishes where the preaching is banal and the liturgy lifeless.

Since none of us knows God’s plans or timetable for the restoration of the gift of unity among Christians, it is not for us to say whether Neuhaus’ decision will retard or accelerate greater organic unity between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. We can only pray that God’s will be done in His way and time. One way in which that goal might be facilitated among Roman Catholics might lean to accept God’s will would be for us to welcome Neuhaus into our company as one urging us to become more fully evangelical and less nervous about the value of the Reformation. In any event, we cannot expect that the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement—the full visible unity of all Christians in a single communion—will be realized because one Lutheran, even a significant leader like Neuhaus, decides to become a Roman Catholic, any more than it will be deterred by one or more transfers going the other way.

Pastor Neuhaus’ desire to become Father Neuhaus presents some practical (but not insuperable) difficulties. Is seminary training out of the question for one who states unabashedly that over the last 20 years he has probably taken the teaching statements of the Roman Catholic Church more seriously than many Roman Catholic theologians? Would a mini-course on the theological meaning of the collegiality of the bishops suffice for one who so clearly has his favorites among the hierarchy, and who—like his friend William Buckley (“Mater S1, Magistra No”)—evidently thinks that all papal encyclicals are equal, but that the ones he agrees with are more equal than others?

No matter what theological retooling of Pastor Neuhaus the authorities may deem a prerequisite to ordination, it should be added that pastoral training these days focuses on much more than correct ideas. I have sometimes winced at the way he has not minced words about those with whom he disagrees, but I am sure that no one is going to ask Neuhaus to apologize to the bishops he has flailed for their failure of nerve. There is little danger that the later Neuhaus will be bland or flat. One may hope, however, that a kinder and gentler Neuhaus may yet emerge.

His bishop in the ELCA, William Lazareth, wished Neuhaus “God’s richest blessing in his pilgrimage of faith.” I hope my fellow Catholics are no less generous. Our welcome to his new-found home should not be iffy, or conditioned on his giving up the very things that make him such an important figure in church life today: his candor, his acerbic wit, his deep convictions, his probing mind, and his impatience with muddled thinking. But as Pastor Neuhaus finds a home among us, I trust that he will be patient with the truth that—to paraphrase another Pastor, Jesse Jackson—the Lord hasn’t finished with many of us yet. I hope that Neuhaus will find a home where the bishops (with whom he disagrees) have as much to say about the economic order as Michael Novak (with whom he agrees). Although his keen mind (and dare I say characteristically Lutheran view of our flawed world?) has led him in the past to be skeptical of my “sectarian” claims about war and peace, I hope he will now find a church at least as open to the nonviolence of Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day of New York, and Teresa of Calcutta, as it is to the Realpolitik of the just warriors. Most of all, I hope that the Spirit of light will lead Richard Neuhaus in a kindly way to find in us a love enabling him to be at home with the extraordinary diversity of the Spirit that characterizes the community he has now embraced.

Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr.

About this issue

Those readers who enjoyed the three essays last month by the members of the Cresset Colloquium on Creation will be pleased now to read the final two contributions on the subject, appearing in this issue, by Professors Bachman and Caristi. The essay about global communication, its problems and possibilities, by Professor Shalini Venturelli, made its original appearance as a talk in the Brown Bag series of lunch time talks by faculty, for faculty, on their work in progress.
Roderick Nash has written an informative albeit tendentious history of environmental ethics entitled The Rights of Nature. Nash's thesis is that an irresistible evolutionary march of intellectual history is systematically transcending and rendering quaint all previous thought about human responsibility in relation to the world of nature. I will illustrate his thesis at work in the book and then give reasons why some of the older biblical ideas about nature are by no means as quaint as Nash seems to think.

Nash's thesis permits him to be interested only in conclusions, not in arguments. He already somehow knows that "the step-by-step extension of ethics away from its traditional fixation on people" (152) is the wave of the future. Thus the more a conclusion expresses this step-by-step extension the more it is worthy of acceptance. This clue from history spares him the painful give and take of argument. In his own words:

I will not split logical hairs with the philosophers and theologians nor biological ones with scientists. It seems to me that the first responsibility of an historian of ideas must be to report accurately what was thought in the past. If those thoughts strike some readers as illogical, biased, emotional, unreasonable, or just plain wrong, the fault, if any, is that of the thinkers under discussion. (xi)

Nash is in fact wonderfully generous in letting us know which thoughts should strike us as illogical, biased, emotional, and wrong. His thesis concerning the inevitably extending circle of ethical concern and responsibility is the only tool needed for showing which ideas should be discarded and which pursued. He rigorously adheres to his promise not to provide any argument.

Nor does he have the patience to sort through the arguments of those whose work he has undertaken accurately to report. Philosophers who argue about ecology and ethics are too often "academic and esoteric" (124). He is especially exasperated that philosophers waste time arguing with each other:

Thinking in terms of intellectual history, they might have seen themselves as colleagues in the step-by-step extension of ethics away from its traditional fixation on people. Instead they energetically attempted to undermine each others' philosophical position. (152)

Here Nash clearly shows his own position. The conclusions are already known. Argument is simply a hindrance to the "step-by-step extension of ethics away from its traditional fixation on people." Nash's is a view of human thought about environmental ethics in which an idea requires no rational support other than the bare fact that it expresses his belief that ethics has evolved and will continue to evolve from a preoccupation with the rights of individual human persons to the correct view as expressed in the following:

In traditional American liberalism, ethics had always functioned to protect individual lives against aggregates such as states or nations. Philosophers assumed that first some humans, then all humans, then some nonhumans (animals), and, as the circle widened, all nonhumans (plants, insects, viruses), had intrinsic value and, it followed for some thinkers, natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of their own style of happiness. But the land ethic (Leopold), ethical holism (Callicott), an egalitarian type of biocentrism (Taylor), and deep ecology (Naess) led the most radical moral philosophers of recent times to conclusions that devalued the individual life relative to the integrity, diversity, and continuation of the ecosystem. This understandably offended many proponents of animal rights, not to speak of those liberals whose moral community began and ended with human society. (160)

For those who have not had the benefit of reading the first 160 pages I provide some notes on
vocabulary. "Traditional," as in *traditional American liberalism*, signals *due for dumping on the trash heap of history*. "Radical" coupled with "recent," as in *the most radical moral philosophers of recent times*, indicates the inevitable march of intellectual history. "Understandably," as in *understandably offended*, functions in Nash’s vocabulary as a signal that a view has worn out its welcome in history and that we may patronizingly dismiss the views of persons mentioned under this rubric.

So it is that, according to Nash’s thesis, ideas which have a long history are by that very fact suspect. He often packages old ideas in oversimplified forms and then makes a comment such as: "An understandable way station on the road" (144) or "But this was 1971" (127) or "But by the 1980s such opinions sounded increasingly old-fashioned" (120). This form of nonargument is illustrated nicely in his approving quotation from an essay by Lynn White, Jr.

Do people have ethical obligations toward rocks? . . . To almost all Americans, still saturated with ideas historically dominant in Christianity . . . the question makes no sense at all. If the time comes when to any considerable group of us such a question is no longer ridiculous, we may be on the verge of a change of value structures that will make possible measures to cope with the growing ecologic crisis. One hopes that there is enough time left. (cited in Nash, 87)

Nash’s only quarrel with White would be that he never undertakes to demonstrate how other competing ideas fail. In his view the devaluing of individual human life relative to the integrity, diversity, and continuation of the ecosystem is self-evidently the goal toward which history is taking us. Preoccupation with merely human concerns is self-evidently too narrow. Yet, Nash is aware and provides ample evidence that in our own time, as well as in the past, people interpret the data of nature in a startling and confusing variety of ways.

Some, like Nash, see in nature a marvelous order that transcends human interest, and they exhort human beings to respect nature’s rights. Others, however, see in nature the endless conflict of “selfish DNA.” They urge human beings to assert themselves to the fullest in the midst of and over against nature. In their view exploitation of nature should be limited only in so far as the imposition of limits protects the human species. Still others see in both humanity and nature only the dance of soulless chance on the stage of an icy infinity (Thielicke, *The Christian’s Creed*, 37).

Philosophers and theologians continue to argue over such diverse interpretations of the natural world precisely because they recognize that one cannot easily and naively read the significance of the evidence. This recognition provides one reason for a continuing consideration of the biblical interpretation of nature. For the biblical interpretation takes seriously our ambiguous relationship to the natural world. In the biblical perspective nature appears both as a bewildering threat and as a lovely blessing. Nature appears both grim and grand. In the biblical perspective the key to interpreting the data is said to lie not in direct knowledge of the creature but in a right relationship with the Creator.

Some of us first approached these biblical notions in the following phrases framed by the Apostles’ Creed and Martin Luther’s explanation: “I believe that God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. What does this mean? I believe that God has made me and all creatures . . . .” (*Small Catechism*, Part 2) In these phrases nature and humanity are not divided from each other. Human beings and all creatures alike stand together. Neither has self-evident significance, and human beings are not given free rein to make of nature whatever they will or whatever they dream. Confession of God as Creator is instead claimed to be the necessary center for interpretation.

One might suspect that Luther added “and all creatures” to his confession simply as an afterthought, but in fact Luther was deeply serious about the affinities between humanity and nature. It was part of his biblical faith to be instructed by nature and all that exists. Heinrich Bornkamm’s chapter “The Picture of Nature” in *Luther’s World of Thought* (176 ff.) provides
the details. When the topic is Luther and natural science, most people remember only that Luther thought Coperniclus to be wrong. Luther, however, genuinely celebrated humanity's advancing knowledge of nature:

We are now living in the dawn of the future life; for we are beginning to regain a knowledge of the creation, a knowledge we had forfeited by the fall of Adam. Now we have a correct view of the creatures, more so, I suppose, than they have in the papacy. Erasmus does not concern himself with this; it interests him little how the fetus is made, formed, and developed in the womb. Thus he also fails to prize the excellency of the state of marriage. But by God's mercy we can begin to recognize His wonderful works and wonders also in the flowers when we ponder His might and His goodness. Therefore we laud, magnify, and thank Him. In His creatures we recognize the power of His Word. By His Word everything came into being. This power is evident even in a peach stone. No matter how hard its shell, in due season it is forced open by a very soft kernel inside it. All this is ignored by Erasmus. He looks at the creatures as a cow stares at a new gate. (Table Talk 1, 1160; cited in Bornkamm, 184)

Luther was opposed on scientific grounds to astrology:

I shall never be convinced that astrology should be numbered among the sciences. And I shall adhere to this opinion because astrology is entirely without proof. Their appeal to experience has no effect on me. All the astrological experiences are purely individual cases. The experts have taken note of and recorded only those instances which did not fail; but they took no note of the rest of the attempts, where they were wrong and the results which they predicted as certain did not follow. (Genesis Commentary, LW1, 45)

Luther had a robust appreciation of nature. In fact he believed God to be present everywhere within the created world. Note, however, that Luther founded his study of nature not upon its self-evident meaning. He instead confessed that it is "by God's mercy we can begin to recognize His wonderful works." He saw clearly that our experience of nature is ambiguous. Luther would not be surprised at contemporary debates over conflicting interpretations of nature and of humanity's place in it. Nor does he entertain a sanguine notion that the evolutionary advance of human thought is making everything clear. Those who study nature to discover the ultimate meaning of things exert themselves to ascend to heaven without ladders (that is, without the Word). Overwhelmed by God's majesty, which they seek to comprehend without a covering, they fall to their destruction. . . . forsaking the Word, they each follow their own thoughts. (LW1, 14)

Nature is not so much the revelation as the mask of the omnipresent God. "Therefore it must be our skill to distinguish between God and His mask. The world cannot do this" (Commentary on Galatians [1531], cited in Bornkamm, 191). The biblical perspective thus interprets the continuing philosophical and scientific arguments about the significance of nature and humanity's place in it as a sign that understanding might better begin in the beginning with the confession "I believe that God has created me and all creatures."

This biblical interpretation then proceeds to argue that what God reveals of himself in the Word provides a coherent way of interpreting the tension we experience between the beauties and horrors of life in nature. Here the theme of wrath and redemption comes to the fore. Commenting on Genesis 3 Luther says "The earth indeed is innocent and would gladly produce the best products, but it is prevented by the curse which was placed upon man because of sin" (LW 1, 205). Because of the enmity between humanity and the Creator all creatures are against us, and they are all equipped for our destruction. How many people are there whom fire and water destroy? How great is the danger from wild or poisonous beasts? And they harm not only our bodies but also the foods which have been produced to support us. . . . Our body bears the traces of God's wrath, which our sin has deserved. God's wrath also appears on the earth and in all the creatures . . . . Although everything on all sides warns us of God's wrath and all but forces it into our very eyes, we still ignore it and embrace this life as our only delight. Just as the signs increase, therefore, the smugness grows, too, and people become insensible and hardened toward their misfortunes. (LW1, 208f.)

Precisely this smugness comes through in Nash's confident, evolutionary hypothesis. To moderns like Nash biblical language about sin and wrath is, at most, malleable metaphor manipulable by those who simply will exert themselves to ascend to heaven without the covering of the Word. Sadly, some prominent contemporary theologians lend support to the claim that theology must necessarily be a manipulating of metaphors. Sallie McFague, for instance, argues that "I do not know who God is, but I find some models better than others for constructing an image of God commensurate with my trust in a God as on the side of life" (192). My trust in God is the measure of what is to be said about God, and therefore by McFague's own admission "although this sort of theology 'says much,' it 'means little'" (xii).

Her theology has come to this pass precisely because she premises to mount up to heaven without ladders. Having reduced Christ to a "paradigmatic figure" who "expresses and illuminates" a "gracious power who is on the side of life and its fulfillment," (192) she attempts to approach God apart from his incarnational covering. As a consequence, just as Luther predicts, she encounters only God's perplexing
masks and can only follow her own thoughts: “The hints and clues we have of the way things are—whether we call them experiences, revelation, or whatever—are too fragile, too little (and more often than not, too negative) for much more than a hypothesis, a guess, a projection of a possibility that, although it can be comprehensive and illuminating, may not be true” (192).

The worst result is not that such theology harmlessly “says much” and “means little.” No, those who reduce theology to word play with model and metaphor systematically cut us off from the possibility that God’s Word about sin, wrath and grace centered on the cross of Christ is the reality. Our experiences of ourselves and of nature, my trust in a God “on the side of life and its fulfillment,” far from governing this word, are instead to be governed by it. Luther warned that a person becomes a theologian not by manipulating models of God and his glory but by hearing and taking to heart God’s Word that humanity has come under judgment and is every day dying and being damned. It is a measure of our smug complacency that we view such talk today as quaint metaphor appropriate to a late medieval monk but necessarily called into question by my way of trusting God. Meanwhile earthquake and tornado, viruses and STDs, recession, famine and war, oblivious to our models and metaphors, provide occasions again and again to ponder whether the biblical words may not be right. Perhaps we do, after all, stand in danger of being overwhelmed by God’s majesty when we presume divine insight into ourselves and nature and when we arrogate the right to strip away God’s masks and model Him as we think best apart from Christ and His cross. His Word about sin and wrath turns out to be the reality and our experience of nature becomes the sign to be interpreted in the light of the Word.

The biblical God is experienced in Nature, but the interpretation of the experience of God and nature is subject to the revealed Word. One part of that word is about human sin and God’s wrath. Biblical faith predicts that no amount of evolving consciousness will reconcile us with God or with the rest of nature. Instead God must redeem and we are called to repentance. Our ecological crisis is also a theological crisis. There will be no path to reconciliation with nature that does not pass through reconciliation with God.

But the biblical word is above all about Christ’s sharing our death and our sharing His resurrection, i.e., about God reconciling us and all of nature to Himself. In his book The Travail of Nature Paul Santmire cites Luther from a sermon on the Gospel of John:

Now if I believe in God’s Son and bear in mind that He became man, all creatures will appear a hundred times more beautiful to me than before. Then I will properly appreciate the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, apples, pears, as I reflect that he is Lord over and the center of all things. (Santmire, 181)

Bornkamm avers that biblical faith bridges “the great distance between this God, personalized in Christ, and His hidden vibrant activity and life in all, and through all, forms in nature” (193). Helmut Thielicke, asserting that we do not find God in the things of nature, says, “Rather, once I have found the Heart, then I understand the things . . . then it becomes clear to me what life could be like” (The Christian’s Creed, 40).

This biblical perspective thus provides grounds for responsible human appreciation, celebration, and stewardship of nature. Humans stand with the rest of nature in the confession that “God has made me and all creatures.” Humans then take their cue from God’s Word in determining what responsible stewardship will involve. The conflicts between humanity and the rest of nature are put into the larger perspective of God’s Word concerning sin and redemption.

In this short essay I have attempted to sketch two reasons why traditional biblical ideas may continue to be worthy our study. One reason is that the biblical interpretation of nature offers a perspective that takes seriously the ambiguity of our experience of nature and that suggests an interpretation based upon faith founded in the Word of God. The other reason is that a perspective thus based on biblical faith illuminates both the threatening and the promising aspects of the created world by connecting them with the realities of God’s Word concerning human sin, death and resurrection. These connections can be tested in light of the full range of our experience of nature, of ourselves, and of nature’s God in ways far more intellectually rigorous than can be Roderick Nash’s monochrome thesis of the evolution of human thought. The realism of biblical words concerning sin and grace promises dividends for study that simply are not to be found in the scheme presupposed in The Rights of Nature.
At a conference years ago the lecturer, a molecular biologist, explained why Science was different from the Arts and the Humanities. He argued as follows, "If you put up ten different paintings on the wall back there, you couldn't say that one of them was TRUE. You could like one better than the others, but it would not be reasonable to assert that one is correct. But in Science, any statements posted on the wall would be either TRUE or FALSE. Science deals with FACTS." One of my colleagues, a biologist, challenged the lecturer on this point during the question and answer session. My colleague asked whether Science itself wasn't also lacking in FACTS when we consider, for example, the replacement of Newtonian understandings by Einsteinian understandings. The lecturer's immediate response was "Is the Earth round?" He seemed to have scored his point that Science really does deal in FACTS. I wish I had been quick-witted enough to argue with him. After all, the Earth looks more like a compressed beach ball than a perfect mathematical sphere.

The question of what is really meant by a FACT emerges in making environmental policy. People debate whether an endangered species will be threatened by a development project, or whether global warming is actually taking place, or whether species survive better in a single large habitat as opposed to several small ones (the SLOSS issue in Conservation Science), or whether fires should be extinguished immediately in a national forest. The issues often sound like the "Earth roundness" question: the species are not quite threatened, only inconvenienced; it's not really getting warmer, we're only increasing the carbon dioxide level. Sometimes facts elude us because we can't (or won't) agree on what we're talking about, or we beg the question.

We can see another aspect of the problem of "facts" in environmental issues when we distinguish the so-called "hard" from the "soft" sciences. In the "hard" science of plant pathology, for example, researchers prove that a particular fungus is pathogenic by using a variety of rigorous and replicated experiments. Other scientists can independently validate these experiments to confirm the results. In the related, but "soft" science of plant epidemiology, researchers develop and study complex mathematical models of disease progress. Lots of laboratory and field experimentation drive these models, but most of the researchers focus on the models and their relationship to the real-world situation. What makes plant epidemiology and other sciences "soft" seems to be the complexity of the questions under consideration (complexity in the sense that there is a multitude of influencing factors that cannot all be controlled). It is difficult to claim that an epidemic will result from a given situation, because any one of dozens of "outliers" might influence the progress of the disease.

When "hard" facts are difficult to obtain or to agree upon, people often resort to models. Models provide a way for dealing with complexity by ignoring many influencing factors while simultaneously emphasizing others. For example, Newtonian mechanics represents the motion of objects fairly well, though it ignores relativistic effects, as long as the objects are not moving too rapidly and are not too massive. Mathematical models of epidemics usually ignore individual factors such as differences in susceptibility while emphasizing general quantities such as the rate of transmission. The problematic aspect of models arises with the following questions: 1. How do we handle competing models? 2. When should we abandon a model? 3. What are the limitations of a model? 4. Under what conditions should we implement decisions based on model results?

In using models myself I have invoked a "meta-model" that serves to put facts, models, and reality into some kind of perspective. This higher level model I call the "Bridge Analogy," and I believe it can be used to shed light on the use of models in environmental biology.

Jim Caristi, who was the fifth member of last spring's Cresset Colloquium, teaches mathematics at VU, and has worked at Montana State with cereal plant pathologists in the modelling of crop diseases. In 1990, he was a recipient of a Sears Foundation Teaching Excellence Award.
The Bridge Analogy refers to the card game, contract bridge, which is played by four people playing as partners, two against two. Each person sees only his or her thirteen cards. With only that information, the partnership must bid to capture a specified number of tricks later in the play with a specified suit as trump. The only thing a person may legally utter refers directly to determining the number of tricks and the trump suit. The minimum bid already commits the partnership to capturing most of the tricks in the play, and subsequent bids must be higher in some sense. Thus, there are few statements that a person can legally make. After determining the level of the contract and the trump suit, the play begins, and each partnership strives to maximize the number of tricks it captures. The laws of bridge are much more complicated than I have presented, but the important part is that people enter into a contract and try to capture the most tricks given extremely limited information.

How should someone who learns the laws of bridge attempt to play the game? There are many choices at any given moment. How does one know which is best? Playing by chance is clearly wrong, because experienced players play better than beginners. Experience provides ideas about what works (and what doesn't). Through the years, good players have developed rules of thumb that guide them through most situations. They have developed methods of assessing a hand to estimate its playing strength. They have developed systems of bidding and playing where a legal bid or play conveys information to the partner concerning the hand's contents. Experts codify, publish and teach these rules of thumb, methods of assessment, and systems of bidding and playing for others to learn in order to improve their game.

These additional aspects of bridge that are taught by the experts I call "rules" for playing bridge well. These "rules" are to be distinguished from the LAWS of bridge, which one may never violate. The LAWS of bridge include following suit if possible, speaking only legal bids in turn, and so on. The "rules", on the other hand, suggest what one should do given several choices: e.g., if you have to lead from ace, king, small, lead the king. Here, it would not be illegal to lead the ace or the small card, but to do so risks confusing partner. If you violate the LAWS of bridge, you will always be caught, and no one will play bridge with you. If you violate the "rules" indiscriminately, only beginners will play bridge with you, but at least you will be playing bridge.

On many occasions and for a variety of reasons, good bridge players will break the "rules." They see that in a particular situation, because they know what has been played already and they can infer much about what the other hands contain, the best play would involve violating a rule. These players use higher perceptions of the reality of the current game than can be provided by an inherently statistical "rule." Of course, they might not assess the situation correctly. In that case, they bear the blame for any bad results. But good players realize that they cannot blindly follow "rules" when the reality behind the "rules" is visible.

In the Bridge Analogy, the LAWS represent facts about life that we cannot change easily: birds fly and lay eggs, gravity pulls on everything. "Rules," however, represent models for behavior. These can be codified in a religious tradition (Love your neighbor as yourself), expressed in mathematical symbolism (such as the Law of mass action), or recited as proverbs (Waste not, want not). However articulated, "rules" attempt to guide us toward our best performance. They are the voice of experience. Many of us rely on "rules" in everyday life (aphorisms, codes of ethics, etc.) largely because we don't have all the FACTS. We see through a glass into the future only darkly. Problems arise because there are competing, conflicting, and inadequate models, and because we are unwilling to abandon those models that are inconsistent with our total understanding of reality. In the game of bridge, there are almost as many "rule" systems as there are players. They vary in complexity, popularity, and tournament effectiveness. Some players play one system with one partner and another system with a different partner. Many systems of play fall victim to the whim of fashion. Wasn't existentialism fashionable in many circles in the early 1960's?

For me, the Bridge Analogy supplies several guidelines for dealing with the problematic aspects of models. The fact that models compete with one another in their assumptions and conclusions, in bridge and in ecology, suggests that models are more tentative than we often admit. In bridge, players are free to use whatever bidding systems they wish, if they declare them properly to the opponents. An ecological model should hold up under extended scrutiny and attack. For example, a model may indicate that a proposed dam will not interfere significantly with an endangered population of snakes in a river basin. But if such a model is used in the decision to build the dam, it should be widely publicized. People should be given the opportunity to use or test the model in their own way. Unfortunately, many computer models of ecological systems are written so poorly that no one can completely understand and test them. Funding should be given for developing other, competing models.
In bridge, good players easily perceive the limitations of the “rules,” while in the ordinary world, people may forget or ignore the intended purpose of a model. In science, models are sometimes constructed for research—to examine “what if” kinds of situations. For example, “what if a fungus that attacks aphids kills them at a rate proportional to the number of live aphids multiplied by the number of aphids recently killed by the fungus?” The last sentence is really a model that can be analyzed mathematically, apart from any physical reality. People can then decide whether the assumptions of the aphid/fungus model make any sense. Problems occur when a model that was intended for research is used directly in policy decisions. Since research models are usually created for exploring the relationships among variables, they do not have to take many things into consideration. Research models, therefore, have built-in limitations. It is also not necessary, for research purposes, to prove the strongest correlation possible between a model’s predictions and actual events. The aphid/fungus model might be valid for research, but could give extremely inaccurate predictions when given actual data.

Good bridge players make decisions based on their understanding of both the “rules” and the reality of their current situation. Decision-making in environmental issues should be at least as complex by considering facts, models, and political and social concerns. Often, however, a single corporation or special interest group controls the decision. For example, an agri-chemical company may commission the development of a model to predict the dispersal of a newly developed pesticide into water systems. The model builders will know that their model had better show that water supplies will be safe. The company is much more likely to consider such a model valid, because it predicts what they want it to. The Environmental Protection Agency considers models as part of an environmental impact statement. So unless there is a watchdog group with the resources to develop a competing model, a decision can be affected significantly by a possibly invalid model.

How should policy decisions be made? Environmental issues are so complex that we require models. Yet models have limitations, might be biased, or might not correspond well with reality. The Bridge Analogy suggests that we use our models, but temper them with experience and general knowledge. To see how this could occur, let us consider an environmental scenario based on current events, but augmented by a few fictional discoveries.

Northern spotted owls live only in old forest in North America. Their numbers have decreased to the point where they have been declared a threatened species. Consequently, large tracts of forest will be closed to logging and development, many jobs will be lost, and the price of wood products may increase. Spotted owls declined in number because they require old forest trees for their nests, and old forest is almost gone. In other words, spotted owls cannot adapt sufficiently to make use of younger forest.

Suppose that geneticists discovered that a certain portion of the spotted owl’s DNA coded for an unusual protein. Suppose also that this protein is connected somehow with the owl’s insistence on old forest for its nesting. Finally, suppose that it is possible to change the genetic structure of the owls so that the unusual protein is not produced, neither in the modified birds, nor in their descendants. Should we create northern spotted owls, version 2, so that they will survive even if most or all of the old forest is gone?

Many questions immediately come to mind. Wouldn’t it really be playing God to modify an entire species? Will we find that the modified owls are still not adaptable enough to make homes in younger forest due to other, currently unknown influences? Will they be more vulnerable to diseases? Will the “version 2” owls become too successful and drive out other species? What other species might require old forest and become extinct if we continue logging and development?

The Bridge Analogy does not answer these questions. Instead, it makes us realize that the situation is too complicated for anyone to understand adequately. Unlike a paralyzing relativism, the Bridge Analogy suggests that we commit ourselves to our favorite perspective, whether economic, ethical, social, or scientific. But we are not to bind ourselves so completely that we are unable to make contact with the larger context of experience and general knowledge.

For example, if we believe that it is right to manipulate the genetic structure of a species under the proper conditions, we must still recognize our own hidden agendas and the concerns of others. It is possible that we would rather facilitate continued logging and development or advance our scientific reputations than make a better world. We also should consider whether our technological achievement will be counterproductive in other ways. Ideally, we would know that we are capable of modifying a species, but that we choose not to do so at that point in time.

If, on the other hand, we believe that it is not appropriate to modify spotted owls, we must then be prepared to address the social consequences. What can be done for the people who depend on logging and development for their livelihood? Will extreme conservationist positions result in having many human
communities become threatened? If genetic engineering should not be applied just to make human life easier, we must still accept the fact that it is a tool, and work with others in determining its appropriate use.

It is seldom possible to know all the consequences resulting from an action. Science and technology provide us with limited facts and less limited, but less certain models. Our social and religious traditions give us additional models. Navigating among these small facts and competing models requires that we cling to tradition most of the time. When we recognize the value of a new approach, while appreciating what our tradition has to say, we should move boldly toward the new approach. Can we demonstrate that our intended actions are not just self-serving? Can we accept the responsibility and the consequences if something goes wrong? Have objective, knowledgeable people examined our new models? When we can respond affirmatively to these questions, we should venture to modify spotted owls.

A Translation: Wordsworth Wrote That

the world is too much with us,
wrote (like man possessed)
that there's little we see in

Nature that is
ours: not the sea
baring its bosom

on cue to the moon, not winds
that howl all hours (they harmonize
with us, and fill out his rhyme

with flowers)—for every thing he claims
we're out of tune; in other words
it (that is, all

of the above) moves us not.
Thus the Poet, becoming the first person
singular, makes boldly

his departure, swearing
"Great God! I'd rather be a pagan
suckled in a creed outworn"

etcetera, leaving us (the aforementioned out
of tune, who get and spend and give
our hearts away)

to our devices, to stand on a pleasant lea
to be less forlorn, for glimpses of Proteus,
to hear old So-and-So's horn.

John Ruff

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REVERSING THE TOWER OF BABEL

Shalini S. Venturelli

In his recently translated book on China, The Gate of Happy Sparrows, Daniel Vave, an Italian diplomat, describes an essay he wrote in a Chinese language class. It was about a Chinese minister who objected to a policy of the Ming emperor, wrote his objections in a memo, carried them to the palace, and committed suicide inside the palace walls. Vave’s Chinese teacher shook his head and handed back the essay. “You ignore the rites prescribed for suicide,” he said. “No respectable person would act as your minister did.” The minister would not have “attained his rank were he unfamiliar with court decorum.” Only the emperor and his family, he counseled, may take their lives inside the palace grounds.

Vave then asked his teacher to suggest an alternate plot, which the teacher did:

Once upon a time there was a celebrated scholar who visited an aristocratic family every week, and was served a bowl of salted turnips as a mark of esteem. But one week the scholar noticed that his favorite dish was absent. Realizing that he had fallen from grace, he went to the foot of the Western Hills and killed himself.

“Now that’s a credible plot,” the teacher said.

Vave objected, “But if I write that story, nobody in the West will believe it.”

“And if you write your story, nobody in China will believe it,” said the teacher. “Besides, I would lose face if I permitted you to write it your way” (35-37).

Vave’s account is about plausibility. Plausibility, that is, in the construction of the narrative of reality, an issue that extends beyond the peripheries of folktale, art tale, or fiction to other forms of narrative construction. It is palpable and present in conflicting versions of news in an information age. The cultural chasm in rendition of daily events was never more clear than in 1989, when Western news agencies parachuted into Tiananmen Square and flooded the information arteries of the world with their version of the massacre. Outraged Chinese leaders saw Western news versions of the death of students within the palace walls as a culturally implausible violation of the court decorum Vave’s teacher describes, far less acceptable than the honourable effacement of life and dissent outside the palace in ritually discreet and distant forms. This is a crucial distinction not in interpretation, but in reality itself; and Chinese leaders reacted accordingly by appropriating those centers engaged in the mass production of narrative: television, external broadcasts, newspapers, radio.

Recently, the media has become the secret weapon in political revolutions worldwide, emphasizing the multiple developments in global communication that are transforming the political and cultural environment of the planet. My essay describes my sense of the implications in these developments, not only with news flow, but with international movements of all types of information, be they dramatic, narrative, political, scientific, economic, social, or commercial.

In his masterful study, Empire and Communications, the Canadian scholar, Harold Innis demonstrates how all societies, from Babylon to the present, have been shaped by the production and distribution of information. His emphasis is on the unsettling effects of new technologies, which he illustrates with the example of Master Johan Gutenberg.

A citizen of Mainz, Gutenberg has just developed a machine that can reproduce manuscript-like pages in many copies. News of his work has reached the local ruler, the Elector of the Rhineland Palatinate. In the spirit of Renaissance inquiry, the Elector asks a group of scholars and businessmen to assess the machine’s impact on the local economy and culture. After careful study, their report recommends that the government not invest research and development funds in the project. Its reasons are direct and cogent: First, a large work force of monks copying manuscripts would lose their jobs if the Gutenberg machine were encouraged; second, there is no heavy demand for multiple copies of manuscripts; and third, the long-term market for printed books is doubtful due to the low literacy rate.

Until now, major communication advances, as in this fable of the Gutenberg printing press, could be dealt with on a linear basis, phased in gradually with time to allow the political and economic adjustments

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needed to integrate them into the existing structures. But technological change, growth, and complexity in the planetary arterial system of information today prevents us from isolating variables and observing their sphere of influence on human culture. We must, instead, make sense of a multiplicity of variables in a state of constant dynamic interaction with each other and with local and regional cultures everywhere. Anything one can say today about the chaotic system of organic and explosive growth may be obsolete tomorrow. And so I doubt we can feel superior in our analysis and projections compared with the utterly fallacious assumptions of scholars and businessmen in fifteenth century Mainz.

We can agree, however, that in the new information age advanced nations will increasingly shift their focus from the production and distribution of things to the production and distribution of ideas. Let me try, then, to develop a general paradigm of the larger significance and implications in the communication explosion we see around us.

Some of these changes are suggested in broad terms by the theologian-paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin:

Research, which only yesterday was a luxury pursuit, is in the process of becoming a major, indeed the principle, function of humanity. As in the case of all organisms preceding it, but on an immense scale, humanity is in the process of 'cerebralizing' itself. (173)

De Chardin's vision still seems Utopian. Nevertheless, it is an early vision of the cultural changes implicit in the evolution to a new kind of information-rich society.

The West is heir to a tradition which saw the organization of available information as a basic condition of human progress. It is the tradition of Ptolemy I Soter (350-283 B.C.), who founded the great library of Alexandria, the first attempt to gather all the world's books in one place and catalogue them scientifically. Its collection of perhaps 700,000 volumes was not matched again until the past century. The destruction of the Alexandrine library in 391 A.D. was a major disaster for Western civilization, reducing the stock of organized knowledge to a few hundred manuscripts. Fortunately, the tradition was kept alive by small groups of Benedictines and other monks, who copied and preserved the few works that survived. The next step, following the invention of printing and cheap paper, was the work of the French Encyclopedists and their equally enlightened Scottish counterparts, the creators of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Both attempted to summarize the world's knowledge in one set of books. Their's was an astonishing effort, with—in the case of the French—direct revolutionary implications. The concepts spread to the development of the modern Alexandrine counterparts—the Library of Congress, the British Museum library, and other great library centers.

H. G. Wells' proposition of a World Brain in the early part of this century, a project for gathering and storing all information in one place, is realizable today in computers. The 30 million volumes of the Library of Congress, for instance, could be stored microelectronically in a relatively small room. Reduced to digital computerized form, the Library's holding could eventually be transmitted in a few minutes over high-capacity networks. The growth of such massive data banks, linked to users throughout the world by high-speed circuits, demands that we reconceive epistemological definitions about the nature of knowledge. When knowledge can be generated and codified by all individuals and information has been decentered to the point of ultimate fractionization, then what can terms such as culture and civilization ultimately mean?

The gospel of modernization is the doctrine of organized universal betterment; it is a world-wide civil religion, more influential than nationalism or such limited movements as democracy, fascism, or communism. A psychic mass migration, via the media, toward a better material existence is an ideal that diffuses in ways that irrevocably affect traditional institutions and values.

This gospel, speaking to the common desires of human beings, is articulated by British critic Malcolm Muggeridge in the following words:

What they all want is what the Americans have got. Driving at night into the town of Athens, Ohio, four bright colored signs stood out in the darkness—"Gas," "Drugs," "Beauty," "Food." Here, I thought is the ultimate, the logos of our time, presented in sublime simplicity. A vision in which suddenly all the complexity of life is reduced to one single, inescapable proposition. These could have shone forth as clearly in Athens, Greece, as in Athens, Ohio. They belonged aptly in Turkestan or Sind or Kamchatka. There are, properly speaking, no Communists, no capitalists, no Catholics, no Protestants, no black men, no Asians, no Europeans, no Right, no Left and no Centre. There is only a vast and omnipresent longing for Gas, for Beauty, for Drugs and for Food. (125)

Today, a new map of the globe is being drawn. It is an information map that renders political maps irrelevant, comparable to a weather map perhaps that indicates shared, global environmental conditions rather than linear directions. This map shows a dense mass of organized information centres over North America, with smaller masses over Europe, Japan, and the Soviet Union. Elsewhere, the density of information shades into thinness. A global knowledge grid. The end result, if we're lucky, may be a stunning global dimension to learning and knowledge, a dimension that can convert a fixation on modernization into a
powerful enculturation force.

But of course it could also be something else. The communication fields are re-ordering a world view that has been profoundly dominated by Western culture in the last few centuries. Even before political philosophers and social scientists can catch up, communication is remaking the epistemological foundations on which Western culture rests.

One version of the end of history posits a vision of a world dominated by a single ideology—the victory of justice and freedom over tyranny. For the end point of human rights, and democratic in government. A universal, homogeneous state made possible through the interconnectedness of networks of information and ideas.

But what will the massive data bases serve in this new picture? Perhaps the universalization of consumer societies, to which social political ideologies matter less and less, replaced instead by relentless consumerism. New middle classes in Asia, Africa and Latin America demand the goods, attitudes and standards of living that characterize the other, wealthier communities of the world.

The Chinese student uprising two summers ago is a case in point, naively misjudged and misinterpreted by the global press, who saw it as a cry for political freedom and democracy in the Jeffersonian sense of the term. But while students may have bandied Western labels, their’s was essentially a rebellion to join the ranks of global middle class consumers while remaining paradoxically subservient to oligarchic control. The same phenomenon is evident in Eastern Europe. The mounting misery of consumers creates the conditions necessary for violent upheaval and overthrow of dogmatic ideologies in favour of access to information networks and the products they bring.

And it is television, so often derided in the West as junk food for the eyes, that has been the secret weapon in Eastern Europe’s revolution. The road to revolution in East Germany was paved by the West German television seen in 85 percent of East German homes. It showed there was another way to live. It showed the loosening of travel restrictions and the rallies that brought down Erich Honecker. In Romania, the National Salvation Committee ran the country from a barricaded TV studio as guards tried to blast it into silence. The rebels were able to broadcast for days while under siege from Securitate forces. Only the broadcast of images of Ceausescu’s dead body took the steam out of the pro-Ceausescu forces and united the nation behind the movement and reality.

Czechoslovakia’s revolution, born in Prague, almost sputtered out until the revolutionaries got control of the nation’s TV and communication centres. Suddenly dissident writer Vaclav Havel and the rest of the Civic Forum were talking to the nation, not just to the people in Wenceslas Square.

The information age also charts some dislocations in the spatial/temporal ordering of civilizations. Multiple, instantaneous transmissions create a universal culture unbound by space—the whole world present in a single room which, at the same time, is present in the whole world.

The idea of an age of the speed of light is really that of information transmittal at the speed of light. What happens then to the fundamental characteristics of human culture, of cultural nationalism, which till now has defined itself in terms of geographic, political, historic difference, contradistinction and variance? We may be compelled to envision cultural change in terms of benefits that unify, not divide, all human beings. According to Michael Geyer, the globalization of banking, economics, and information systems are replacing primordial social environments by constructed rational social models cascading from a massive avalanche of texts—books, news, dramatic tele-entertainment, electronic information, and so on.

The prospects of the universalization of Western culture and civil society has its daunting passages. Where there is Coca Cola and Pepsi, there must be capitalism, and where there is capitalism, there must be civil society. Geyer suggests that this will be a society in which the only debate is that between the economic interests of multinational corporations. Between Coke and Pepsi. A world in which cultural differences become essentially the realm of folk art—politically and socially irrelevant.

Speed also nullifies space. The spatial integration of the world has made it unnecessary for us, at the end of the twentieth century, to envision the world at all. Today the world is a material totality as opposed to a collection of regional collectivities. We already note the emergence of points on the globe, centers that link up interdependent networks of information, systemic networks that leave no place outside the system. Spatial metaphors of center and periphery, social scientists say, have ceased to work in a communication fabricated world. No longer is there a single, powerful Eurocenter, for other networks of power have replaced it as territoriability and sovereignty are cast overboard, victims to the growth of communication networks and speed of information delivery.

A more unified American consciousness—a sense of sharing of common experiences, values and living standards, the vision of a nation, a mass culture—was a consequence of the first coast-to-coast radio broadcasts. So too, on a global scale, planetary linkups in the information age have caused the territorial interests of nation
states to be radically challenged by the conforming pressures of mass information. This is the sociology of the world today. Culture is no longer a local process. Global data banks and globally-shared video information mediate between the global and the local. Commerce and communication have captured the field of invention and dissemination of global culture. Philosophy and intellectual thought has to catch up.

Rethinking cultural differences in an information age forces us to acknowledge the dominance of vertical relationships, those between interactive and privileged networks of communication power and control, and innumerable scattered locales.

I believe that throughout this process of change is woven the subtext of prose itself. The course through which flow explanations, stories, narratives of reality that define the world we live in. The human storyteller traces tales in the Western world largely through three cultural epochs.

The first is a pre-industrial, mnemonic age in which memory and ritual, repetition and the accumulation of a limited set of stories about the origin of the Universe, meaning of life and prescriptions for proper conduct was dominated by tribal leaders responsible for the interpretation of such stories. It is an a-rational time in which ideas and information are meaningless unless clothed in structures of myth, emotion, ritual, and drama.

Then follows the industrialization of storytelling in the age of print culture in which printed stories become standardized commodities, movable packages of consciousness that can be carried across boundaries of time, space, language, religion, and status. Books or rather texts now free people from their historic dependence on the ministrations and interpretations of chiefs and priests. Written texts restructure the process of humanization, heretofore confined by geography and relative stability, through rational discourse, highly valuing reason and logical argumentation.

Finally, we see the telecommunications era superimposed upon and reorganizing print-based culture. Television once again returns us to an ancient system of storytelling that is oral, singularly dramatic, a centralized ritual, distant and pervasive, yet seemingly personal and face to face. It disseminates a limited number of story forms that describe and explain the world once more in emotive, formulaic dramatic visual argumentation that requires none of the linear premises of a print culture. We experience a series of myths that make an otherwise diverse audience into a new kind of community: the modern mass public. In terms of its essential socializing functions, television is more like tribal religion than it is like any other selectively used medium preceding it. It practically monopolizes cultural participation and dominates the cultivation of common consciousness as local parochial culture did before the print era.

Incidentally, many non-Western cultures, such as in South America, for instance, have leapfrogged the values of rationalism embedded in a print culture and have arced from tribal storytelling to televised storytelling in less than a decade. According to Bradley Graham's story in the Washington Post, television is arriving in the backwaters of the world, in Latin America reaching distant villages like Ocobamba, Peru, often before running water, telephones, regular mail service and—thanks to battery-powered sets—even before electricity. In many of the poorest homes, a TV set now ranks as the treasured next addition after a kerosene stove. Before phones, before literacy, books, print culture, these people want television. A way of absorbing the world that demands no fundamental change in the structure of knowing already possessed by isolated, pre-literate societies. They seek to move instantly from myths of ancestors and village culture to electronic myths about distant places that may themselves be mythical.

This televised world still essentially promotes a Western storyline from the Greeks to the present, a narrative that has suppressed differences in establishing its own hegemony through several centuries of technological change.

Such a narrative supposes a universal story line that, since the Renaissance has advocated the progressive liberation of spirit from nature, a story of freedom, is one in which the non-West plays the role of supplier. Supplier of recognition. It is a story in which societies either mirror the Western Prose of the World or appear as mere distortions.

Today non-western societies look nostalgically at a vanished world of their own uniqueness as they face increasingly being incorporated by communication networks into the Prose of the World. They confront the final spectacle of homogenization that began five centuries ago, that fixed identity of long ago which has now become the abstraction of a past tradition dominated by an increasingly diminished variety of legitimate prose forms wielded by the global media oligopolies.

Will this universalized story lead to a global oneness? Is such a oneness desirable? In Genesis 11, God said, "Let us go down and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech." The Tower of Babel. Using the same metaphor, international communication today appears to be reversing the scattering of people. The homogenizing effect of exposure to similar experiences that
stem from: (a) exponential increases in travel and tourism (around 400 million people a year, according to UN figures); (b) dependence of world media on a limited number of international wire services—five to be exact—so that a growing number of people are exposed to the same news and information, in the same format; (c) the cloning of the world’s dramatic storytelling by the television, videocassette, and film industries; and (d) the standardization of material life by the international mass marketing of consumer goods and services.

Though Eastern Europeans, Asians, Africans and Latin Americans kick and scream at being dumped into this melting pot of standardized mass culture, they also inveigh against any effort to deprive them of the artifacts that modernize their lives. As people, they hate to give up their ethnic, national, tribal, or community identities that set them apart from their neighbours, but covet every convenience their neighbours possess. However, this is only a transitional dilemma in the construction of a planetary communication age whose final form can only be conjectured.

A storiological history of Europe shows that the creation of links between different peoples and languages was made possible through textual, rather than military culture. Through the development and creation of a common set of texts, European civilization was invented. Today this model provides us the means to read and write culture anew. The nations of the developing world have already pleaded with Western communication oligopolies to develop multiple discourses in the recounting of international and intercultural narratives. Through a plan called the New World Information Order, submitted to UNESCO, they ask us to question how something gets to count as text, as information, as a story in the mass media. They ask, in other words, to question our principles of inclusion whose assumptions have been unyielding and fixed for half a millenium.

In its early years, UNESCO was dominated by the conflict between the Europeans’ esoteric cultural concerns and the Americans’ pragmatic interests in literacy campaigns, and scientific cooperation. The organization is now dominated, for better or for worse, by Third World concerns, reflecting the majority of its members, and is now the spawning ground for the concept of information sovereignty, or the right to protect one’s cultural heritage from unwelcome outside influences.

In his popular book, *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan suggested the idea of a new global village knit together and transformed by television. An information network would envelop the planet, he said, spreading democracy and leading to a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity, a general cosmic consciousness. That global village is growing. Glasnost in the Soviet Union, stirrings in Eastern Europe, and demands for openness in China all respond in real measure to images of freedom transmitted by the penetrating networks foreseen by McLuhan.

But, as Ben Bagdikian, writing in the *Nation*, points out, a handful of mammoth private organizations have begun to dominate the world’s mass media, and by their own admission, five to ten corporate giants will control most of the world’s important newspapers, magazines, books, broadcast stations, movies, recordings and videocassettes by the 1990s. More unsettling still, Bagdikian’s exhaustive examination reveals that each of these planetary corporations plans to gather under its control every step in the information process, from creation of “the product” to all the various means by which modern technology delivers media messages to the public. “The product” is news, information, ideas, entertainment and popular culture; the public is the whole world.

The men who run these empires Bagdikian calls Lords of the Global Village. Some, like Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell are flamboyant figures known to much of the literate world. Some are obscure names in West Germany. All are media royalty bent on capitalizing, Bagdikian says, on global technological and political trends, aided of course by developments like fiber optics and satellites. They seek to harvest that most profitable of all commodities, human attention.

The lords of the global village have their own political agenda. Together, they exert a homogenizing power over ideas, culture, and commerce that affects populations larger than any in history. Neither Caesar nor Hitler, Franklin Roosevelt nor any pope has commanded as much power to shape the information on which so many people depend to make decisions about everything from whom to vote for—to what to eat. The fight for hundreds of millions of minds is among Time Warner Inc.; Bertelsmann AG; News Corporation Ltd.; Hachette SA; and Capital Cities/ABC, Inc.

Monopolistic power may dominate other industries, but these media giants have two enormous advantages: they control the public image of national leaders, and they control the information and entertainment that help establish social, political, and cultural attitudes of increasingly larger populations. They’ve received generous tax breaks and antitrust exemptions from American and European lawmakers, encouragements which appear to ignore the cautions of thinkers like Jefferson and John Stuart Mill on the dangers of collectivized thought.

In 1960, when the UN draft Declaration on
Freedom of Information was introduced, it had the support of those who had in mind the controlled information of authoritarian governments. It was assumed that once governments got out of the way, "the free flow of information" and power of the public "to ascertain and appraise events" would be made possible by free-enterprise media. They were correct. But the problem, as Bagdikian points out, is not free enterprise, but the lack of it.

As authoritarian governments tumble around us, the restraint of economic activity that reduces voices is in danger of staying on, like the irritating guest that refuses to leave when the party's over. For such reduction of voices has now become the function of unrestrained growth in the size of media corporations. The basis of all liberty—namely, freedom of information and knowledge—is threatened by that old familiar scourge of the free spirit, centrally controlled information.

A vision of an inflexible, precise natural order first drove the scientific revolution and then was absorbed into social ideas. The transition of the metaphor was subtle, facilitated by the assumption that, having learned the rules of nature, we had only to apply them to human society. The precepts of Newton and Darwin were extended beyond their original contexts. This possibly misapplied scientific theory pushed us toward the brink of anarchy in the forced fabrications of social order under fascism and communism. We could not have survived another century if we continued to pursue such myths of scientific and technological certitude. Fortunately, we now sense that something is wrong, and the new philosophies of science confirm our doubts. In physics, Einstein and quantum mechanics shattered the supposed order early in this century. More recently, it is biology that has challenged the extremes of Darwinian social views and offers some hopeful analogs about human culture and destiny.

Biologist Lewis Thomas has noted, with grace and clarity the ways in which new studies have questioned older concepts of evolution as primarily a record of open warfare among competing species, with survival limited to the strongest aggressors. He points out:

The tiniest and most fragile organisms dominate the life of the earth... The urge to form partnerships, to link-up and form collaborative arrangements, is perhaps the oldest, strongest and most fundamental force in nature. There are no solitary free-living creatures; every form of life is dependent on other forms. (19)

Observations from the new biology parallel the realities we face in coming to terms with the new dimensions of international communication: thousands of Einsteins whose talents are liberated by the microchip; millions of consumers whose consumption patterns drive the destiny of human civilization.

How do we fit then the new communications and information resources into a more mature re-ordering of our personal and collective purposes, not as deterministic evolution but rather as a more harmonious melding of the many-colored strands that fragment world cultures? British scholar George Steiner has noted the importance of molding communication systems in ways that do not sacrifice diversity to the uncertain benefits of a centralized planetary culture. He cites the role of the world's 10,000 languages in this process:

Each and every tongue is a distinct window into the world. Looking through it, the native speaker enters an emotional and spiritual space, a framework of memory, a promontory on tomorrow, which no other window in the great house of Babel quite matches. Thus every language mirrors and generates a possible world, an alternate reality. (26)

Are we for cultural uniformity and universal "lifestyles" as the advertisers now call it, or are we interested in preserving freedom though competing cultural diversities, a multiplicity of voices? What systems of information will permit each of us, as Emerson urged, to produce that peculiar fruit we were born to bear? 

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The “Values” of Competition

Arvid F. Sponberg

Hoary subject, I know, but stick with me for a little bit. If I don’t catch your attention in the next paragraph or two, you can hop off at paragraph five when I slow down for transitional humor.

My title phrase is much on my mind this Fall, and not only because the university football team, as I write, is wallowing at the far end of a 26-game winless streak. [The editor would like it noted that we have won a game in the intervening weeks.] The phrase runs through my head like the refrain of a maudlin ballad because it crops up in places where I wish it wouldn’t.

Take education, for instance. Here’s the columnist, Robert Walters, quoting a 1986 report of the National Governors’s Association:

“If we first implement choice, true choice among public schools, we unlock the values of competition in the educational marketplace. Schools that compete for dollars will . . . make those changes that allow them to succeed.” (emphasis added). Walters also reports that in Prince George’s county, Maryland, parents “stand in line for as long as three days and nights to enroll children in widely acclaimed magnet schools.”

Perhaps these parents also nurture their children by staying home on other nights and helping with homework. On the other hand, maybe some of their children are among those included in a survey by the Department of Health and Human Services, a survey reported in a September issue of Sports Illustrated. HHS estimates that there are 250,000 adolescent steroid users in the United States. Interviews with 55 users revealed that: 93% thought that they had made a “good decision”; 87% would make the same decision again “without hesitation”; more than 80% said that steroids made them bigger and stronger and that the resulting achievements made them “more popular”; 85% felt no peer pressure to stop; nearly 66% disagreed with the statement that their coaches believed that steroid use was a “bad idea”; 82% disagreed with medical experts who say steroid use poses long term health risks, including liver and kidney disease and sterility.

In light of this information, the phrase “values of competition” looks moronic—wait a minute—oxygen-moronic, a logical class that currently includes “rap music,” “savings and loan,” and “guests of the Iraqi government.”

Those who speak loudest in praise of the “values” of competition often compare the marketplace with the playing field. Yet in making this analogy they almost always omit a factor necessary to competition in the athletic arena: the referee. The important thing about referees is that they watch every play and penalize every infraction of the rules—well, almost. In this behavior they differ acutely from marketplace regulators whose attention is often desultory, at best. How much better off would the depositors of Lincoln Savings be today if a referee had scrutinized Charles Keating 24 hours a day? Yet this element of oversight, which is central to athletic competition—can we even conceive of baseball without umpires?—is regarded by many as destructive of liberties necessary in the marketplace.

Nevertheless, we are urged to apply the “values” of competition to education. I would ask, who will referee the school board meeting? the teacher’s lounge? the classroom? the home? Who will insure the integrity of the learning process while we parents exercise “true choice” by camping in a cold dark rain outside a “magnet” school, our behavior barely distinguishable from that of the other kind of “heavy metal” fans? It is irresponsible to advocate competition without stating how the fairness of the competition will be assured.

Of course, the proponents of “true choice” reply, no one advocates unfairness. We simply wish to help our students to become more disciplined—and chief among the “values” of competition is discipline.

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Some little reflection shows this purported relation between competition and discipline to be otherwise than popularly understood. Rather than competition instilling discipline, discipline is a condition for competition. In other words, the source of discipline lies outside competition, which cannot exist without it. This is true in the stadium, the marketplace, and, most plainly, in the arts.

As it happens, Valparaiso University is home for excellent organists. In my time here, William Eifrig and Philip Gehring have set the highest possible standards for teaching and performance. Last year, Philip Gehring retired and Martin Jean succeeded him in the post of University Organist. Professor Jean, at the age of 30, is a veteran of international organ competitions. As you read this, he will have recently returned from a sort of Super Bowl for Organists in Calgary, Canada. The organizers—a group of entrepreneurs assisted by Simon Preston, formerly the organist of Westminster Abbey—invited 40 organists to audition for the competition and selected 8 finalists, including Professor Jean. He could win $15,000 and contracts for recordings and a recital tour.

I asked Professor Jean for his views on the relation of competition to education in organ performance. He asserted that there is no necessary connection between the two. For example, he does not consider it a primary purpose of his teaching to propel every student toward the goal of competitive virtuosity. Rather he takes students at their own levels and helps them find the paths—and the discipline—appropriate to goals they have set for themselves. Unless one learns to love an activity for its own sake, it is highly unlikely that one will acquire the discipline to master it. Competitions come long after the discipline.

Professor Jean pointed out two other consequences of competitions, neither of them positive: "trepidation" and the temptation to choose music known to be liked by the judges. After more than a decade of competitive experience, he believes that he has, at last, mastered the fears that attend public performance. However, the temptation to play it safe seems inherent in competitions. In his preparations, Professor Jean admits that he has explored parts of the repertoire that were entirely new to him. But overall, competitions encourage conformity to mainstream tastes and standards.

Let's end by returning to the marketplace. A recent analysis of Japanese methods of automobile manufacturing illuminated another defect of competition as a basis for organizing human activity: secrecy.

According to a recent article in the New York Times Magazine by James Womack, in the United States, "the relationship between mass production suppliers and assemblers has been marked by mutual suspicion and distrust. The suppliers jealously guard information about their operations from the assemblers, lest it reveal the size of their profits." In contrast to this secrecy, Japanese assemblers "are privy to the most sensitive information about their suppliers' operations, including costs and quality levels. This is possible because the relationship between assembler and supplier, and among suppliers, is cooperative rather than competitive."

It may seem to be quite a stretch from magnet schools and steroid abuse to organ competition and mass production. It isn't. The connections among such different topics show how deeply our lives are permeated by the "values" of competition: secrecy, narrowness of mind, fear, cheating and other varieties of predatory behavior. In its defense, we can say that competition, in the marketplace, sometimes reduces the cost of goods and services. In this arena, properly regulated, it can help to apportion and publicize some rewards and honors. Nevertheless, as a solution to what ails American education, the "values" of competition deserve a cold eye until the desire to be competitive as a society is matched by the desire to be fair and the desire to be good.
Campus discussions these days tend to be asking about the controversies of the coming decade. Although accompanied by other candidates contending for the heat of the media spotlight, already one point for discussion, the contentious debate over censorship, seems destined to cause ever more controversy and to create even greater conflicts in the upcoming years. Perhaps no other domestic issue has received more coverage by the press and more attention by artists or academics thus far this year than that of censorship, and perhaps no other art form may be as susceptible to the influence of public and political pressure brought about by blatant or abstruse attempts at censorship than commercial filmmaking.

Already in 1990 a number of prominent films have been under siege by censors or so-called (often self-appointed and self-serving) social watchdogs, and we see indications that this pattern may continue well into the new decade. Among the critically acclaimed films which have garnered the most attention by censors this year have been Pedro Almodovar’s Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!, Peter Greenaway’s The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover, Uli Edel’s Last Exit to Brooklyn, John McNaughton’s Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer, Zalman King’s Wild Orchid, David Lynch’s Wild at Heart, Luis Mandoki’s White Palace, Phil Joanou’s State of Grace, Martin Scorsese’s GoodFellas, Bernardo Bertolucci’s The Sheltering Sky, and, most significantly, Philip Kaufman’s Henry & June.

Throughout the year, a number of these directors had either been forced to edit their films in order to avoid an X rating by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings board or had chosen to release their films under the commercial burden imposed by an X rating. Two (Greenaway and McNaughton) had decided to distribute their films unrated as a form of protest against a system which they believed had stigmatized movies containing serious, adult-oriented themes and subject matter depicted in a realistic manner. Pedro Almodovar’s distributor, Miramax Films, filed a suit against the ratings board that was rejected by the New York State Supreme Court.

Except for the surprisingly vigorous ripple of displeasure voiced by some critics, arising from concern over the mildly violent scenes in Steven Spielberg’s Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, which led to a minor amendment to the MPAA ratings system and resulted in the establishment of a PG-13 rating in the mid-1980s, the last two decades have seen few challenges to the ratings categories (G, PG, R, and X) first established in 1968. This year, however, instead of another mere ripple of displeasure, a steady stream of disbelief over the recent ratings decisions, and a rising flood of dismay threatens to overwhelm the future of American cinema.

The history of censorship over the cinema in America is as old as the art form itself. At the turn of the century, while moving pictures were still being screened in nickelodeons, government institutions and civic leaders, from the Chicago Police Department to the mayor of New York City to the U.S. Supreme Court, had attempted to prevent the viewing of selected films by the paying public. However, Hollywood managed very early to persuade public representatives that control over content in films should be left to private preventative boards which

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reflecting the social tensions and which was protected under the laws. These tests were necessary as
However, the film industry once
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films with X ratings had some trouble being box office successes, but in the first few years of the system, the artistic intentions of film makers were hardly tarnished by the X ratings. In fact, two films which were originally slapped with X ratings, Midnight Cowboy and Last Tango in Paris, proved to be among the most critically acclaimed films of the era. Midnight Cowboy even went on to win the Academy Award as Best Picture for 1969.

However, over the course of the last two decades, "X-rated" has become a generic adjective applicable to any obscene or pornographic materials, and any film with an X rating was likely to find distribution and advertising impossible in many communities. Throughout the last decade, an X rating, although not technically an indication of obscene or pornographic content, had acted as one. Though it had been designed only for the guidance of parents with children, the X rating, in effect, unfairly prohibited a filmmaker from exhibiting his work to the entire adult American public.

Jack Valenti, the president of the MPAA, has stated repeatedly that the ratings system allows parents to monitor their children's viewing. However, he has refused to acknowledge the possibility that an additional rating might aid adults in determining which mature films are or are not truly pornographic. Recognizing the value of this service, nevertheless, the movie community had offered a compromise which would alleviate, if not allay, all of the current controversy: critics and filmmakers had suggested an additional "A" rating for serious adult films which do not display explicit sex in the manner of pornographic films, while maintaining the X rating for true sexual exploitation films. With this A rating all under the age of 17 would be prohibited from viewing, but theatres and advertisers would be more likely to acknowledge the serious artistic content of the film, thereby extending to the filmmakers a potentially greater audience.

Still, Valenti has repeatedly denied the need for a new rating category and continued to lead the industry towards further internal conflicts, ratings skirmishes, and public confrontations. After months of escalating pressure (at first brought on by independent filmmakers, but more recently applied by the major studios) and amid rumors that he would soon be ousted as industry spokesperson, Valenti has made a move. Rather than add another rating category, he finally has recommended what amounts to a mere change in nomenclature for the more mature films—from X to NG-17—and has filed for copyright of the new rating, a decision certain to promote more controversy.

Unfortunately, the prospect of further public confrontations also allows those individuals and organi-
organizations whose self-promotions have flourished in this controversy—Rev. R.L. Hymers, Rev. Jerry Fallwell, Rev. Donald Wildmon, and the American Family Association—to maintain a platform from which they can pressure further for restraints on artistic expression, not only in film, but in all areas of American culture. The nation remains entrammelled by groups who want to dictate to all what can and what cannot be seen or heard. Already a rock band has been tried for allegedly contributing to the suicide of a teenager who listened to their lyrics and (according to the prosecution) heard subliminal messages in words which were not really present; another rocker also has been indicted on identical charges in a separate case; a rap group has been arrested for performing in front of an audience consisting only of adults over 21 who had to present proof of age at the door, and has had sales of its albums banned in some parts of the country (even though the albums are voluntarily stickered with a cover-tag warning of the content); a record-store owner has been convicted on obscenity charges for the first time in American legal history; a comedian has been banned "for life" from an entire television network; over one thousand attempts have been made to ban books in public libraries; and an art museum director in a major American city has been tried in a criminal court for organizing an exhibition of photographs.

As this fervor for control of the arts flourishes across the country, and as the fever of intolerance spreads from museum to music hall, from the small screen to the silver screen, one wonders whether or not anyone is really accomplishing anything. Will we be better off for all this effort?

It would be easy to single out the political conservatives and fundamentalist Christians as the sole censors, a lonely group struggling to control the hearts and minds of Americans, but the alarming truth is that this cloudy problem covers a more immense area. As the ship appears ready to capsize, those liberals huddled on the port side of our political vessel are equally at fault. The National Endowment for the Arts braces itself against attacks from the right, but meanwhile, another NEA, the National Education Association, volleys from the opposite side in support. Among the resolutions adopted for the 1990-91 edition of its constitution, the National Education Association "deplores any efforts by government to suppress" artistic expression and "supports the freedom of publicly funded agencies" in awarding grants. Still, the support offered is sullied somewhat when one notices that this is only one of the many so-called politically-correct positions the association has designated for its more than two-million members in an attempt to discredit alternative options of thought. The National Education Association also defines politically-correct positions which its members ought to hold on scores of other issues—including affirmative action, abortion, gun control, world peace, ozone depletion, nuclear weapons, statehood for the District of Columbia, reparation of Native American remains, and even mail-order brides.

In our institutions of higher education similar attempts to control viewpoints and speech occur. Ironically, in many colleges and universities, where support for freedom of expression in art is ostensibly nourished, where openness ought to be championed, politically-correct viewpoints on government, society, and culture are vigorously promoted. Conspicuously manipulative academic programs, slanted catalogue listings, and curriculum adjustments privilege certain opinions. Speech itself, inside and outside the classroom, is increasingly limited through newly-established behavior codes. The University of Michigan has had its campus free-speech restrictions, banning all language which might appear offensive to anyone, overturned recently by the courts as unconstitutional, but a number of other universities continue to enforce restrictive speech codes. At the University of Connecticut, students can be expelled for "inappropriate laughter" or "conspicuous exclusion of another student from conversation" anywhere on campus. Similar legislation against free speech exists at the University of Wisconsin, Emory University, the University of Pennsylvania, Stanford University, and other leading institutions nationwide. In a number of bitter and much celebrated battles which have also reached the courts, Dartmouth College has tried to control, limit, or discredit the reporting by the student press.

In Chicago, liberal aldermen and a liberal alderwoman have marched into a museum gallery and illegally removed a painting they found offensive. In New York, the actors' guild has attempted to subvert artistic freedom by deciding to dictate racial casting for the Broadway production of Miss Saigon. MTV has launched a self-congratulatory campaign against censorship of the arts, even though the network itself has a long history of censoring or banning videos and performers, including the very ones they pretend to be supporting. And in Hollywood, Spike Lee has attacked such critically acclaimed films as Driving Miss Daisy, The Color Purple, Bird, and Round Midnight, declaring that white directors, even those as talented as Bruce Beresford or Steven Spielberg, should be prevented from making films focusing.
on black characters, real or fictional. Against the backdrop of all this static from both sides of the political spectrum, examining the consequences of dropping the old X rating may provide an indication of the way future discussion will go. Perhaps since this decision will receive as much public attention and have as much direct affect on the average citizen as any other relating to regulation of the arts, initial reaction to the switch from X to NC-17 can serve as an accurate barometer by which to judge the American social atmosphere and may be an approximate indication of the kind of action which eventually will be taken against other artists.

Most of the current censorship attempts are made through economic actions resulting in restraint or regulation of profit from performance as well as a restriction of affordability for artistic endeavors: viewers are asked to boycott products advertised on certain television programs; filmgoers are told to protest a film depiction of Christ's crucifixion and to avoid video chains which stock the movie; record companies are coerced into sticking albums, thus restricting sales; concerts are cancelled due to pressure from special interest groups; funds are cut off from art exhibits by conservative members of Congress; television stations and newspapers reject commercials for controversial rock stars and refuse to carry advertisements for X-rated or unrated films; and malls contractually prohibit their cineplex theatres from screening such films. Similarly, in recent years the major studios have been demanding in their contracts that all directors achieve an R rating before release dates. An economic form of censorship has already limited or tamed new art in all forms across the country.

This form of censorship is significant since it is economic clout that has finally broken the MPAA's steadfast refusal to amend the ratings system. Economic power is one too! the film industry has at its disposal that almost all other distributors of art forms do not; therefore, some observers hope that famous film makers now might lead the arts' charge against the censorship siege. As long as the films which were battling against the stigma of the X rating were small films or independent productions mostly directed by little-known directors, the MPAA, stood firm. (This is the same position in which the recording industry now finds itself, as the groups most under attack so far have been rap groups or heavy-metal bands, not mainstream artists.) However, with Henry & June, the new film by Philip Kaufman—a well-respected director best known for his mainstream movie, The Right Stuff, and for an artistic gem, The Unbearable Lightness of Being—the MPAA was going up against a prestigious release by one of the major studios, MCA/Universal. In addition, the film is more concerned with two uncommon characters who created erotic literature than with the re-creation of exploitative, sexually explicit acts; Henry & June investigates the love lives of a pair of serious literary figures, authors Henry Miller and Anais Nin. After receiving the X rating and having seen appeals by others summarily denied, Universal and Kaufman enrolled the aid of heavyweight attorney Alan Dershowitz. Together, they launched a counter-attack against the MPAA ratings board and its system. Surely, Universal and Kaufman argued through a publicity campaign, ratings restrictions of releases by major studios on the basis of erotic content would be unrealistic and would cost the film industry millions of dollars. Additionally, given the easy attainment of an R rating by even the most brutally and senselessly violent of films, such restrictive measures would further diminish the credibility of the ratings system in the minds of directors, critics, and patrons.

Finally, Henry & June was released on October 5th in about 80 theatres nationwide, the first film rated NC-17. The film was promoted on selected television and radio stations, and it was advertised in major newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times, the Chicago Tribune, and The New York Times. Most of this promotion would have been impossible if the film had maintained an X rating. However, it still remains to be seen whether the new NC-17 rating will actually assist in allowing more adults to see serious, controversial films. Immediately after its release, Henry & June was banned, of course, in some suburban Boston theatres.

At the writing of this article, the three major television networks have not yet decided their individual policies towards allowing advertising for films with the new rating. Many theater owners are unsure whether they will allow films with the new rating to be screened: enforcement of its restrictions is almost impossible at most multiplex theatres. Some suggest that the elimination of the stigma of the X rating will increase the likelihood that borderline films will be pushed more frequently into the most restrictive NC-17 category by the ratings board. Others believe the new rating makes it enticing for directors to deliver more daring and sexually explicit films. Many wonder whether the new rating will indeed legitimize clearly pornographic films which presumably receive the same designation as the serious, adult films, or whether theatres will be asked to split hairs if they must decide individually which NC-17 films to screen and which ones to prohibit.

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Legal conflicts? Studios must now decide whether or not to allow directors more freedom by eliminating the contractual insistence on R-rated films, even if the studio's support might not be backed by the actions of the distributors and advertisers. Cable stations such as Showtime, Cinemax, and Home Box Office need to decide whether they will carry any or all NC-17 films. Because Valenti and the MPAA have refused to add the A rating between R and X (or NC-17), video stores will be affected when they face the prospect of including films by highly-regarded filmmakers side-by-side with truly pornographic materials in their adult sections. Those video stores which exclude X-rated films from their shelves now must choose whether or not they will include NC-17 films as part of their inventory. Something still is wrong when the possibility, indeed the probability, exists that Academy Award-winning films by directors like Martin Scorsese, Philip Kaufman, and David Lynch will be relegated to the smut section of a video store.

As Congress, the courts, and citizens across the country continue to debate the meaning or limitation of free expression, as artists of all kinds attempt to create new and admittedly controversial works, as academics actively seek to speak out against the constraint caused by campus speech codes or politically-restrictive policies, and as filmmakers begin to respond to the new ratings system, clearly the widespread censorship conflict will continue for some time. Ironically, a wave of change is sweeping throughout Eastern Europe; one nation after another finally is enjoying a taste of the absolute right to free expression which it had envisioned and envied—often through Western images on the silver screen—on our side of the Iron Curtain. Yet, many Americans still seem uncertain about the necessity of maintaining free expression, especially of expression which offends someone. The public display of differences, and the celebrated debate over censorship which has launched the 1990s, particularly in film (perhaps in some sense the most public of art forms), one hopes will serve at least as a reminder for Americans of the value and fragility of free expression. Such a lesson is one that others around the world are only starting to learn, and that some of us momentarily may have forgotten.
The Scholar

The chill air smacks
The dark-eyed boy,
Leaving rosy handprints
On his cheeks.
Bounding across the campus
With lanky strides,
He hides in the collar
Of a long, black, woolen coat
And tries to run from the cold.
A backpack perched
On a strong shoulder
Is filled with Russian plays
And Nietzsche
Because he is brilliant.
When he speaks, the world
Eagerly awaits each word
That falls like a gold coin
From his handsome mouth.
He does not feel mortal
On this winter day,
Gloved hands willing
To strike the sun.
This young Ahab
Is late for class,
But it does not matter.
As he trudges darkly
Through the sparkling snow,
In his mind, at this moment,
He is larger than time
And greater than God.

Kara LaReau
Wendell Berry and the Unsettling of Academia

Thomas D. Kennedy


On our campus, as on most university campuses in the United States today, we're talking a lot about multicultural awareness and diversity and community. I profess solidarity with those who are pressing for a diversification of our faculty and student body. When I look at my classes I see, almost exclusively, young, upper-middle-class women and men from the Midwest. This troubles me, perhaps because my students seem too much like me. I would enjoy a more diverse student-body, and I endorse the goal of multicultural awareness. My experiences as an "outsider," as a minority person, have been few, and trivial, but nonetheless stinging. Southerners grow-up feeling—and talking—like outsiders, so we tend to be treated that way, and the results aren't pleasant. So I think my students might learn something morally important by meeting people from a different culture or ethnic group. I think they might be improved, say, by talking to a fundamentalist Southern Baptist (such encounters might teach Luthers patience, if nothing else) or a pentecostal African-American.

Community, too, I think a good thing. My life, and the life of my family, these past ten years has been anything but settled; we've moved, on average, about every two and a half years. Rootless and wandering, we have been packing up almost as soon as we have finally satisfied the prerequisites for community—the trust of one's neighbors, a recognition of the goodness and the goods of a people and a place and a love for these, an appreciation of the "differenness," the "particularness," of a people and a place. What "community" we have known has consisted of friendships with those we have fortuitously discovered who love something we love. Those friendships are, of course, relations of incommensurably great value, but they are not community. I suspect that most of our students have known as little of community as my family, and we and they are the poorer for it. So I wish for my students community, although I realize that those few students who have known community will leave university alienated from their home communities, and that other students will graduate from university mistaking the cheap and shabby "community" they know in their Greek societies for the real thing.

Many administrators seem to think that the most effective way—as if effectiveness were all that mattered—to establish community is to talk a lot about what a good thing community is. And many administrators and faculty seem to think that the only way students will learn to appreciate and value, or at least tolerate, those of other ethnic and cultural groups is if we institutionalize it into the curriculum, is if we introduce new subject matter and new courses into an already complicated and, to our students, incoherent "system" of general education requirements. I think those administrators and faculty wrong on both points. So too, I think it can be said, does Wendell Berry.

Berry lives, writes, and farms in Port Royal, Kentucky. He has written some twenty-five books of poetry, novels, collected essays and a non-fiction work on agriculture, perhaps still his best-known work, The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture (San Francisco, 1977). His poetry frequently appears in environmentalist and conservationist journals; his essays are often re-printed in Harper's. Berry left home as a young man to seek his fortune as a writer, but found the costs in terms of human goods—community, land, good work—too great. (Some of these concerns are captured in his recent novel The Remembering (San Francisco: 1988).) So he moved back to Henry County, where his father farmed, where his brother now farms, to farm and to write.

Berry writes, as many readers of Harper's will recall, without the aid of a computer. That essay, "Why I am Not Going to Buy a Computer,"
which has lead many to dismiss Berry as a crank, or worse, is included in this collection, along with several letters it provoked, and Berry’s response to those letters. It displays with brilliant clarity who Wendell Berry is and what he believes. He will not buy a computer because he is already too “hooked up” to the energy corporations and because he believes computer companies are no more virtuous than energy companies. He will not buy a computer because he does not see that computers “...are bringing us one step nearer to anything that does matter to me: peace, economic justice, ecological health, political honesty, family and community stability, good work.” The purchase of a computer would eliminate the need for his old Royal standard typewriter and, more seriously, would cost his co-worker, his wife, Tanya—reader, critic, and typist—her job. He will not buy a computer for the same reason he does most of his farming with horses—he does not want to fool himself. He doesn’t believe he will write any better with a computer, and he doesn’t believe we are better off with farmers who employ the latest technology. He is biting in his critique of universities and computer use:

The professors who recommended speed, ease, and quantity to me were, of course, quoting the standards of their universities. The chief concern of the industrial system, which is to say the present university system, is to cheapen work by increasing volume. (190)

Wendell Berry doesn’t write with a computer, but whatever it is with which he writes, he writes well enough. He writes, no doubt, as he farms, for the writer and the farmer are one. His style is simple, as are his tools. He knows his land and, having ruined a hillside in the past by carving a pond into too thin a slope, he is careful and modest in what he attempts with his words. Writing, like farming, is meant to be a healing work. He can write with humor, as when he points out how innovative he is in proposing that computers not be used when their use is the norm. More commonly he writes with a wise and gentle care for people, a faithful love for and commitment to the ground on which he stands and the dirt on which we all depend, and an alarm at our waste, at what we are demanding, without recompense, of our land.

What Are People For? is, it should be said, as great a visual and tactile delight as Berry’s writing is aurally, and that is high praise. The cover is a deep red upon which is centered Thomas Hart Benton’s Politics, Farming and Law in Missouri; the pages are sewn. (Every book I’ve seen from North Point Press is worth owning for its look and feel alone; yet they are not expensive.) Berry arranges his essays in this book into three sections, an opening selection of poetic essays on damage and healing, the land and our lives the objects of these actions, a middle section of book reviews and reflections upon good people and good writing, and a final section in which he addresses his familiar themes of culture, learning, the economy, and nature.

The book’s title essay, “What Are People For?” is an exploration of the thoughts and affections which underlie the comments of the agricultural economists that the national economy and we as consumers are better off with the failure of many family farms, for it is only the “least efficient producers” who are failing. Berry points to our soil erosion rates, the dissonance of urban centers and the numbers of “permanently unemployable,” (to use the language of the bureaucrat) who have abandoned the land for the city, the destructive character of contemporary farming techniques, and the ruin this promises for our future food supply as evidence that the problem is not too many small farms, but rather our contemporary assumptions about human nature and what the human purpose is. People are not for, the human purpose does not lie in, consumption, Berry maintains; but it is because we value so highly a life-style of ever-increasing consumption that we put such a premium on “labor-saving measures, short workdays, and retirement,” a cause, along with our rate of consumption, of our social ills. What people are for, is work, good work. Despite the daily failure of a family farm, despite increasing levels of unemployment, there remains work to be done.

In the country, meanwhile, there is work to be done. This is the inescapably necessary work of restoring and caring for our farms, forests, and rural towns and communities—work that we have not been able to pay people to do for forty years and that, thanks to our forty-year “solution to the farm problem,” few people any longer know how to do. (125)

Wendell Berry is, then, a kind of economic philosopher. He diagnoses our current problem as, to put it inelegantly, but accurately all the same, consumerism. He is not naive about the explanations for our consumerist mentality; it is not merely a matter of individual tastes and values. Part of the problem is “the centralization of our economy, the gathering of the productive property and power into fewer and fewer hands, and the consequent destruction, everywhere, of the local economies of household, neighborhood, and community,” (p. 128) in short, too little diversity. Pollution and waste and unemployment, are inextricably linked, the consequences of economic centralization and consumerist values.

The solution to our contemporary crises is not quite so simple as cutting our consumption and
returning to the land where there is good work, although this might be a more viable alternative than most of us are ready to admit. Our problem is fundamentally a moral problem, a problem of wanting what we ought not have, of wanting more and different than what is appropriate for us. Our problem lies in the moral character of individuals. Berry's "A Remarkable Man," as he writes about Nate Shaw, a black farmer from Alabama who spent twelve years in prison because of a stand he took against some white sheriff's deputies, before he returned to a life of farming. "Shaw," he writes:

burdens us with his character. Not just with his testimony, or with his actions, but with his **character**, in the fullest possible sense of that word. Here is a superior man who never went to school! What a trial that ought to be for us, whose public falsehoods, betrayals of trust, aggressions, injustices, and imminent catastrophes are now almost exclusively the work of the college bred. What a trial, in fact, that is for us, and how guilty it proves us: we think it ordinary to spend twelve or sixteen or twenty years of a person's life and many thousands of public dollars on 'education'—and not a dime or a thought on character. Of course, it is preposterous to suppose that character could be cultivated by any sort of public program. Persons of character are not public products. They are made by local cultures, local responsibilities. That we have so few such persons does not suggest that we ought to start character workshops in the schools. It does suggest that 'up' may be the wrong direction. (26)

Character, Berry maintains, is developed only in community, only in a local culture where people and place and a way of life are known and loved, where individuals can see that there exist goods to be valued independent of their desires and abilities to purchase these goods. Berry does not whitewash local culture. Any community that can form character can form bad or corrupt character as easily as good. Local cultures, too, will need something to save them. But they still, at least for the time being, have the vision to perceive "the marks and scars of an exploitive national economy," a memory of how community worked, and the independence to restore some measure of community and, hence, of character.

If the schools and universities cannot produce people of character, at least what we might try is to avoid corrupting the good character that has developed in our students before they arrive at college. But, as Will D. Campbell, Wendell Berry, and Berry's writing mentor, Wallace Stegner, have pointed out, contemporary university education is alienating and corruptive; we tend to take more away from our students than we give them in return. Thus, in Stegner's words, education moves students "...away from the people and society they know best, the faiths they still at bottom accept, the little raw provincial world for which they keep an apologetic affection." They deposit their affections with us, an investment they lose, receiving only a return of data.

We do this to our students by jerking them out of their communities, dropping them into a place with people about whom they know little or nothing, people who may feel, at best, pity and perhaps outright disdain, for their "parochialism." There are but two curricular options from which students can choose; courses are to be chosen either on the basis of personal preference or arbitrary institutional demands, either, "Take whatever courses you wish to take; it really doesn't matter what," or "These are the general education requirements which must be satisfied prior to education and these are your major requirements, because we say so."

With these two curricular options alone we force the student into either an education which places her at the center of the universe, or which places her in a universe so vast and disjointed that her identity no longer matters.

To compound our attack, in our courses we demand that students approach their subject matter impartially, ignoring their identities, who they are and how they have become who they are. An education so alien to a student's identity and story or, at least, to the story of those students whose history consists of something more than a series of purchases in an incoherent narrative, inevitably reproduces in students the same alienation their professors, isolated and competing with one another for students, raises, grants and tenure, feel. Knowledge becomes a mere collection of data to be purchased, at one's convenience, and added to one's stock of non-perishable consumer goods.

It is the fact that multicultural awareness is to be added into this academic context that gives me pause. Students, who are led by contemporary American university curriculums to believe that they rightly love themselves above all or, on the contrary, that their own personal history is so small and unimportant as to be unworthy of any type of intellectual exploration, who are led by the curriculum to believe either that they are everything or nothing, will become appreciative of other cultures upon taking a course or courses in which another distant and alien culture is introduced to them? A mere addition of data to the file, I suspect. It is not because our culture, whatever that is, is the only one of value and significance that I am hesitant about multicultural awareness; it is rather because all cultures, or almost all cultures, have a dignity and worth of
their own that I am reluctant to impose upon other cultures the same indignity of commoditization and, hence, trivialization, that our cultures have been subjected to. Most curricular suggestions for multicultural awareness amount to, and can amount to, little more than additional data to be stored in the memory-banks of our students. Additional data will not make our students wise and will not change character and we are naive to think it will.

What would a curriculum look like that was more likely to produce the character needed to preserve and care for the earth? Berry suggests that the essential requirement is that it recognize “the primacy between individual people and individual places.” Whatever our ethnic heritage, recognizing our love for this place, this country—a “beloved country” particularly loved—we could start thinking about how land is used in our country. In thinking about how land is used, Berry demands that economists and scientists, even if they themselves have no love for the land, admit the “demands, checks, and corrections” of people’s affections for the land.

“To be well used, creatures and places must be used sympathetically, just as they must be known sympathetically to be well known.”

The humanities, no less than the sciences, ought to be spared the affectionless approach of objectivity and specialization, Berry contends. The humanities, too, must take a “beloved country” as context:

Without a beloved country as context, the arts and sciences become oriented to the careers of their practitioners, and the intellectual life to intellectual (and bureaucratic) procedures. And so in the universities we see forming an intellectual elite more and more accomplished in procedures such as promotion, technological innovation, publication and grant-getting. The context of a beloved country, moreover, implies an academic standard that is not inflatable or deflatable. The standard—the physical, intellectual, political, ecological, economic, and spiritual health of the country—cannot be too high; it will be as high, simply, as we have the love, the vision, and the courage to make it (117).

Wendell Berry believes that the future of our land requires a coming together of the sciences and the humanities “in the presence of the practical problems of individual places, and of local knowledge and local love in individual people.” The sciences and humanities must “mend their divorce” not only at the university level, but must mend their divorce from common culture, if the land is to be worked well, if we are to survive as people.

Berry’s recommendations are no more specific than this, but they do present a challenge, a challenge which I fear too few universities have the courage, or the finances which make possible the courage, to meet. Tuition-driven universities with small endowments are irremediably conservative—we cannot risk instituting expensive programs that are out of sync with what other “recognized” universities are doing. We dare not risk something too innovative, even if our students and our land would be better off with the innovation, lest the private and corporate interests to which we are beholden withdraw their support. Lutheran universities, whatever they are freed from, are apparently not freed from looking over the shoulder of “successful institutions,” of imitating them at every point from curriculum design, within and without departments, to tenure and promotion, to salary decisions. That, I think, is regrettable, because I suspect it is only the church-related universities and colleges, African-American colleges and universities and, perhaps, women’s colleges and universities, in which there is enough of a shared life and a coherent story to take the educational and political risks that may be necessary for the development of wisdom and character and the salvation of the land.

It is this beholdenness to the industrial complex, this want of courage in American universities, this refusal to risk innovation lest we lose academic respectability, this arrogance in which we think we are doing something worthwhile when we convey merely knowledge, but not wisdom, that Berry finds so unsettling. It is because he recognizes the failure of universities, our pretentiousness and our vices, and points these out to us, that I and the academy find Wendell Berry so unsettling.

Although I was not raised on a farm, I grew up around farmers. I grew up knowing and loving a particular place, a piece of land, now left far behind. I knew where you could quickly and easily leap across the creek, where the mud would suck your feet like quicksand, around which bend you might find minnows, and where there was, in springtime, a stand of dogwoods lovely enough to make an adolescent male cry. My children will not grow up knowing and loving such things. My children’s children may not discover land to which such joy and love can be attached. I am sorry for them. For their sakes, I trust they will come to know someone with the character of Nate Shaw, someone with the wisdom and affection and delight in the land as Wendell Berry. That they, and others before and after them, may read Berry’s writings gives me hope.
World Lutherans
Look at Creation

Richard D. Dunning


The struggle to articulate a coherent positive environmental stance, grounded in the Christian tradition, has gone on for at least a quarter of a century; it has intensified since Lynn White delivered his 1966 paper, "The historical roots of our ecological crisis," linking destructive Western attitudes toward the environment to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Amid growing concern over environmental problems, the debate about the role of religion has increased. The Lutheran World Federation has added yet another dimension to the conversation in its recent document, Creation—an ecumenical challenge? The document, a summary of interfaith dialogues on the potential ecumenical perspectives on and value of creation theology, is illuminating, but leaves its key questions unresolved. Before describing the LWF document, however, a brief discussion of the general context of the debate is in order.

Two articulate voices in this debate include the books Imaging God—Dominion as Stewardship by Douglas John Hall, and The Travail of Nature by H. Paul Santmire. Both authors, responding to the White Paper, are careful to say that the Christian religion is not the cause of environmental problems, but both also specifically use the term "ambiguous" to describe attitudes toward the environment within the Christian tradition.

Ambiguity arises from the fact that Christian writings through the centuries seem to include both positive and negative attitudes toward nature. Hall discusses themes in Christian theological discourse that contribute to the ambiguity: a detachment or disdain for the world and worldly things as antisspiritual; an apocalyptic vision of the destruction of the world; faith that emphasizes personal salvation; a strong influence of Hellenistic culture; linguistic confusion that arises in scriptural interpretation; and confusion over the relationship between divine sovereignty and human will. Santmire traces the history of this ambiguity about the environment in the thought of influential writers within the Christian tradition.

Even when not addressing direct criticisms, Christian leaders frequently confront competition from non-Christian traditions which seem to offer more fertile and more attractive environmental positions.

Some of the other traditions that do address the environment in their teachings and conversations include Native American spirituality, nature spirituality, feminist spirituality, new age spirituality, and secular humanism. Christians, distrustful of the faith claims of these other traditions, have tended to react against any of their positions.

White articulated a key insight, echoed by many writers since, including Hall and Santmire (and LWF): people's attitudes toward the environment are fundamentally grounded in the ways people understand self, other people, and the world around them. Religion is the thing that most shapes basic understandings of self and world—many times indirectly through the vernacular uses of religious concepts within a culture. In Western societies, since it is the Christian tradition which one way or another forms the basis of so many cultural values, at this level, the ambiguity of Christian theology with respect to the environment is potentially most dangerous. Christian teachings are subject to so many mistakes and misapplications. Recognition of theology's profound impact on the environment via its shaping of culture and values sounds for theologians one of their most important callings.

Certainly an important reason for improving the theological literacy of the citizenry is the need for critical examination of fundamental attitudes about self and the world within a society.

The scientific community can describe the environment, the way it works, the problems that confront it, and the implications of various choices that people make about their lifestyles and uses of resources. Ultimately, however, in moral dilemmas, the choices people make depend less on objective analysis of scientific facts and more on deeply seated ethical principles and cultural norms. Joseph Sittler pointed out that: "A change in 'the spirit of our minds' requires something vastly more than a combination of frightening facts and moral concern."

The Lutheran World Federation document provides an opportunity to observe theologians wrestling with the theological doctrine of creation and its implications for the current environmental debates. The document summarizes the
results of a multi-faceted study by the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, France, over the period 1982 to 1987, comprising three interdenominational consultations on creation theology and two research projects. The purpose of the study as described by Bishop Per Lonning, one of the leaders, was "to explore dimensions of interrelatedness between creation faith and contemporary ecumenical approachment."

The study succeeds at maintaining its focus on creation theology and in raising questions which, as described below, address some fascinating topics. The results are presented summary form, however, and leave out more than they include, especially in the sections on the interdenominational dialogues. The results are presented summary form, however, and leave out more than they include, especially in the sections on the interdenominational dialogues. Each of the participants' presentations is summarized in a paragraph or two and, as a result, they are too disjointed and insufficiently developed for most readers to follow the theological arguments. Points of disagreement, even within individual traditions, are left as unresolved questions although that might be expected in the early stages of such a project. Nevertheless, some points are interesting even to the casual reader.

The first consultation was structured around "the vision of creation historically characteristic of six main confessional traditions." The session titles listed here are meant to reflect some of the central concerns of each tradition with regard to creation:

**Orthodox**: Theosis—the aim of creation.

**Roman Catholic**: Nature and super-nature—the dimensions of creation.

**Anglican**: Incarnation and sacrament—a key to creation.

**Lutheran**: Creation and recreation—continuity in discontinuity.

**Reformed**: Creation in the light of covenant.

**Free Church**: No to the "world" as YEs to creation.

The second consultation addressed contemporary challenges to creation theology within four large themes:

- "Theological discourse on creation—Christian or pre-Christian,"
- "Being—becoming—actuality: ontological implications of the concept of creation,"
- "Creation faith and responsibility for the world,"
- "Creation or salacity of the created."

The third consultation, held in the United States, centered on "the cultural presuppositions underlying traditional creation theology" through the comments of representatives from North American minority cultures (Native American, Black, Hispanic, and Asian).

The descriptions of individual presentations provide a few useful comments, but the summaries of the entire consultations are more coherent. In his summary of the first consultation, Per Lonning lists several points as most compelling: First, "the ecumenical issue is not creation per se, but how creation relates to history/revelation/salvation"; Second, "the traditional East/West controversy has been influenced by a different understanding of salvation: restoration of a creation more or less damaged by sin, through satisfaction/forgiveness/repair (Occidental), or a scheme for perfection of creature inbuilt already in the primordial vision of creation (Oriental)"; Third, "How is the correspondence...between creation and sanctification of the created universe in the sacraments to be understood?" Fourth, "the sequence of simple chronological observation—creation comes first—might be of more theological relevance than generally supposed." Again, however, these points, while interesting and perhaps useful as directions for future conversations, are not fully discussed within this document.

The LWF document also reports on Mark Ellingsen's research project analyzing hundreds of post-1964 statements issued by church bodies on contemporary social issues. He considers how the doctrine of creation functions as warrant for ethical positions.

The statements address a wide variety of social issues but few of them are specifically about the environment or creation. Ellingsen observes that "by far the predominant approach to ethics in the statements of all the churches considered collectively is to appeal to Christology as warrant, bypassing the creation doctrine."

Perhaps the most interesting observation is a "striking agreement on ethics among the churches, even among those from radically distinct cultural contexts" in their social teachings. According to Ellingsen, this "suggests the irrelevance of theological disagreements in determining the churches' practice. For in a number of cases, churches reflecting different understandings of the doctrine of creation, different modes of theological argumentation for authorizing their ethic, still arrive at similar ethical conclusions."

The second research project summary describes an attempt to obtain additional information from Third World countries by using a questionnaire.

One issue not addressed in these discussions is suggested by contemporary ethicists who describe an ever-expanding circle of ethical relevancy as including more groups of people and animals and ultimately perhaps plants, soil, rocks, rivers, and the planet itself. Will such a

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growing ethical consciousness ultimately change the meaning of ecumenism to include the nonhuman members of the creation?

The LWF document is illuminating as a glance into the ambiguity of the Christian understanding of creation; it helps illustrate the fact that there is in fact no single doctrine of creation shared by all denominations. And creation is only one of the issues which must be resolved in attempts to formulate a coherent positive Christian stance on the environment.

Differences of understanding do exist and may provide significant barriers between denominational groups. Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, the document provides no point at which to begin resolution of the differences. Even the questions posed at the beginning of the document are not addressed directly: can ecumenical dialogue improve the understanding of creation theology and environmental attitudes and does creation theology provide a fruitful basis for ecumenical dialogue? The first question may be answerable indirectly. Given the role of religion in shaping fundamental values and given the many differences that exist in the understanding of creation and the role of humans within creation, genuine environmental progress may be impossible without vigorous efforts at ecumenical dialogue and theological education in the widest possible definition of the words.

Scientists warn that the changes necessary to slow the present human impacts on the Earth’s ecosystems must be dramatic and, because the results of such efforts will be slow, must begin soon, as the window of opportunity is decreasing. If the necessary lifestyle changes require fundamental changes in society’s attitudes and values, then those changes of heart must begin even sooner. If the world must rely, for its future, on widely accepted religious values informed by coherent theology, then the LWF and all other international and interdenominational bodies must be sent back to their conference rooms and congregations with an urgent sense of purpose and openness. For people interested in exactly that task, the LWF document is probably not the best starting point because the content of the discussion is minimal. The document will still have value for other dialogues on these issues in the questions it raises and in the structures described for organizing the consultations.
Coming in the December *Cresset*

- Jaroslav Vadja and Current American Hymns by Russell Schulz-Widmar
- Keyboard Noels by Richard Hillert
- Jerry Evenrude, Charles Vandersee and others muse about music
- The Nativity Triptych by John August Swanson