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The Cresset (Vol. LIV, No. 4)

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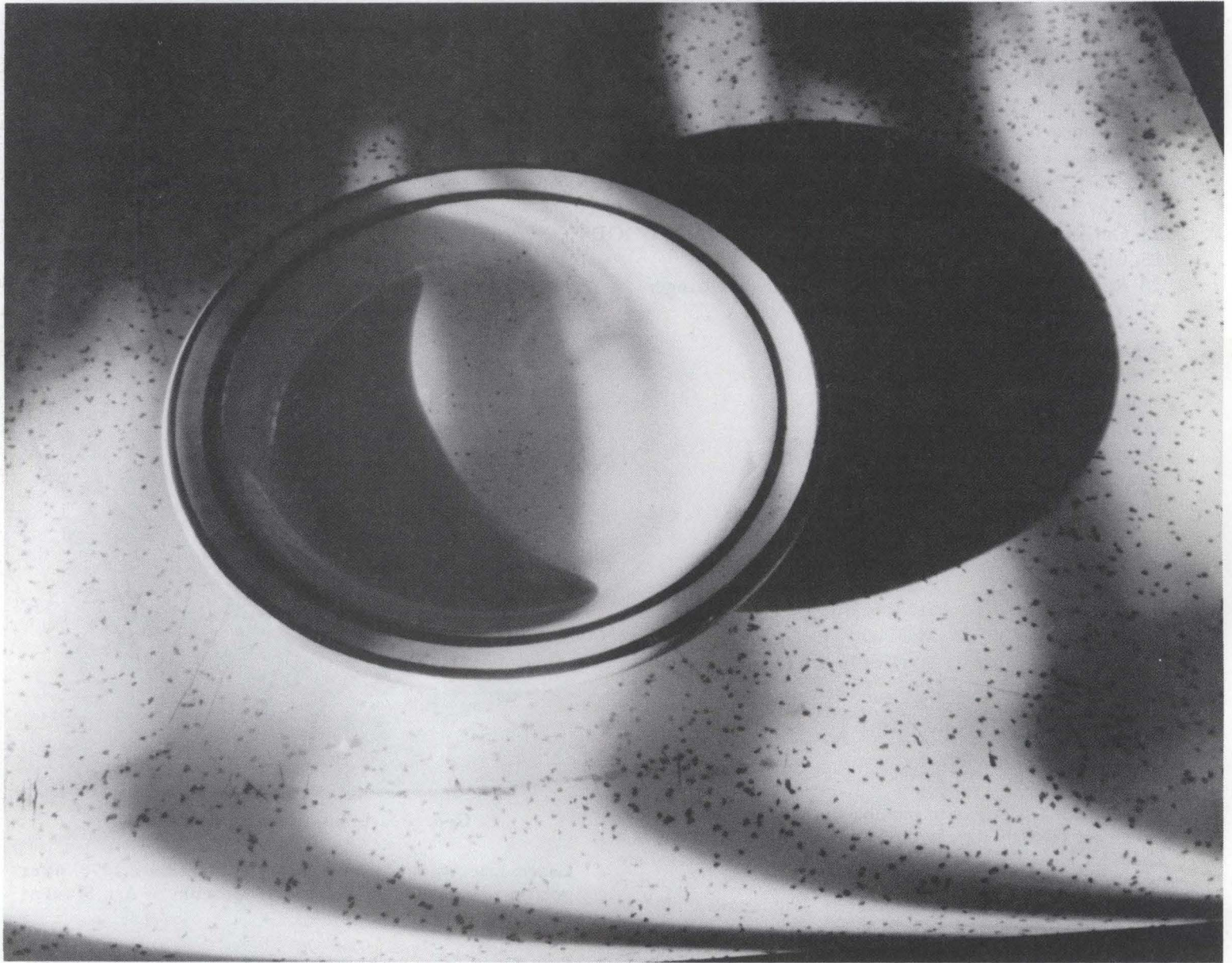
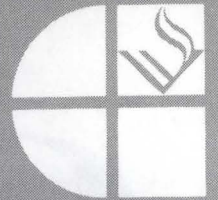


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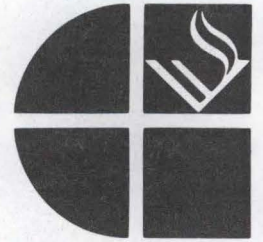
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the Cresset



A Review of Literature, Arts, and Public Affairs
February, 1991

C^{the}resset



Valparaiso University
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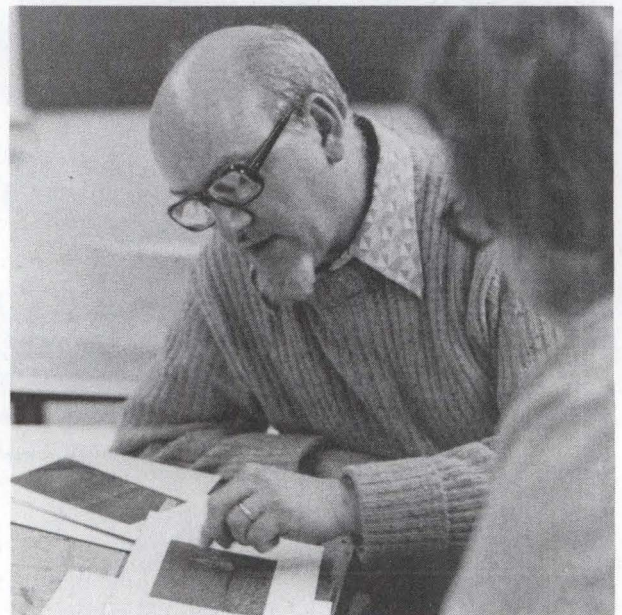
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George Strimbu, American 1927-1990

Cover: Eric Arnold Levin, *Material Transcendence*, 1990, silver gelatin print, 16 x 20 inches. VU Museum of Art, Student Collection.

Back Cover: Krista Steinke, *Untitled K2*, 1968, silver gelatin print, 9 5/8 x 6 5/8 inches. VU Museum of Art, Student Collection.

Both photographs are gifts of the Friends of Art. Both Mr. Levin and Ms. Steinke are former students of George Strimbu.

Page 8: George Strimbu, *Tumacacori Mission*, undated, black and white photograph, 7 x 7 inches. VU Museum of Art, University Collection.



IN LUCE TUA

Comment by the Editor

Grandeur and the American People

The morning after we began dropping bombs on Baghdad, we flew to Washington to hear a concert of medieval music and see three art exhibitions. The rhetorically curious will be interested in the two uses of the word "we" in that sentence, and I find them compelling myself. In fact, it is one of the most persistent questions that being in Washington D.C. raises, and keeps raising, for the visitor. We, the people... We hold these truths to be self-evident... We are met on a great battlefield of that war...

These great sentences, cut into white marble, confront the visitor largely; they are so powerful, those 'we's.' So neat, so clear. The voices that spoke them are silent, so that their hesitations, or peculiarities of pronunciation, their accents and pitches and rhythms, are gone. What remains are the words themselves, without the frailties of human expression to betray any uncertainty or ambiguity. Who are we? The speakers may have wondered, but the words of the monuments are calmly certain. The words circle overhead—one spends more time looking up in Washington than in any other place I know except Chartres, which ought to tell us something—so that one turns around to read them, the words literally pulling the reader through an orbit.

At the monuments, the word 'we' could well mean 'the people who stand here reading the words.' On January 19, at about 8:30 in the evening, that included, circling around Jefferson's large white boot, about twenty-five people. There were some young people from Minnesota in parkas and hiking boots, cheery and just properly noisy, like people from Minnesota are supposed to be. There were two families with 2.3 children and a grandmother. One of these families had dark skin and black hair, the other did not. There were two young women in evening dress, their hair blond and their gowns glittery, who had arrived in a white limousine and asked one of the parka-ed Minnesotans to take their picture next to Jefferson's boot, since the tuxedoed gentlemen who accompanied them were standing down at the foot of the steps smoking cigarettes, admiring a truly admirable motorcycle that was parked there. The Park Rangers were cordial but adamant with the person who climbed over a piece of

fencing trying to get a better photograph of Jefferson's head, and he capitulated readily in climbing back, expostulating only to the woman who had urged him to take the picture, "I told you I wasn't supposed to go there!" And then, of course, there were the four of us professorial types from Indiana. We the people.

We were also part of the audience for a concert, given by the Folger Consort at the National Cathedral. The music, most of it anonymous, most of it English, was gathered together on the principle of being 'Music of Chaucer's Time.' Viols, recorders, a harp, bells, fiddles, and countertenors. We sat, very quietly, listening hard for the delicate sounds in the large dark space. At one point—in fact during the evening's loveliest combination of boy sopranos and instrumental ensemble—sirens outside shrieked by for several minutes. Since we were listening intently, the sensing apparatus distinguished several different voices, the high, ululating ones, and the low urgency of those horns that sound as though they must be enormous. I looked around wondering if this could be some ultimate moment—was this group the 'we' with whom I was destined to spend my last moments? But no, after what seemed like a long time, the sirens faded away, and we were just an upper class, esoteric-music-loving audience again, not the American populace under attack.

Titian and Van Dyck brought us into yet another 'we,'—art lovers, western-tradition inheritors. Part of our cultural literacy is recognizing the face of Pope Paul III, or the children of Charles I. These portraits of powerful people, of princes, and popes, and queens, these elaborate scenes from religious history and mythology, reflected for their own times and for their people a sense of the 'we' that made these painters great and popular. To the question, asked by both sitters and their society, "Who are we?" Titian and Van Dyck gave answers in gorgeous color. How could one doubt the power and substance and certainty of an identity so fixed? To look at Van Dyck's portraits of Charles I, and simultaneously to know of the monarch's death by beheading some decade later, is to be struck at the heart with the inexorable truth that magnificence and power are linked to human frailty.

Some of the portraits show people who seemed to know that truth, and others depict those whose sublime assurance appears to deny it. And when the magnificence and power are insisted on, as these pictures insist on it, the frailty becomes, ironically, more and more insistent also. But, milling around their images, staring at the pictures and commenting in the subdued tones we use in art museums, we citizens of a republic they never dreamed of formed yet another commentary on their power and their assurance.

Is there a sense in which the American people today are a "we, the people"? Leaving the Lincoln Memorial, which was filled with visitors at nine in the evening, we turned to walk down the steps, the Washington Monument shining in the dark reflecting pool stretching below us. At the foot of the steps, on the level driveway, a group of high school students, who had looked at Lincoln's statue with respectful attention a few minutes earlier, were paying for a Domino's pizza which they had ordered delivered to them there. This seemed to me a quintessentially American response to the solemnity of monuments: to be observant of their meaning, or at least quiet in their presence, and then to deal pragmatically with the exigencies of existence, which I assume for teenagers means to get a pizza when you need it.

Grandeur, or at least the postures of grandeur, do not seem to me to fit well with the American character. Whoever "we" are, we are not at our best when we attempt to imitate magnificence. We will be truer to ourselves, and even truer to those white marble words, if we get on with what we must do in an attitude of modest efficiency, without the gestures designed to lend artificial authority to our actions.

Peace,

GME

About This Issue

This issue of *The Cresset* is devoted to the work of younger writers and artists, and so it is particularly appropriate, if sad, to dedicate it to the memory of our late colleague George Stimbu. George was an artist, a photographer, and pre-eminently a teacher. He had enormous faith in young people, in their skills and vision and in their teachability, if we may make up a word. He devoted so many hours to this faith that he stood out, even in a faculty remarkable for the hours it devotes to students. We are happy to have in this issue one of George's own photographs, as well as those of two of his recent students on the front and back covers.

Rene Steinke has acted as guest poetry editor for this issue, sending us work by two graduate students now in creative writing programs. Ann and Mark Curtiss, whose photo stories appear on pp. 16-20, are artists who live and work in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. They are former students of Tom Di Biaso, head of the Media Arts Department at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

We had intended to have a piece for this issue on Christian Higher Education, written by a person under thirty, and to that end ran a contest, offering real money for the best essay. This resulted in one submission, which did not seem to us a contest. We may try it again, or we may just continue to puzzle over why there was so little interest in a subject that seems to us so crucially important. Perhaps we shall have to have a contest for older writers on this puzzle.

In the meantime, enjoy the delights of these young visions. Not all is gloom, even in gloomy times.

Undeveloped Role

You called out from our past to tell me
that George, your friend and former mentor,
was betrayed by his own heart.
The apology began in cautious tones;
It's bad enough to say goodbye and sympathize
but worse yet to go, though willingly, alone...
Jagged words fell in familiar train,
the comfortable refrain leading
to the inevitable "In short."

The request
conjured up another age when, arm in arm,
we attended photography shows
in hushed, marbled chambers;
or examined through the George's lens
the unlikely beauty of Highway 41.
At the opening of your first and final show,
my gurgling pleasure had not the focus
of George's ill-contained, triumphant glee.
He smiled, as your dad pumped his arm
up and down, up and down,
the future fixing in the sharpest black and white
for you, for you, the talented protege.

You say
you saw him only last week
and showed him your latest four-digit toy.
Unfailingly he sighed and pressed closer,
urged you again, as he has these last three years,
to relinquish the tarnished silver platter,
to live by the snap and wind of the camera—
The same old song, sung plaintively
and distantly all along by George
as parents nervously applauded
your new, dust-shielding lens cap
and gently steered you into the family trade.

Although my opinion
is no longer requested
on your lucrative problems,
on the source of your stress,
it will almost be like warm, former times.
I'll probably hold your hand throughout, and rock

you afterwards with both arms against my sodden shoulder.
But the desire has long since withered
and, although your walls are covered with photos,
George's litany will rise one last, futile time
in the smoke of an extinguished candle.

Roberta S. Petusky



THE LESS-THAN-INNOCENT EYE

Bill Rohde

One of the most effective ways to talk about photography is to consider the three main kinds—personal photography, art photography, and documentary photography—and to understand that, while each type contains elements of the other two categories, personal photography is concerned mostly with emotion, art photography mostly with aesthetics, and documentary photography mostly with information (Beloff 1). Given these distinctions, let me show what some of my own experiences with photography reveal about the nature of these picture categories.

Over the last few years, I have tried to take a photograph of my grandma that will satisfy me, holding in its colored pixels my feelings for her and the stories that are clumped around her in my memory. Not necessarily an accurate picture—a diagnostic image showing her as she “is” (as she looks)—but one showing her as I anticipate I will remember her when she is gone. One that calls home and gathers in the loose recollections and emotions.

I may have gotten the desired shot a few Christmases ago. Holding a plate of food, wearing a cream-colored sweater marked by green and gold flowers, she pauses for me, allowing herself to become a subject. No flash; instead the warm glow of the kitchen light off the wood beams and cupboard doors. She has *paused* rather than *posed*. Her face bears a natural expression; this is how she looks when she is not aware of observation. This is how she looks most of the time. It is a look I don't find in most snapshots of friends and family members. They smile hard and wave, apparently greeting the photographer, the camera, and the future. (Whether or not they are conscious of it, they and their moment have just been

Bill Rohde graduated from VU with a B.A. in English and Humanities in 1988. He has since worked as a counselor at a day-care center, an editor of a small-town newspaper, and secretary to the president of a brokerage firm. He lives in Chicago, where he performs editorial assistant duties in the communications division of a health care association.

encapsulated into the Past.) Perhaps their waving is an attempt to usurp some of the photographer's power to define; the obvious posturing makes plain their awareness of the situation. These photos seem to me like small cages holding self-conscious inmates anxious to show that they are making the most of, or even thriving in, their captivity.

This image of my grandma is not a studio shot, either, in which the subject, recontextualized (against a colored background or phony nature scene), becomes a bust, a monument. Studio pictures become as generic as those images you sometimes come across in yearbooks and magazines, in which all but the “person” is trimmed away, disengaging it from its role as a likeness in a specific place so that it may take on the new role of design element, nestled among paragraphs, headlines, and white space. These cut-outs and headshots do perform a function if they are of someone we have not seen before—slapping a face on the mental container into which we will toss stories and ideas about this new individual—but I find them displeasing when they portray those whose faces I know. Such pictures look like artificial flowers smell.

So this particular image of my grandma may satisfy my requirements because it does not look like a conventional snapshot or formal studio photo, which pulls their subject from their natural patterns of living. I may have no choice, however, but to settle on this picture because the camera has begun to feel intrusive during last few visits home. Though she did not complain, my grandma seemed uncomfortable in the presence of this camera she was told to ignore. I asked myself, why do I feel defensive when cameras are around? I fear they will capture and hold for all time that which I would rather see fade in the normal flux of time: an angry look, an expression of sadness, signs of boredom. The camera may provide evidence of a time I'd rather forget. Worse yet, it may create an unflattering image that will chip away at the very foundation of the way I perceive myself and the way I imagine others see me. We all carry a visage of ourselves, a product of the multiple images we've seen and the idealized self we long for. Coming across a new picture of yourself is often jarring, because it might require revision of the self-image or a very active

attempt to forget. Posing is the natural response to this fear. I find it easy to wear a pose; I have assumed it before. When the camera's around, the pose almost feels natural. I assume it in the hope that the resulting image will approximate the one I hold in my head. Usually this means looking at the camera straight on, so that the photograph won't be that different than what I see in the mirror. (Turning my head would leave me vulnerable to a new view.)

But that's me. I doubt if my grandma is as concerned with how she looks in pictures as I am. If she is, I would guess that her self-image, which has endured eight decades of battering and revision, is sturdier than mine. Instead, what may well bother her is that her grandson is treating her as an aesthetic object or as a component in a problem he is trying to solve. We don't relate to each other as loved ones when I hold the camera. A power relationship takes

over, undermining the normal conversational exchange that keeps us on equal levels. Maybe next time I'll leave the camera behind.

This picture of Grandma shows her right shoulder slightly raised. You'd hardly notice if you weren't looking for it, but to an "insider" this is a sign of the polio she fought through at five with the help of massages and hot baths. The struggle marked her: her torso is crooked like a poorly-hung painting. At times, the muscles of her back contract around the knobby shoulder blade the way wood grain tightens around a knot. Once, barely a week after a doctor had looked at an X-ray and pronounced her back "one helluva mess," a spasm tossed her out of bed.

That is all there in the picture, but only when I look away. The steady march of memory halts when I stare at the photo, resuming only after I close my eyes or shift my gaze to the wall or ceiling. A photograph,



George Strimbu, *Tumacacori Mission*

February, 1991

Roland Barthes says, "actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory . . . because it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or denied" (91). For Barthes, the photograph "is always invisible; it is not it that we see" (6). I will grant him this on some photographs, certainly the one of which I have been speaking, for it was not until late in the looking that I remembered that I was the one who took it. I was able to stare at it and dwell on it without recalling its origin, as if it came into existence on its own. There is little there to remind me that this is a photograph; what is there I am happy to ignore.

My minor forays into art photography have been fueled by just the opposite notion—that photography packages the world differently than the way I perceive it through my senses. "I take photographs to see what things look like photographed," said the late photographer Garry Winogrand, reminding the viewers of his work that it was not natural. Winogrand's pictures of people (and, frequently, animals) on the street, in zoos and rodeos, at airports—shot quickly, often from odd angles, sometimes with a tilted horizon line—look randomly composed, but they were actually careful investigations of just what turns up on film. They were said to embody a snapshot aesthetic, a charge he vehemently denied:

The people who use that term don't even know the meaning. They use it to refer to photographs they believe are loosely organized, or casually made, whatever you want to call it . . . The fact is, when they're talking about snapshots they're talking about the family album picture, which is one of the most precisely made photographs. Everybody's fifteen feet away and smiling. The sun is over the viewer's shoulder. That's when the picture is taken, always. It's one of the most carefully made photographs that ever happened. (Diamonstein, 180)

Winogrand believed "a photograph is not what was photographed, but something else." I agree, and so I've aimed the lens at billboards and statues, people at parties, and rippling flags to see what they look like photographed. I've often been surprised—which is about the best a photographer could hope for, according to Winogrand.

Half the modernist camp of photographers would probably have grouped themselves around Winogrand. The other half would gather around Alfred Stieglitz or Ansel Adams, "masters" who used the camera to achieve their vision rather than to find out what it had to say. Armed with personal credos, notions about purity, and complete command of the

technical aspects of picture-taking and print-making, these photographers created majestic images of Nature (mountains and deserts), Woman (Georgia O'Keeffe, etc.), and Emotions (clouds), many of which you can find today on calendars and postcards. Although their ideals were lofty, these classic straight photographers share with most amateur and commercial photographers a chief desire—not to be surprised. Camera manufacturers try to accommodate by offering to the amateur an "easy-to-use" camera and to the professional numerous technical features for overcoming variables. Few things, though, are as boring as snapshots of strangers, unless the pictures did not turn out as planned. In a used-bookstore I came across a publication called "Image Nation," which contained surprises such as a green baby floating on a red carpet, figures unintentionally silhouetted against bright curtains, and blurred trees seen through car windows. My sister commented, "They look like the ones you'd throw away out of the batch." Exactly.

Not surprisingly, young photographers seem to gravitate toward the Winogrand philosophy, "shooting" in a cocky and aggressive manner, while more senior photographers seem to model themselves after Adams, approaching the world and their camera with a degree of care and reverence. At least one photographer has made the complete transition. Joel Meyerowitz began his career in the 1960s by jabbing his 35mm camera into crowded scenes and exposing roll after roll of black-and-white film. Now, he lugs a heavy, old-fashioned 8x10 on a tripod, sets up each shot precisely and records calmer scenes in gorgeous, generous color.

Both these styles of photographing display a belief in the sheer goodness of going into the world and seeing. Learning to take pictures under the late George Strimbu, VU's longtime photography instructor, taught me to *see* all the time, not just when a camera strap was digging into my neck. For much of those two semesters I looked at things in terms of how they could be photographed. It's the same sensation I have when I walk through art galleries. After looking carefully at paintings or sculpture, I find myself paying more attention to everything visual—appreciating the pure pleasure of the shape of a coiled hose, the ordered rhythm of five parallel water pipes making the same bend around a corner, the cracked face of aging brick. A simple lesson: to see is to appreciate, to see is good.

The modernist belief that looking can be a transcendental or simply surprising experience has been savaged in the last decade. Artists and critics have been demonstrating that looking is never an innocent act. They believe, as *New York Times* photography critic

Andy Grundberg summarized, that

it is dishonest to pretend that untapped visual resources are still out there in the woods, waiting to be found by artists who can then claim to be original. For them, imagery is now overdetermined—that is, the world has already been glutted with pictures taken in the woods. Even if this weren't the case, however, no one ever comes upon the woods culture-free. In fact, these artists believe, we enter the woods as prisoners of our preconceived images of the woods, and what we bring back on film merely confirms our preconceptions. (11)

Perhaps the most validating demonstration of the postmodernist skepticism of looking is the later work of Winogrand. When he died in 1984 at the age of 56, Winogrand left behind 9,000 rolls of film for which he had not made contact sheets. Those who sifted through the 300,000 unedited images found them disappointing when compared to his early work (Grundberg 77). Winogrand had spent much of his time riding in a car, firing off shot after shot. He sometimes used a motor drive (which takes multiple shots every time the shutter release is pressed), even though he worried that it was bad for his pictures. It appeared that he was trying to find his eye again, just as writers work to find their voice. Postmodernist critics would say that Winogrand was bound to come up empty; he had made too many visits to the woods.

Artists in the 1980s used photography to demonstrate that photographs were not "transparent windows on the world, but intricate webs spun by culture" (Grundberg 101). They exposed myths and stereotypes by decontextualizing existing images (rephotographing or appropriating photographs) and by creating their own staged images that emphasized and hyperbolized the conventional elements. Sherrie Levine took pictures of classic photographs and called them her own, raising the issue of ownership and originality in a world bombarded by artificial images. Cindy Sherman, guised as an actress in film stills, exaggerated the roles of Anxious Woman, Sex Kitten, and Helpless Victim to emphasize their presence in our culture. Richard Prince rephotographed billboard and advertising images and regrouped them to show the underlying myths.

While the realization that photographs are "intricate webs spun by culture" has permanently changed the way photographs are produced and received in the art world, a more important concern is what effect it will have on documentary photography and photojournalism, areas in which the photograph's veracity and purity have rarely been challenged.

Photojournalism and documentary photography share a fundamental problem: how to present accurate information in the least biased but most aesthetically pleasing way. The photo has to tell something, but it must do so in a supposedly objective, visually exciting way.

Anyone who has ever worked for a news organization or been directly involved in an event that became a news story comes out of the experience with a knowledge of the gap between what happens and what gets reported. I remember watching a rally at the VU Student Union, protesting a university decision to ban alcohol from fraternity parties for a short time in response to a rape that had taken place at a fraternity following a party. Several hundred students attended, and while the rhetoric was as weak as the reason for the protest, the affair was orderly and mostly sober. The attendees did not discredit themselves or their cause by being drunk or disorderly. I saw one student drinking a beer. The following morning, a picture of the lone imbibor graced the front page of a local newspaper, giving readers the impression that the protesters were a bunch of drunks. The photograph did not lie—the guy had a beer—but he was obviously the exception. The part did not represent the whole. The part did, however, make a good picture and allow the paper to give its mostly blue-collar readers an opportunity—over their coffee—to vent their class frustrations by confirming what they felt: college kids are spoiled, drunken pricks.

Every news photo, like every news story, has an angle. It may be to give the readers what they want or to give the editors a chance to "prove" what they know. Or it may simply be that the photo is a powerful design element for the page. Few editors would deny that stories have angles; most would disagree with the claim that photos do; and just about all of them would show you the door if you said angles are agendas that reflect ideological biases.

Ask the *Chicago Tribune* why it put a picture of a burning flag on its January 15 front page the day after an anti-war demonstration was attended by several thousand protesters, all but a couple of them non-flag burners. A powerful image—I stopped walking to look at the newsstand—but also a powerful attempt to discredit protesters as radicals far outside the mainstream. A wide-angle shot showing sheer numbers might have been more accurate, but this would've run counter to the *Tribune's* apparent agenda. The January 15 *Chicago Sun-Times* front page had a more accurate, ambiguous, and interesting picture. Two arcs, each composed of roughly equal numbers of people, one of police on horses and the other of protesters, face each other. The photograph

was taken from a high angle. The cops are in the upper half of the picture. The newspaper stands upright in the newsstand, giving the impression that the cops are descending on the protesters.

Documentary photographers have an advantage over photojournalists: they usually get more space to tell the story. However, the power of their stories has diminished over the last three decades for two reasons. Television, obviously, is now the first source for news with the dual advantage of instantaneous coverage and moving images. But equally important to the demise of the documentary is, as the postmodernists have told us, the supersaturation of news images, which has resulted in a weary public that types each photograph as a War Picture or Famine Picture or Disaster Picture before processing it. I can page past the image of the starving child, though I've never actually seen a starving child, because I've seen so many pictures like it before.

Some photographers have responded to the lessening impact of their magazine images by displaying them in galleries and publishing them in books. Many have also begun using color film, previously taboo, to make their images fresher and more—to borrow from business lingo—impactful. Revolution, now color-saturated, never looked so good.

That images sell hardly needs repeating. But those who take great pictures of suffering because they will sell are on dangerous ethical ground. People who

are concerned about truth, and images of truth, might well get themselves ready to talk about these concerns, whether or not the photographers are ready to participate.

Footnote: A Cautionary Tale

Hiking in Scotland, headed up a hill to the crumbling and overgrown remains of a bathhouse that had been abandoned almost a century ago. A storm has just swept over the harbor and left a rainbow in its wake. A scene ripe with image potentiality. I sprint to the ruins and line up the frame so that the rainbow arches over the red stone chimney. Click! Satisfaction at the capture. I head back down. At the bottom I realize I probably should've looked at what I was snapping, taken in the scene, enjoyed the greenery clinging to the chimney. That will all have to wait, however, until the film is developed. □

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ANSWERING THE CALL

Thomas C. Willadsen

Since February 1987 I have been a candidate for ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). At that time I was applying to divinity schools and seminaries. I applied to Harvard, Princeton, Yale and The University of Chicago. The Candidates' Committee in my presbytery was a little concerned that I had applied to only one Presbyterian school, Princeton. I explained that I expected to be a Presbyterian minister for the rest of my life, so I wanted three years away from them. After one of those long, uncomfortable pauses a member of the committee expressed doubt as to whether one could become sufficiently "Presbyterian" at a non-Presbyterian school. I assured them I would try to be.

That spring I waited to hear from schools. Harvard accepted me first. I heard from them in the middle of March. I immediately called my mother who said, "Really? I didn't think they'd accept you." Next I heard from Princeton, then the University of Chicago. I was eager to hear from Yale. The pastor at my home church had gone there and advised me to look at many schools before deciding on Yale. I waited and waited. Finally I phoned their admissions office. Their records showed that my application was not complete; they still needed one of my letters of recommendation. When they finally received it, they had allocated their entire financial aid budget. I could go there, but I would have to pay full tuition. The woman on the phone suggested that my church hold a spaghetti supper to help me raise tuition. After realizing how many hungry Presbyterians would be required to attend such an event, I narrowed my choices. Harvard had not impressed me; Princeton was in New Jersey; The University of Chicago offered me full tuition. Money talked.

There were about fifteen first year ministry students in my class at the Divinity School, most of us either just out of college or out one year. Our denominations ranged from Quaker to Roman

Catholic. We all had to take a course the university called "Introduction to the Study for Ministry" taught by Martin Marty. (We called it "Marty's Cavalcade of Stars".) Each week we read a book by a different member of the Divinity School's faculty, and then the author came to class to answer our questions. The final assignment was to write a paper based on something we had read in one or two of the books. I picked the idea of Hell.

I had not really thought much about Hell, except that it sounded pretty awful. I figured that graduating from seminary (even a seminary that might not be "sufficiently Presbyterian") and becoming a minister would keep me out of Hell. Looking around the table where this class met, though, I found that none of my classmates really took the idea of Hell seriously. I did some research and found that the whole idea of Hell has been trivialized, since it makes its most serious appearance in Far Side cartoons. I wrote up my conclusions, and called the paper "Hell No."

Over Christmas break that year, at the annual "Snow Bowl" game some of my friends and I hold, I faked out the whole defensive team with a nifty quarterback bootleg, scoring a touchdown and tearing a ligament in my knee. So I spent the first half of winter quarter on crutches. Crutches are bad. Chicago winters are bad. Chicago winters on crutches are close to unbearable.

Over spring break I had surgery, so I spent the first half of spring quarter on crutches as well. Two mornings a week I went for knee therapy. One of these mornings I hobbled over to McCormick Theological Seminary, the neighborhood's Presbyterian seminary, (every neighborhood should have a Presbyterian seminary, don't you think?) to meet with the pastors of churches who wanted field students for the next year. These meetings were supposed to be informal opportunities to gather information about the placements. I did not bother changing from my knee therapy clothes. My first interview was with Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church. I found the room and opened the door and found three people, two men and a woman all dressed like corporate power brokers. I kept my back to the wall so

Thomas C. Willadsen, a graduate of Northwestern University, lives in Chicago while he waits for a congregation to want him. He wins contests on Cubs trivia and is a recognized expert on the city's Thai restaurants.

they would not see that my t-shirt advertised "Lousy food, warm beer and ugly women." Somehow I managed to make a good impression on these people. They wanted me to be their field student.

The summer between my first two years of seminary I did a unit of basic Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at the University of Chicago Hospitals. CPE is strongly recommended by the Presbyterian Church, and it fulfills a field work requirement for the Divinity School. Basically, in CPE the student is given a lab coat, an identification badge, a tour of the hospital, and a group of patients to serve as chaplain for the duration of the CPE unit. There is a chaplain on call at all times in the hospital.

Before a chaplain's first on-call shift, he does a "walk along" with a more experienced chaplain. This is the only instruction regarding how to interact with patients that one is assigned. My walk-along took place on a Wednesday night. At about 7 in the evening we were paged to the emergency room to be with the family of a man who had died of a heroin overdose. The chaplain I was working with went to find a doctor at one point. Shortly after she left, a nurse came in and asked me to prepare the body for viewing. It was my third day of chaplaincy, I was just supposed to be observing, I was not ready to do something like that, I thought. But it was my job. So the very first thing I did as a chaplain, my very first act as a professional minister, was to pull the sheet back from the face of the dead man so his sister and his friends could see him.

I led them into the room and they saw the man, convulsed, with his eyes open and a tube in his mouth. They tried to close his eyes. They muttered some things about the responsibilities he had left behind. Then they rushed out of the hospital. I walked back into the lounge hoping to find the other chaplain and noticed that the television was still on, showing a rerun of the *A-Team*. It seemed wrong. "Doesn't anything put the television off? Shouldn't there at least be news bulletins, like when President Reagan was shot?" I wondered.

About once a week it was my turn to be on call, to wear the beeper, and to keep the log book for twenty-four hours. An average of four people die every day at the University of Chicago Hospitals, and a chaplain is called to all deaths. In some ways, giving this kind of front-line pastoral care gets easier with experience. I found that after a while I did not panic every time the beeper went off, and that you can learn to expect the unexpected. Still, in some ways, visiting grieving families never, ever, gets any easier.

On two occasions I wore a clerical shirt on my

rounds, just to see what would happen. One of my Episcopal colleagues lent it to me. All the people I encountered in the hospital assumed I was Roman Catholic. The problem was that I forgot I was wearing the shirt, except when I tried to straighten my tie, which was not there. The first time someone called me "Father," I answered "Not unless you know something I don't." This was the wrong thing to say. Other comments I heard only on those occasions when I wore the shirt were "You're so young!" and "Hey! black is your color." The latter comment troubled me. Did I really look good in black? Were people happy on seeing that I had chosen a celibate life? Did they want what they could not have? I was not sure. I had my picture taken wearing that shirt, looking up at the black velvet painting of Jesus on my mantel. I put it in my Christmas cards that year without explanation.

The very last time I carried the beeper, I was covering for another chaplain who was in a meeting. Usually the early afternoons are quiet, and I owed her a favor anyway. I was paged to the emergency room. There was an eleven-year-old who had come in with his mother in an ambulance. She had taken an overdose of something. The nurse explained to me that the boy thought that it was his fault. We went into the family room and I tried to talk to him, to hear what he was going through. I was spinning my wheels. Then I started to think how I would feel if my mother were in the hospital—because of an overdose—which I had caused—at eleven years old. I started to cry.

As the first tear hit my shirt, he threw his arms around my neck and hugged me. We cried for awhile. Then he called his grandmother. Within fifteen minutes we were eating Doritos from the machine in the lounge and having a great time. His mother was going to be fine. When he got bored I gave him a tour of the emergency room. We washed our hands with the cool, red disinfectant soap and looked at the X-ray machines.

When I look back over that summer as a chaplain, I remember the two overdoses like bookends, my anxiety and confusion at the first, crying and eating Doritos at the second. I think I got better at being a chaplain, and being a minister that summer, but it is hard to know. Success in ministry doesn't quantify well.

Each summer the Synod of Lincoln Trails sponsors a candidates' retreat. Candidates for ministry from Illinois and Indiana, and members of preparation committees, descend on a retreat center for two and a half days. These retreats are full of helpful seminars and opportunities for fellowship. Candidates are supposed to meet with their committees once each

year to discuss their progress and to receive guidance. My presbytery tries to schedule annual meetings at the Candidates' Retreat. These meetings are usually pro forma; candidates talk about their experiences over the past year and their plans for the coming year. The summer that I was in CPE I went to the retreat full of stories I wanted to tell. I was excited from my first taste of ministry and I wanted to share that with anyone who would listen. Unfortunately, only two of the ten members of my presbytery's committee came on the retreat; one of them stayed awake for my annual meeting. I was hurt and angry. Ministry is important and so is the preparation for ministry. And I am important. I spent the next year being very angry at my committee for not taking me seriously.

During my second year of seminary I worked about 20 hours a week at Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church. Many of those hours were lost commuting to the north side of Chicago from Hyde Park. I tried to make the best of that time, however, by reading the Bible. This plan served me in two ways, first because I was taking an Old Testament course for which I had to read the entire Torah, and second, because subway lunatics are reluctant to bother someone reading the Bible. My plan was not always successful. One Sunday morning on my way to church, a man put a gold chain in my hand. I looked at it and with exaggerated innocence asked, "Is this ill-gotten gain?"

"Huh?"

"I'm ...uh, not interested," I said, handing it back.

My work at the church ranged from preaching and leading worship to staffing committees, to teaching Sunday school. Sunday school was a special joy. I was always the youngest person in the room, and usually the only man. One morning we were reading a passage from Exodus and one of the women asked about circumcision. What exactly happens at circumcision? Is it still done today? Another woman said that she thought that about 85 percent of American men are circumcised. All I could ask was how she did her research.

All the second year ministry students had field placements. We spent so much time working and studying that we did not see each other as often as we had our first year. Our parties were different too. Now, we often sat down and talked. Before we danced on the furniture. During my first year I hosted a party and invited some friends from college who were in town for the weekend. One of them said that she couldn't imagine the ministers she had known while growing up ever being as loud and crazy as my classmates were. By our second year, though, we weren't loud and crazy any more, but warm and studious.

By our third year we had drifted off altogether. Some had left school, others transferred, others changed to different programs. Some had moved from Hyde Park. We all had jobs, and were looking for something to do after graduation—and only four of us graduated in June. The only times I saw my classmates during that year were quick chats in the coffee shop, and at the presentations of our third year projects. My third year project was about the theology of laughter. I had hoped to read Woody Allen books and Roz Chast cartoons—and get credit for it. In the end the University of Chicago mentality took over, and I was able to remove all humor from the study of laughter. I did thumb my nose at the establishment in my preface, where I explained why it is easier to study laughter than humor:

id est, by that I mean, "i.e.," that is, "that is," it can be easily determined whether someone laughed, but it is very difficult to understand why.

Since graduating I have gotten closer to the day when I will no longer be a candidate for ministry, but an actual, fully-fledged, licensed, man of the cloth. I have come to think of the process a number of ways. Some days I am a tropical storm in the Gulf of Mexico, waiting for that magical moment when I reach *sustained winds of 74 mph or more* (italics mine) and am, therefore, a hurricane. Other times I think of the process as an elaborate martial art. Once I have complete all seventeen steps I will have the black belt of ordination. To date I have completed fifteen of these steps, making me something of a pastoral brown belt. The two steps that stand between me and ordination are accepting a call to an ordainable position, and passing an oral examination of the floor of the presbytery that calls me.

Since August 1990 I have been "actively seeking a call," (the denomination's term) or "looking for a gig" (my term). Were I a Roman Catholic or a United Methodist, I would have been given a position after graduating from the seminary. As a Presbyterian I have to find my own position. This means sending out many copies of my Personal Information Form (PIF) to churches that are looking for a pastor. A PIF is a ten-page statement about one's gifts, talents and expectations for ministry. The national Presbyterian headquarters in Louisville keeps track of all the pastoral openings in the nation. Every month new lists come out and I read them, hoping to find a church where I might be a good match. The national office also matches PIFs with Church Information Forms (CIFs) in a process similar to computer dating.

Synods periodically sponsor Presbyterian Interview Experiences (PIEs) where Pastoral

Nominating Committees (PNCs) and candidates can meet.

Last November I went to one of these events. I met with ten different PNCs in less than 24 hours. It was a wonderful experience for the most part. I must say that it gets tedious to be in a room full of strangers who sit in a horseshoe and say their names in turn, laughing at inside jokes about one another. And the chairman of the committee, perhaps the man who manages the local Burger King, always says something like, "Tom, we've read your PIF and we're all anxious to get to know you. I wonder, could you tell us about your faith journey?" After a weekend of ten interviews, even I am bored with my faith journey. Sometimes I'm tempted to make things up just to keep myself interested. "...so there at the Fullerton el station was this guy speaking in tongues and I understood what he was saying, that we should sell our stocks (or was it 'socks?') and listen to him and carry a sign like this one—wait, I left it at the hotel..."

Usually, though, I explain that I am Presbyterian because my mother loves movies. If my mother wanted to go to the movies when she was a girl she had to go to church. Since she loved the movies, she went to church. When she moved back to Peoria after my father died, she went back to the church that had been within walking distance of the house she grew up in. This story certainly gets their attention and it reminds me that denominations probably have to watch it when they start talking about their claims to truth, beauty and goodness.

While I have been going on interviews, I have been working four part-time jobs. I am not happy with this situation, but I keep thinking that it is only temporary. One of my jobs has me back in a hospital doing on-call shifts as a chaplain one or two nights a week. I am also working at a church, doing some preaching, teaching and administration.

One time last summer during a sermon at church, the power went out. (This is my favorite ministry anecdote, so pay attention.) I was preaching a sermon that I had worked very hard at; I had done my own translation from the Hebrew. My message was challenging, but I thought that it would be well-received by the congregation. Now think what happens in a church when the power goes out. (I

should say that the electricity goes out, some people have misunderstood me to say that the power of the Holy Spirit went out from me, like in the last scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.) The organ, the lights and the microphone all stop working. There was a piano in the sanctuary, so losing the organ was no problem; it was a sunny day, so we didn't miss the lights for reading our bulletins and the words to the next hymn. Losing the microphone, however, was a problem. I had to shout to finish my sermon and the people who use the hearing aids in the pews had lost every word. After the benediction I stood at the back door of the sanctuary, eagerly awaiting the reaction to this sermon on which I had worked so hard. A few people said "Good morning," which is the most neutral thing anyone can say to a preacher. Some complimented me on my poise, they were impressed that I handled myself so well in a difficult situation. The one comment that I will always remember, because I learned so much from it was, "Must have been a transformer."

"Must have been a transformer," said a man in the congregation as he shook my hand.

"How's that?"

"Squirrel must of got into a transformer or something. Too nice a day for it to be anything else."

"Well, you're probably right," I said.

My first thought was, "For this I took Hebrew?" But I calmed down later. This man reminded me that what I say during a sermon and what people hear and remember are very different things. I learned that there is only so much of a sermon that I can control. For the most part I have to rely on the guidance of the Spirit to inspire my words and to help them to be understood. I am much calmer now before I have to preach. Not because I think that the congregation will not get the message, but because now I know that whether or not they do is not entirely in my hands. I do the best I can and trust that it will be good.

Ministry and the preparation for it are not cut and dried endeavors. There has to be room to explore and try and fail at different parts of ministry for it to be human and successful. And we have to leave room for the transformers to speak, to remind us that God—or those crazy squirrels—are in control, not us. And that's OK. □

Flailing the Darkness

Asleep, she slides off the pillow,
wedges herself beneath my arm,
nuzzles my breast, content.

When I remove my arm and
roll aside, cautiously,
she flails her limbs, searching
for me, knowing
I am there, insisting
I remain tangible.

When I return my side
to hers and shelter her head
beneath my arm again,
she stills her limbs,
sighs, nuzzles my breast,
content again.

What faith—to know in your sleep
(a whole year before kindergarten looms)
that when you are weakest,
some woman will Isis you
or some man Jesus you;
that you need only
reach into the darkness,
and a fleshed-out love
will fold warm wings around you
and let you sleep, secure;
that when you wake and find
sunrise recoloring your life,
you can whisper exultantly
into the ear of God:
“Now look how morning it is!”

Regina Lederle

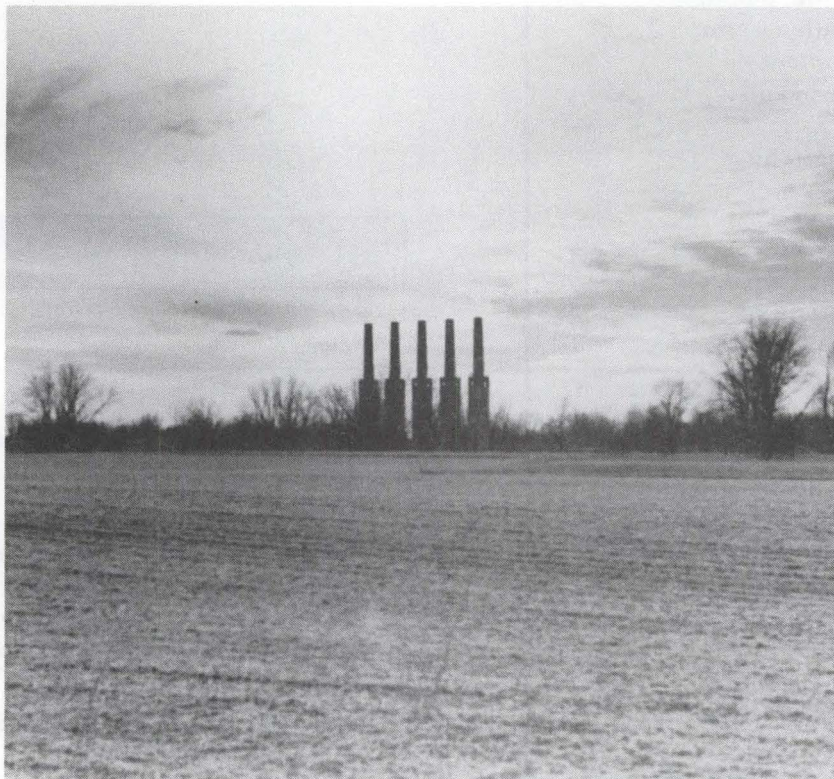
Grappling with My Father's Dead Weight

Let's say that you cut off my needy hands
to hide your inability to give,
and that before I left home for school
I'd grown adult-sized hands, capable
of giving but not receiving,
burdens that inhibited learning
until I grew into them.
I've learned, since then, how
many men hide their inability
to give by creating images
of women, earth, life that offer
inexhaustible supplies of all they need.
Like you, they lash out or run away
when their hallucinations fade
and they must give what they receive.

Let's say that, at death's safe distance
from need, you saw my hands
holding up your wife and your middle daughter,
caressing your grandchildren,
greeting strangers (Hi, I'm Tom's oldest daughter),
writing prayers and acknowledgments,
hiding from others the brutal hospital form
accompanying your clothes (attach to body bag),
folding those clothes into boxes,
giving your mother mementos.
And let's say that you saw how
my hands trembled and you realized at last
that when you cut off my infant hands,
the hands were effectively removed
but the neediness remains.

Regina Lederle

Ernest Hemingway looked me straight in the eye and said, "Boy, you just go ahead and put that rock right back down where you got it and we'll forget the whole thing ever happened."



Ernest
Hemingway

-story by
Mark Curtiss

It sounded good, and I probably should have done it, but it was Hemingway. Ernest Hemingway. Not just anyone. It was him. I felt that at that moment in my life I just couldn't let him get the better of me. I just knew that he would never let the world forget that it was me that backed down on that cold and grey fall day.



"Goddamnitall, put it down!" he said as he put down his tumbler full of drink. I knew what was coming, so I grabbed the top of his head and pushed him back into his chair. Dust rose into an irritating cloud between us as I took a step back and aimed. Ernest Hemingway howled in pain as the rock hit him squarely on the left breast.



-photos by

Ann Curtiss &
Mark Curtiss

Every once in a while, as I ran, I could, or think I could hear a swearing and frustrated Hemingway crashing through some thick bush off in the distance. The image of a darted and angry elephant came to mind. "Marlon is near." I said to myself, looking skyward for the helicopter, as I reached the highway.





There are some things that cannot happen, and there are some things that people are only sure can't happen. I think that if the reasons are good enough for something to happen, then there are no reasons for them not to happen. That doesn't seem to make too much sense to the people around here but they never knew old Jon Parkill quite like I knew him. And they never saw the footprints.

Jon Parkill was a farmer his entire life and in the last few years, each time he chose to look at it, the future looked darker and darker. He would tell me that everywhere he looked, there were signs that things were winding down. I saw what he meant in a way, what with his wife's death a few years back and his kids, one by one, telling him that the life of a farmer was no longer in their plans. Those reasons alone would be enough to convince a person that it was time to sell the farm and buy the apartment in town. But, for Jon, even though the past was sometimes terrible, he would dutifully deal with each event and then move on, looking hopefully forward rather than sorrowfully back. So it wasn't his past that worried him, it was his future. It was also his friends, the people he would deal with every day. He would say that he could see it in their eyes and hear it in their voices. A new depression. A depression of the spirit.

I would tell him that when a person gets older they slow down accordingly. It's in the cards. It's always in the cards. When he would hear this he would hold up his arm and wave off any talk of what is, or isn't, in the cards and then say, "Yes, but we all have our own private deck."



For a while, most of what he told me amounted to one big mystery. I didn't really begin to understand until his friends began dying one by one. Jon loved his friends and always believed that they would be there when things got hard so it hurt him to see his friends not so much to help each other but to simply reach out to hand one another the towel. This enraged him perhaps because his entire life was so devoted to working hard and making something of himself. I think that maybe he worked so hard that he forgot that there does come an end. The moment when we all realize that what we've said goes not into textbooks but simply up into the air, into space maybe, never to be heard or understood again. Or I'm way off base and he was simply tired of being a pallbearer.

The night Jon left us, I got a phone call from him insisting that I come into town to join him for a few drinks. It being a weeknight and thinking it would be too crowded, I agreed. When I got there, I found that it was entirely the opposite of what I had hoped for. The bar was packed wall to wall with teary eyed drunks. I was turning to leave when I spotted Jon sitting alone in the back, next to the men's room. When I sat down I asked him why he was sitting by himself and he told me that he originally came there to talk to a few friends but one thing led to another and before long, everyone in the place told him to shut the hell up and drink some beer. I told him not to take it too personally, they were probably still a little wound up from from the funeral the day before.



I tried to change the subject so I asked him who he thought was going to die next. He didn't answer, so I started talking about who I thought was going to die. He told me to shut up and that I was being really stupid. I didn't think I was being stupid but I shut up anyway and we sat there for about a half hour just watching everyone. I started to order a beer and Jon jumped, "That's a part of it!" he said. "That's most definitely a part of it! And they don't even see it. That's why I wanted you here, so you could see what I mean. These people aren't wound up because of yesterday. They're always like this now, and the maddening this is they don't want to know why. They're living so hard on the notion of retirement and giving up that to hear that there is, or could be, a future, gets them confused and, like I saw tonight, agitated. They are so settled in that all they want now is their beer, their past, their friends from their past, a slow and gentle last call, and a quick and painless walk through the cold to their apartments before the sun rises. And that's where they've got it all turned around. Every morning before the sun rises, I get up and watch the sky turn from dark to light and I get the same feeling every time that this new day possesses greatness. While the day doesn't always keep its promise, that's not the point. The important thing is that between every night and day, anything can happen and nothing is impossible. I think that everyone in this bar at one point in their life knew this but did nothing with it. I know that I can't fault them, but at the same time I can't stand to see it happen."

"You're a big man, Jon," I said.

"Yeah, I suppose so." he said, then reached across the table and shook my hand as he said goodbye.

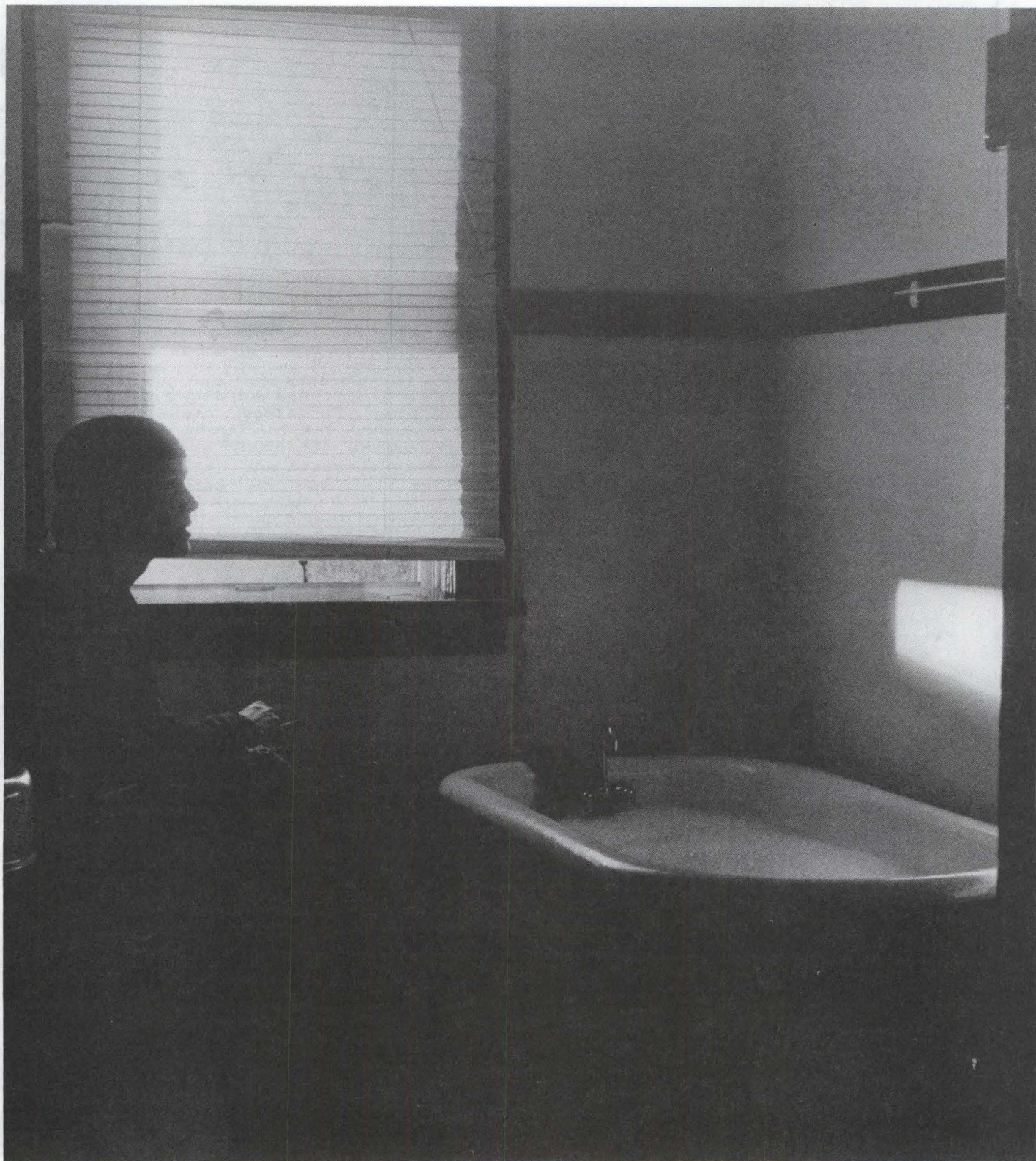


I told him that if he'd stick around for a bit I would drive him home but he made it clear that he had to walk. A couple hours and too many beers later found me walking also.

The sun was about to show itself, I was halfway home, and for some reason I couldn't get my Grandfather out of my head. I knew it had something to do with the earlier conversation but I couldn't exactly say. As I thought about it, I found myself walking in tracks in the snow that I assumed were Jon's. I figured that I would catch up to him shortly, as he was an unbearably slow walker, but when I started to cut across the Northern States Power company parking lot, the tracks suddenly began getting farther and farther apart until I could no longer walk in them without taking four or five steps in between. At about the same time I realised nobody, walking or running, could make these tracks, they abruptly stopped. I walked past the end of the foot prints about twenty feet and found in the otherwise untouched snow, what appeared to be a skid mark made by a dragging foot with a single foot print at the end of it, and then nothing more.

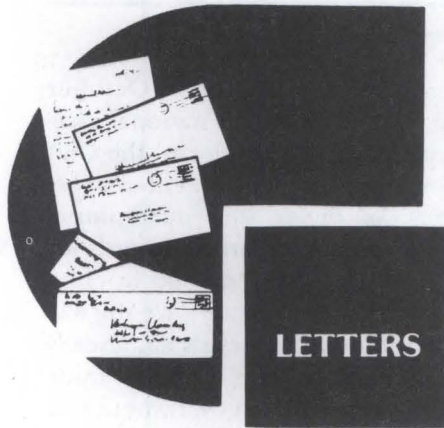
The sun was warm on my face as I stared down at the snow and thought about my Grandfather. I remembered that when I was a kid he would sometimes tell me that dogs could talk between night and day. When I would ask him what he meant he would tell me it meant anything I wanted it to mean.

As I stood in the parking lot that morning, I finally understood what they were both trying to tell me. I also had a feeling that nobody would ever see Jon Parkill again.



The Kennedy Clan.

o.k., F. Scott Fitzgerald was ruthlessly shot down while driving through Dallas. His Assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, said it was all a coincident. Now, shortly after all that, F's brother, George Kennedy got sucked out the window of a 747. They later made a movie about it.



Letter from Cairo

Jon Brockopp

We are barely into the new year now and I cannot imagine the circumstances under which this article will be published—maybe there will be peace, but that prospect looks exceedingly unlikely.

Regardless, I feel compelled to record my observations of Egypt, its people and its religion right now. I feel the weight of this moment here—this eerie sense of waiting—as I have felt no moment before.

My own emotions have peaked. I have nightmares of war and every siren I hear is the one . . . a wailing cry and the call to war. I am only at peace when watching

Jon Brockopp, an '84 VU graduate, is in Cairo on a Fulbright Grant for continuing his Ph.D. in Islamic Studies at Yale University. His letter arrived—unsolicited, but fortuitously in time for this issue—by Federal Express on the afternoon of January 8. His wife, Paula Droege, is with him in Egypt.

CNN, for the two hours it comes on each day. At least then I am sure that I will know. They'll tell me right away when it happens.

It is the war I am afraid of. The deaths, the bloody sacrifices to our most primitive characteristics. I have friends there—people like me, just married with boundless hopes and dreams. I do not want to hear that they have died, alone in the desert.

Last month I went to visit the cemetery in Al-Alamein, the famous battleground where Rommel was finally stopped by Allied soldiers. It was the end of November, the same time those battles were fought. The desert stretched flat to the horizon. Hard, dry, stubborn ground, the wind whisked over it and chilled my face.

As I looked out, I saw the battle lines, thirty miles long, artillery, tanks and dying men. It was a very bloody battle and the cemetery stands witness to the thousands who died there. Occasionally two or three headstones are grouped together and I close my eyes to try and stop seeing the ruins of a battle tank, with not enough parts of any one man to warrant separate burial. But the pictures are inside.

I do not want my daughter to visit such cemeteries in the wastes of the Saudi desert, marked with the names of men and women, and with the occasional terse inscription

“known unto God” for those no longer known to us.

What exactly does God know about this war and just what is he doing about it? It is His war, in many ways. Three great religions have sprung from the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Ishmael. Now for the first time in history, all three are gathered together in the same place, armed to the teeth and ready to do battle. Is he the same God for all three—as all three claim— or different Gods? And which side will he favor with victory?

The contradictions are overwhelming. Muslim law is clear about “fighting in the path of God” and does not allow inter-Muslim warfare. So there have been a lot of illegal inter-Muslim wars in history. Christians too have fought each other for centuries, each side claiming God's blessings for their side. In recent times, Jews have refrained from wholesale killing of other Jews, but Israel is rapidly making up for this through the brutality of their security forces in the occupied territories.

War. It is such an evil thing that we look to God and religion to bless the bloodletting. And so they do—rabbis, chaplains, priests and imams.

We pray for peace and prepare for war. So we fight the war and pray for victory. And poor God must get a little overwhelmed with all this petitioning—regardless of what side he is really on.

It seems to me it is the Christians who have least excuse, though. At least the Jews and Muslims were brought up on war. Their states, both modern and ancient, were established by warfare and their holy scriptures give it credence through rules, blessings and exhortations. Christians don't have a statute to stand on.

On one side the Jews are defending their Promised Land; on the other, a *Jihad* against the unbelievers is being declared. What do the Christians have, but "Turn the other cheek" and "Blessed are the peacemakers" and "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." According to their religious beliefs, every one of those soldiers over there who is a Christian should declare himself or herself a conscientious objector and come back home.

In cases like this, it seems that the separation of Church and State has just gone too far. As Christians we have a message unique among these religions: reconciliation, peace and forgiveness. But we put our religion and its morality into a little box, safe from the needs of daily life and—God forbid—politics. Separation of Church and State isn't an abstract religious doctrine, it is what we do to ourselves—praying for peace and preparing for war.

□

A twelve-minute propaganda documentary on Egyptian television scared me to death, though I don't think it had much effect on the Iraqis. There it was in living color—the immense power of the allied forces along with step by step plans for destroying Iraqi forces (should it be necessary). The film included American footage (Viet Nam? Grenada?) of helicopter gunships, TOW missiles and battleships. Towns destroyed, harbors annihilated. In short: Death to the Iraqis (should it be necessary).

I watched it carefully, memorizing tank names and missile capabilities. I am obsessed by this war and I want to know if it is going to work.

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My university wants my passport number, and Paula's too. Home address and phone number. Person to contact in case of emergency. Where can you be reached between January 1 and February 28. Don't be alarmed.

I received a notice to stock up on food and water and to have some extra cash around, in case the banks close.

I wonder what war will do to my Egyptian friendships. I try and imagine the change in public opinion should Iraq attack Israel. It will be lonely being an American then.

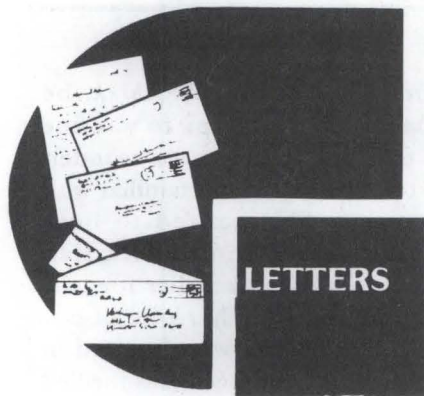
Perhaps out of a need for self-preservation my trusting side takes over. I assure myself that the Egyptians are a warm and decent people. They are wise enough to separate the person from the politics of the country and I need not fear for my safety.

After a brief lull in October and November, when national elections were the top priority, the Gulf Crisis has returned to center stage. Every taxi driver asks your opinion on the gulf. We learn the words for *crisis*, *invasion* and *deadline* in class, and news anchors announce the daily countdown. The crisis has already hit hard. The drop in tourist trade is well known. The government estimates a drop of fifty percent, *Time* reports seventy percent, and my unofficial inquiries suggest numbers even more drastic.

Unemployment has climbed as thousands of Egyptians are returning home from their once lucrative jobs in Kuwait and Iraq. Kuwaiti refugees also fill the city, causing rent inflation in Zamalek, a wealthy district in Cairo. US debt forgiveness is nice, but only the government and upper classes benefit, while the lower classes are left to bear the burden of the costs.

But Egypt's people are patient. They have waited out other wars and they will wait out this one as well. Determinists by training, they believe that God's will must come to pass, whatever that might be. *Allahu A'lam* God knows best.

As for me, I still struggle with God—how could he will war? So I still pray for peace—as if he doesn't know already that that is what should happen. But inside I can feel a slow hardening of my heart as I too prepare for war. □



From Russia With Trade Goods

Christine Zrinsky

Music is often called the universal language because, so goes the cliché, it transcends the barriers to communication and overcomes distortions inherent in translations of spoken language.

During the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's tour, which took us to Russia, Hungary and Austria, I thought about this piece of folk wisdom many times. I experienced the barriers, certainly. As a staff person with the symphony, it was my job to make certain that the 90 Friends of the Orchestra who toured with us had a smooth and comfortable time. As one of three staff and three tour coordinators, it was my job to help ease around barriers, if not demolish them entirely. But a trip with 110 musicians, their 76 guests, and 90 major donors, meeting hundreds of different hosts of all descriptions, was bound to hit a few communication barriers head-on. And it proved true that only music itself provided the reliable communication between such disparate people.

Christine Zrinsky graduated from VU in 1986, and is presently the Director of Individual Gifts for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She accompanied the orchestra on its November 1990 tour to Leningrad, Moscow, Budapest and Vienna.

In Russia, we learned that American dollars and Marlboro cigarettes spoke much more loudly than words. We discovered that knowing several Russian phrases was an invaluable aid in communicating with the Soviet people, and that our clothing and other possessions practically shouted that we were American.

Although hard currency may not be legally procured by Soviet citizens, foreign money is the only way to obtain essentials the state markets do not contain and rubles cannot buy. The dollar is prized, and many of the Russians practice two crucial English phrases that enable them to speak to tourists: 1. "Madam, you like?" while searching through a plastic bag containing any number of the well-known nesting dolls (some adorned with Gorbachev's likeness and those of the other Soviet leaders), postcard booklets, lapel pins and fur hats or mittens 2. "Madam, change money?" followed by offers to change money on the black market for absurdly high rates. During our tour, the official exchange rate was \$1.67/ruble, and the tourist rate was six rubles to a dollar. But on the street, each precious dollar could be worth 15 or 20 rubles. American dollars—either given outright or used to encourage someone to act on a request (a.k.a. bribe)—spoke loudly to the Russians.

Before the tour, the United States Information Agency warned us not to exchange money on the streets or to deal openly in dollars because the Russians view this as an affront to their economic condition. We were also told that we wouldn't have to search for black market dealers; they would find us simply on the basis of our American looks.

They were right. Teenage and younger boys trailed our group whenever we stepped off the buses and offered to trade or sell us trinkets or to change money. The Friends learned to barter with the

boys whenever possible—the peddlers were amazed when someone paid a price without haggling over the cost. Often, the younger boys knew little English but wanted "Wrigley's" or bubble gum for Lenin pins or postcards. Candy was scarce and delighted the children. My hotel maid in Leningrad also thanked me profusely in Russian for a small package of peppermints. Such small items, including perfume samples, nail polish, lipstick, and pantyhose, were treasured by the maids, both because the local versions were scarce, and of somewhat inferior quality to the things we had brought.

The most valuable "currency," however, was Marlboros. Everybody in Russia seems to smoke, and American cigarettes are more prized and much more expensive than Russian cigarettes. Marlboros seem to be favorites because of their connection with macho men — cowboys —in America. Although many of the Friends and musicians had moral qualms about giving people a known carcinogen, it seemed to be the only way to "talk" to some of the Russians, including bus and taxi drivers. We soothed our consciences by deciding that many of the citizens traded the cigarettes for other important, scarce goods, just as we did, and probably never smoked a puff. The smoky air with which we were usually surrounded made some of us question this hypothesis, but we resorted to Marlboro bribes every time we needed something as basic as a cab. We learned that in Leningrad, \$5 and a pack of Marlboros would get a group of three or four to any location in the city. The price always started out at \$10 or \$7 and was bargained to \$5 and a pack or two of cigarettes—or maybe lipstick or perfume for the driver's wife. I never heard a cab driver quote a price in rubles, and I never saw a meter.

Speaking a very little Russian—even *please* or *thank you*—delighted the Soviets. I had learned the Cyrillic alphabet and could sound out words on signs, but I had no idea what the words meant. Our guides were pleased when any of us could recognize Cyrillic letters or speak basic phrases, but the staff decided the Russians were uneasy when Americans knew too much Russian. We often felt uninformed when our guides and interpreters would speak Russian together for several minutes, and then give us one-word answers in reply to questions.

Flexibility and spontaneity do not seem to be valued traits in the Soviet character. This was especially evident to my group during a visit to the Armory Museum near the Kremlin in Moscow. Our guide led us through the museum and highlighted many of the collection's treasures, which include the famous Faberge eggs. When they realized that the museum was scheduled to close in 15 minutes, some of the Friends asked the guide to omit a portion of the tour and proceed to the eggs. "We will see the eggs," the guide responded, and calmly continued with her tour. The group followed dutifully but kept prompting the staff to exert control over our guides. Three of us sternly asked to see the eggs—now! She repeated that we would see the eggs. We did—and enjoyed them for three minutes before the museum closed. Somewhere, the communication broke down in the translation!

The Leningrad concert was an amazing experience. After the staff had handed out tickets, we rode busses to the concert hall, where we began the process of getting inside to our seats. The militia manned the doors and stopped nearly every person to be sure he or she had a ticket. Wooden barricades kept out hundreds of "ordinary" Russian citi-

zens who were hopeful that extra tickets might become available before the concert's beginning.

As was the case in nearly every public building, only one door was unlocked. Fire codes are unheard of in Russia, and many of us said silent prayers that none of the smokers would ignite the concert halls during performances or we would all have surely perished. Many of the patrons were amazed to find that Soviet citizens routinely shoved anyone blocking a path before or after a concert. "They seem so patient and calm while waiting to purchase food or other essentials," one patron quipped. "But put them in a concert hall. . . ." Showing did seem to be *de rigueur*, and no one ever apologized for pushing in a slow-moving crowd.

We did make it to our seats unharmed, and we were pleased to find that our Friends group had been widely dispersed. We would truly have a chance to see how the Russian audience enjoyed hearing *our* orchestra.

The first piece was Bartok's "Dance Suite," and the Russians applauded politely at its conclusion. We speculated that the audience was unfamiliar with Bartok and had not warmed to the Hungarian composer's discordant music immediately.

We confirmed this suspicion by "speaking" to a seat-mate during intermission. One of the other staff members, Ellen, and I were separated by one seat, in which a Russian woman sat attentively. Ellen asked—in very halting Russian—whether she enjoyed the concert. Assuming that Ellen spoke fluent Russian, she launched into an explicit assessment of the orchestra and Bartok. (Oh, why hadn't I studied my Russian more, I thought, for the hundredth time!) Ellen smiled and apologized that she only knew a little Russian. The woman knew no English, so Ellen's Russian had to

suffice—and it did. We *think* the woman said that the piece was fine and that the orchestra was wonderful, but that she wasn't familiar with the music. She wanted to hear Tchaikovsky or another Russian composer. We thanked her for talking to us and gave her one of our business cards that were printed in English and Cyrillic. She was thrilled and said each word on both of our cards. She seemed proud to have spoken with Americans, but her pride did not compare to Ellen's at being able to communicate so directly with a Russian citizen.

After intermission, the orchestra performed Mahler's Fifth Symphony. Although the audience had probably not heard much Mahler, they were familiar with its romantic lyricism, and responded with rousing applause and an ovation. Soon the applause shifted into rhythmic clapping that did not stop until Solti returned to perform Debussy's "Prelude to Afternoon of a Faun" as his first encore. Then more applause, rhythmic clapping and another encore. Surely, few of the musicians were accustomed to this response, but the audience spoke clearly: we adore your music and want to hear more!

For the second encore, Solti halted the applause and announced that he would "say something to you in Russian that you will understand. . . Shostakovich." The Orchestra performed the second movement from his Symphony No. 10. The audience sat enraptured. At the movement's conclusion, Ellen and I glanced at our new Russian acquaintance. She had actually been moved to tears and was clapping in unison with the other audience members. Not even this piece was enough, however, and the Russians demanded another encore.

Solti stepped to the podium again and allowed the audience to

choose between Mozart or Wagner for the final (his emphasis) encore. Wagner was the overwhelming choice, and the Orchestra played the overture to "Die Meistersinger." The rhythmic clapping began while the final notes still reverberated in the hall, and Solti stayed on stage long enough to acknowledge the audience's generous response. But the orchestra had a train to catch, and the Maestro finally led Concertmaster Ruben Gonzalez from the stage. The interaction between the orchestra and the audience left the attendees nearly breathless. This 150-year-old auditorium, complete with beautiful chandeliers and elaborate decor, was the site of the most satisfying communication I experienced while visiting the Soviet Union.

Although tickets were in such

short supply that the staff could not attend the Moscow concert, we experienced another fulfilling interaction with the Russian people in the lobby before the concert began. After escorting the Friends into the Grand Hall of the Conservatory to prevent them from slipping on the ice-covered sidewalks, we waited in the lobby to be sure all the patrons had satisfactory seats. We held three extra tickets, in scattered locations. As we checked our watches, noting that the concert would begin momentarily, we saw a young boy, perhaps eight or nine years old, crying, and his mother consoling him. Gloria, one of the other staff members, said we should give him and his mother two of the tickets. We agreed but reminded her that they were separated, and he seemed young to sit alone. We gave

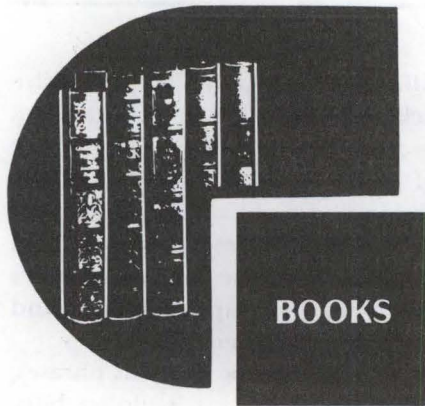
Ellen—our Russian expert—the tickets and asked her to offer them to the mother after informing her of their location. She did, and the child was delighted. His mother was effusive in her thanks—all in Russian, of course. But their smiles conveyed their appreciation, and words were not necessary.

In the USSR, Russian phrases, Cyrillic business cards, dollar bills, gum and Marlboros all spoke directly. The most effective medium, however, was the music supplied by Maestro Solti and the orchestra. While listening to such beauty, one can forget food shortages, or armed conflict, the ferocity of weather, or the uncertainties of life itself. I know that this is true for me, and we had every evidence that it was the experience of our Russian hosts. □

nightwonder

he left walked out lied can't figure it out everything just like a sitcom baby you me make three vacations Niagara Falls Liberace patted baby on forehead Yellowstone Sleeping Bear Dunes times we went up north looked at rich people on boats bright colors probably presbyterians blond children good colleges lawyers lawyers doctors by now seemed happy didn't we i was happy even though i was older when baby came we loved her very much maybe too much maybe loved her too much maybe didn't pay attention to each other when did we lose it you lose it when did you start having that affair again can't remember now i blocked a lot out hurts so much you see you understand don't you understand it almost ruined both of us do you know it almost ruined our sitcom world shattered glass protected us splintering glass almost ripped baby and me to shreds let all the blood out hardly remember it now like i said blocked it out you know how hard memories can be Christmas birthdays father's day when you couldn't make it saying you couldn't believe that actress left her husband and child for another man calling her a whore can't remember now long time since you said that but it hurts so bad still it hurts so bad still you hurt me us them so bad you know that do you know that it will never leave not in a million years won't ever hurt less than the day you wrote that note remember you wrote a note told me you were leaving after 25 years you left a note did you know what you were doing you left a note you didn't say it to my face you could not say it to my face goddamn you could not look me in the eyes after marriage baby vacations everything in between took your suits tools took the rest but i didn't change the locks maybe one day you will come back one day our sitcom life will return happy truly happy again because nothing has really been happy for a long time since you left

Chris Rice



Africa Revisited

Christoph Schulze

From July 1985 to April 1988 I lived and traveled in Africa. I went over as a Peace Corps volunteer, and my work as history and geography teacher at a secondary school in eastern Botswana kept me well occupied for most of each day. However, being without malls, telephone, bills, TV and the many other distractions which so often crowd North American life, I still found myself with plenty of what we Americans curiously call "free time." As in most of the developing world, where time is still generally free, I spent a good deal of time with my neighbors.

And, I read a great deal, sometimes a book every three or four days. Most of the works I read had little or nothing to do with my surroundings (or my interests!) as we read what was available from friends or the capital city's one bookstore; but a handful of books opened up new ways of seeing Africa, and helped me to understand and

Chris Schulze graduated from VU in 1985 and spent two years with the Peace Corps in Botswana. Since that time he has been teaching in Lutheran schools in New York.

define for myself my role as an American in a southern African society.

Cultural barriers were a constant theme in discussions with fellow expatriates in Botswana. While we all tried, in varying degrees, to blend into Batswana society, the question remained: could anyone, African or westerner, surmount the cultural barriers between the two societies? Two novels particularly impressed me with their answers to this question. E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* is not only a superb novel, but also an extended discussion of what happens to the people involved when cultures meet. Set in India towards the beginning of this century, the novel opens with a group of upper-class Moslems discussing whether it is possible for them to be friends with an Englishman.

This question of cross-cultural friendship and understanding turns out to be the central question of the book, and almost all of the characters introduced are trying desperately to make sense of people from cultures radically different from their own. Dr. Aziz, one of the Moslem leaders, is eager to understand the English, to appreciate their art, to learn thoroughly their language and their medical techniques. Adela Quested is the curious English traveler, earnestly seeking the "real India" and perhaps even willing to settle there. Cyril Fielding, the English principal of the Government College, is well educated, reasonable, and anxious to be friends with both Moslems and Hindus. Mr. Das, a Hindu magistrate, seeks to understand the English, and to reach out cautiously

to the Moslem leadership.

By the end of the novel, these people and many others have mingled and attempted friendship with disastrous results: all three major groups—Hindu, English, and Moslem—have suffered through a trial over an incident which occurred during an outing to a nearby cave, and the old prejudices and hatreds seem deeper entrenched than before. The question about cross-cultural friendship posed at the opening seems to be answered most clearly in the concluding pages of the book, in which even the sympathetic Dr. Aziz and the enlightened Mr. Fielding cannot patch up their friendship; the difference between their backgrounds is too great, and the social structures around them force the two men apart.

Forster seems to conclude that each of us is trapped in the culture in which we have been raised, able to understand completely the gestures, passions, and values only of our own people. Try as we may, even the most open-minded and eager of us cannot join completely—or even fully understand—another culture.

Charles Mungoshi reaches much the same conclusion in his *Waiting for the Rain*. The author, a Shona from Zimbabwe, describes in this novel what difficulties occur when a young African man, Lucifer, decides to accept a scholarship to study overseas. Though Lucifer, with his departure, decides to repudiate what is most precious to his family (ancestors, land, village friendships), Mungoshi makes it clear that this young man will not be able to wipe away his upbringing simply by leaving his homeland.

One indication of this is the fact that the decision is such an agonizing one for Lucifer; he consults a spirit-medium, discusses his options with several villagers, and has feverish dreams about the consequences of his choice. In addition, when it is time for him to leave, and a white priest arrives to pick him up, the priest seems so awkward, so out of place, that the reader realizes that Lucifer still shares far more with the people of his village than he can ever share with people the priest represents. A person may leave home, and even denounce the society which has shaped him or her, but none of us can simply do away with the countless lessons, lectures, and values we were given by the culture in which we were raised. *Waiting for the Rain* is not a great novel, but it is a powerful statement on the impossibility of escaping one's cultural heritage.

Both *Waiting for the Rain* and *A Passage to India* shaped my views on how to relate to the African society I was in by pointing out that cultural barriers are vast, and need to be approached with respect, even caution. I eventually came to see that while I could change my speech, my daily routine, and even my mannerisms, there were values and sensibilities I would never share with my neighbors. I would feel this most acutely when my neighbors and I would have an unexpected disagreement over a simple but fundamental point.

I recall vividly, for example, being chewed out by an elderly woman for corrupting her grandson by giving him the equivalent of a penny for running errands; I thought I was rewarding hard work, while she thought I was destroying obedience to the authority of his elders. As close as I was to some of the Batswana, especially the children, I think we resigned ourselves to the idea that a certain sense of

strangeness would always exist on both sides of our relationship. Perhaps the novel, with its peeks at the thinking and the relationships of the characters, is the best literary form for expressing the power of that feeling of otherness, of strangeness.

For each novelist who has written on clashing cultures, however, there have been several anthropologists, missionaries, or professional travelers who have labored patiently to explain one culture to another. John Mbiti, in his *African Religions and Philosophy* does just that, and does it well, for the westerner. With experiences from his own upbringing in East Africa, case studies from various parts of the continent, and a systematic and measured style of examination, Mbiti offers the outsider a glimpse of traditional African thinking on nature, time, and society. Especially interesting to me was his use of two Swahili terms, *sasa* and *zamani*, to categorize the traditional African view of time. *Sasa* time includes the present and recent past; it flows slowly into *zamani* time, which is the distant past. *Zamani* time is the time of the ancestors, and is preserved and revered in myth.

According to Mbiti, these two categories of time dominated traditional thinking on the world, and the distant future was not considered. This is fascinating and important reading for those of us who come from a culture which sometimes seems fixed on the future (I think now especially of our obsession with the year 2000). Mbiti's many insights, and his constant use of brief case studies and linguistic examples, made this book a good read and a broad view of African culture as perceived by an African.

And we sorely need that view, because the stereotypes of Africa which abound in our culture will

lose their strength only as we read more African writers. Chinua Achebe, in a lecture at the University of Massachusetts titled "An Image of Africa," spoke of western writers such as Joseph Conrad and

...the desire—one might indeed say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil for Europe, a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest....a place [Africa] where a man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality.

Harsh words, but there is much truth in them. As a corrective we need to read books on Africa by Africans—not by British novelists or Ivy League anthropologists. Any of Achebe's novels would make a good starting point for such reading, as would *The Joys of Motherhood*, by Buchi Emecheta, a Nigerian. Her novel, ironically titled, traces the hard life of an Ibo woman as she brings up her children in a changing Nigeria. Emecheta not only crafts an engrossing story, but also points out that most African women face a war on two fronts: against giving in completely to westernization and against the often-oppressive limitations placed on them by their traditional societies. Having fought this war herself, Emecheta writes convincingly of both the women who triumph in this situation, and those who are destroyed.

During my stay in Botswana I worshiped with the people of St. Patrick's Mission, a Roman Catholic congregation of about 200 in the village of Mahalapye. Serving this community were several Ursuline sisters and a Passionist priest. Through our worship, Bible studies, and meetings in the community, I came to know some of these leaders well; seldom, before or since, have I

seen such selflessness, sacrifice, and patience in church leadership. Here were Christian brothers and sisters — Australian, African, American, European — who had put behind them family and homes to serve as needed in Botswana. Of the books which they shared with me, I was impressed especially by the works of Henri Nouwen.

Nouwen, a Dutch priest who has traveled widely, has written several fine books on what it means to be a follower of Christ in the late twentieth century. My favorite was his *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. In it, Nouwen describes the movements Christians can make from hostility to hospitality; from illusion to prayer; and from loneliness to solitude. These movements are, in Nouwen's view, a matter of discipline and learning, but also a gift of God.

I remember especially his words on hospitality as the ministry of creating for others the possibilities for solitude; this was, for me, a new way of ministering, and it allowed me to respond in a new way to those around me in Mahalapye. Nouwen's words, simply expressed and drawn from several traditions, reassured me that despite all barriers of nationality, sex, or culture, God's work in the world continues, and the great cloud of witnesses continues to grow. And of all the voices that came to me through literature in Africa, that was perhaps the most important. □

Note: Chinua Achebe's lecture is reprinted in *Massachusetts Review*, Winter 1977, Volume XVIII, Number 4.

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Pluralism Open to the Voice of Tradition

J. Michael Utzinger

Unapologetic Theology by William Placher. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989. 178 pp, \$13.95 pbk.

Religious pluralism and dialogue are much on the mind of the theologians and philosophers of religion these days. The questions that have to be asked on such a subject are hard ones, perhaps especially difficult for those committed to traditional Christian beliefs. Regrettably, this issue is polarizing Christians. One's position on the exclusiveness of Christianity serves, in some places, as a litmus test for whether one is fit for academic life. Undoubtedly, some guidance in making our way through the issues of religious pluralism is desirable.

Wabash College professor William Placher is a theologian well-placed to provide such aid. He is conversant not only with contemporary theological movements, but with recent trends in philosophy and this enables him to bring light where darkness is more frequently the norm. In his book, *Unapologetic Theology*, Placher contends that new understandings of the Christian voice in a pluralistic conversation must be explored because current Enlightenment, liberal, and relativistic values are not systems compatible with genuine pluralistic dialogue.

Placher contends that the dominant model of knowledge in the West has been some version of philosophical foundationalism. According to this view, a belief can

count as knowledge only if it can be properly derived from acceptable foundational beliefs, knowable by any rational being. Foundational beliefs, available to any and all objective persons properly situated are the basis for all other beliefs. In our current intellectual climate, empirical science serves as the model for the appropriate type of foundationalism.

In these foundationalist systems faith, precisely because of its particular character, is not considered to be a certain or reliable foundation for justified beliefs. Because not all objective observers are convinced of the truthfulness of faith beliefs, these cannot serve as foundational beliefs from which other beliefs are rightfully derived. The result is that religion, morality, and metaphysics are thought of, at best, as an anthropological activity which has positive value for society or, at worst, as meaningless statements and irrational superstition. On this view religious beliefs, if they can be made sense of at all, tell us more about ourselves than they tell us about God or the world external to the believer.

Placher notes that most forms of Empiricism and Rationalism, the two dominant types of philosophical foundationalism bequeathed to us by the Enlightenment, have come under fire from contemporary philosophers. Typically, Placher maintains, forms of empiricism and rationalism are found to be self-referentially incoherent, that is, each theory fails to satisfy its own criteria for what counts as knowledge, and the beliefs that can actually be justified by foundationalist criteria are embarrassingly few. Foundationalist criteria strictly applied, one can know little more than one's own existence and the modifications of one's mind.

Placher states, thus, that foundationalist criteria for rationality are not acceptable for the Christian the-

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ologist who wishes to participate in intellectual dialogue:

If theologians try to defend their claims by starting with basic, foundational truths that any rational person would have to believe or observations independent of theory and assumption, they are trying to do something that our best philosophers tell us is impossible—not merely for religious beliefs but for any beliefs whatever. It makes no sense to demand that Christians undertake such a self-limiting discipline as the price of entry into contemporary intellectual conversation (34-35).

Even science cannot boast of some sort of unique claim of rationality. Placher effectively shows that modern science is as pluralistic as religion and philosophy. For example, Placher argues that one could, in a given case, choose to use either Euclidian or Riemann's (supported by Einstein's theory of relativity) geometry with little better reasoning than that one system works better than the other in certain situations. Placher suggests that there is no way of concluding one and only one correct answer. One's choice is undetermined by the data at hand. Scientific foundationalism cannot produce any sort of universal criteria of rationality; in fact, no system of thought can produce such universal criteria, impartial to all systems of thought, including its own.

In a similar fashion Placher critiques modern liberalism as the defender of Enlightenment values. In this case "liberal" is not used in its usual political sense. Placher defines liberalism as "a much broader tradition, beginning with the Enlightenment, of those often suspicious of tradition, who believe that society should not try to find a common vision of the good toward which we could work together. Rather, they accept that we will always have different religious and ethical ideas, and we are socially united only in procedures that preserve our rights to pursue those

different ideals without interference" (75). Liberalism asserts Enlightenment values such as the freedom of inquiry, the equality of humanity, the questioning of tradition. Placher uses Jurgen Habermas and John Rawls as examples of liberal thinkers. He concludes that, "for all their [Rawls and Habermas] commitment to tolerance and pluralism, these representatives of liberalism seem at crucial points to be advocates of a rather strong form of intellectual intolerance" (87). This is in reference to Rawls' conclusion that people not accepting justice as the ultimate standard of human action are irrational or insane and to Habermas' conclusion that those individuals not accepting his ideals for dialogue are primitive or backward.

Placher warns that the assertion that liberal values are anything more than culturally bound values, or that liberal values are universally applicable to all human beings, allows liberalism to assume an imperialistic role of intellectual superiority over other intellectual worldviews. Terms such as "uneducated" and "narrow minded" are intellectual euphemisms for imperialistic terms like "savage," "barbarian," or "pagan." These terms allow the liberal to dismiss anyone who does not live up to the intellectual status quo. Placher suggests that American liberals might have something to learn from cultures "more bound to shared ideals" than our own culture (87). In any case, to create a rule of intellectual conversation that rules out non-liberal cultural values, such as fidelity to a religious tradition, is nothing short of intellectual bigotry.

The other extreme from liberalism, according to Placher, is intellectual relativism. Placher notes Michael Foucault and Richard Rorty as the great critics of modernity and liberalism. Both Foucault and Rorty criticize attempts to cre-

ate any sort of globalizing discourse or theoretical foundations. Any such discourse or foundation, according to the relativist, will end up being a tool of repression used by those who have power. Placher notes that Foucault makes the point "with moral passion" that one must challenge the claims of reason (recalling that truth is defined by the those in power) when reason is used as a tool of repression (94). Rorty, on the other hand, is a little less emphatic. Rorty claims that the best one can do is simply to pursue "the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of 'us' as far as possible" (97). Placher states that Rorty wishes to give up notions of some sort of community, which is able to transcend social and natural differences or a non-parochial unity, because such a society is "an expression of an ahistorical human nature" (97).

Placher concurs that portions of the relativistic critique seem valid, for example, relativism's denial that there are universal standards of rationality. However, Placher is not satisfied with the conclusions that come out of the relativistic philosophies of either Foucault or Rorty. Foucault attempts to undermine criteria of "goodness" and "truth" because they are created by the powerful and lead to repression of the weak. Placher argues that "the moral force of his [Foucault's] attack depends upon our recognition that repression is a bad thing. That in turn seems to require some standard by which we can judge that freedom is better than repression—really better, objectively better" (94). But Foucault has no rational grounds for such a judgment because of his dismissal of objective standards of rationality. What we are left with is an arbitrary preference for freedom.

Placher believes that Rorty implicitly allies himself with the

ranks of the defenders of the Enlightenment because the "us" that Rorty is trying to extend ends up (in practice) creating a standard of rationality. Placher favorably quotes Richard J. Bernstein: "Despite Rorty's manifest pleas for extending the principle of tolerance, the latent content of what he says can lead to the worst forms of intolerance *unless* he is prepared to distinguish (even locally and historically) pernicious and benign forms of ethnocentric appeals" (101). By what criteria, however, can Rorty distinguish between pernicious and benign ethnocentrism having renounced all appeals to universally objective standards, standards of goodness and rationality external to a community?

Placher believes that there is an alternative to both Enlightenment/liberal values, which are latently intolerant, and relativistic values, which are unable to support any sort of positive attempt at true pluralistic dialogue. He agrees with the relativists that there is no universal standard of rationality; however, Placher follows Enlightenment/liberal values by insisting that it still is possible to make judgments of truth. The standard upon which one can make decisions of truth is located within one's own tradition. Dialogue, Placher insists, "does *not* require suspending all our previous beliefs or agreeing to appeal only to premises that would be accepted by any 'sane' person. Indeed, genuinely suspending all one's own beliefs—trying to wipe the slate clean—seems itself a recipe for insanity" (106). True pluralism has as its goal the most open and wide conversation possible, a conversation open even to those deeply committed to their tradition in its historic form. Placher admits that commitment to tradition can hinder conversation, but he adds that suspicion of tradition can be just as much of a hindrance. One must avoid the

"stultifying force of tradition, without refusing to listen to the voice of tradition altogether" (115).

There must, however, be limits on a "pluralism of truth" if one is to be able to have true pluralism of argument and justification. Placher observes that contemporary theologians and philosophers seems oddly uncomfortable with genuine religious pluralism. "They cannot accept the possibility that there may be just different, even conflicting, religions and no point from which to evaluate them except from within some one tradition or another" (144). There are two strategies, which this discomfort drives theologians and philosophers to subscribe to: (1) to claim that all other religions are implicit versions of one's own, or (2) to create a "neutral" standard by which one is able to judge all the religions. Placher uses Karl Rahner and John Hick, respectively, to point out the critical issues raised by these strategies.

Karl Rahner believes that there are people outside of the Christian faith who are "anonymous Christians," individuals who do not think of themselves as Christians but who, in reality, are. Rahner does not think that every person outside of Christianity is an anonymous Christian; however, all non-Christian belief systems contain the essence of Christianity. Placher notes that, to some extent, this seems plausible. The Christian believes that the Buddhist has been offered God's grace through Jesus, even though the Buddhist believes that he must break out of the wheel of *samsara*. The Christian might even believe that the Buddhist, who seeks truth by means of his Buddhist practices will, somehow, come closer to the reality of Jesus Christ. However, it is quite a different claim to contend that the Christian actually knows more about the nature of Buddhism (and its claims about reality), knows that Buddhism contains the essence of

Christianity, than the Buddhist herself does. Placher believes that this attitude is not only ethnocentric, it is insulting to the sincere believer of a faith different from one's own. It is but another form of imperialism.

John Hick has a different strategy than Rahner's; Hick creates a syncretism of beliefs, which he claims is the essence of all religions. Hick claims that the God of Christianity is only a different manifestation of one divine Real. In other words, the God of Christianity, the nirvana of Buddhism, and the Allah of Islam are all different phenomena of one divine noumenon. Placher believes that Hick's syncretistic core of religion is implausible, and with approval quotes Ninian Smart's assertion that it not reasonable "to think that there is sufficient conceptual resemblance between God and nirvana (as conceived in Theravada Buddhism) to aver that the Theravadin and the Christian are worshipping the same God (for one thing the Theravadin is not *worshiping*)" (143).

This disagreement, however, is not Placher's fundamental concern with Hick. Placher contends that Hick's theory of a common core of religious belief ends up being elevated to the status of a standard by which all religions are judged. Hick believes that his theory of the common ground of religion provides a neutral representative of "religion in general" (146). Therefore, Hick dismisses the traditional Christian claim of the incarnation of Christ, because such a doctrine claims a unique revelation of the Real. But uniqueness is something that Hick has already ruled out, any unique claims are, by Hick's standards core, peripheral and aberrations. Placher criticizes Hick because he "claims to want to foster a universal religious dialogue, but it turns out that evangelical Christians, Hasidic Jews, traditional Muslims, and so on are

not really eligible to join that dialogue, because they will be unwilling to accept the proposed rules of the game, rules that seem to emerge from a modern, Western, academic tradition" (146).

The Christian can and should be wholly convinced of her beliefs as a Christian, the Buddhist of his. These beliefs are not just isolated to respective Christian or Buddhist worldviews. Rather the Christian and Buddhist believe that their respective systems are wholly true (though not beyond critique) and make judgments accordingly. An individual cannot justify a belief outside the context of a tradition; however, the truth of that belief is not context dependent. Placher summarizes his position stating, "Serious dialogue indeed requires openness to change, but it also demands a sense of how significant changing one's faith would be" (149). Placher concludes that openness is important, but should not encourage the conversationalist to

occupy many different positions at once, because this is but another form of relativism.

The Christian converses with the Muslim in hope that she can become a better Christian. True openness does acknowledge that conversion is possible; however, this openness should not encourage a casual attempt to be a Buddhist or a Jew. Placher believes that to encourage such attempts asks the believer to betray his faith and gives the believer a rather superficial understanding of what it would mean to be a convert of another tradition. He claims that "if we are honest, we will admit that we stand somewhere. If we are serious, we will feel commitments to the place we stand. Those whose ideal of interreligious dialogue calls us to abandon such commitments as a precondition of conversation invite us either not to be honest or not to be serious" (149).

Placher rightly calls Christians to attend to their tradition identity,

to own their location in the Christian tradition. His critique of Enlightenment rationality and of relativism is, I believe, to the point. His grasp and presentation of contemporary philosophical discussion is accurate and clear. This book might be commended on these points alone.

More importantly, Placher provides contemporary theologians and philosophers of religion, as well as clergy and laypeople interested in these questions, with some guidance as to how they can engage in the contemporary discussion without sacrificing either intellectual integrity or their most basic identity. There are questions which he does not answer adequately—How are beliefs to be evaluated in light of one's tradition? How does tradition function as a standard? What is a tradition? Nevertheless, all readers will be assisted by the help Placher does provide in this work. □

Mama

i look into her grey eyes
no longer blue
years pour out
but they're not blue anymore
haven't been blue in a long time
Arab blood makes her shy
Arab with blue eyes
makes her think she's not as good, smart, acceptable
doesn't say what she feels
carries it like an ulcer
poisons her heart

afraid of her papa
thought he was death
her brother pushed her toward him
gentle man
quiet man
just like his daughter
coal miner and shopkeeper
died with black lungs
charred from deep below the earth
gave his children air
while he smothered in blackness

Chris Rice

