• Is the Constitution Neutral on the Existence of God?
• Sober Reflections on Compassion, Truth, and AIDS
• The Secularization of Vocation & the Worship of Work

CRESSET

A review of Literature, the Arts, and Public Affairs
December, 1987
CONSTANCE GENGENBACH

IN LUCE TUA

THE SECULARIZATION OF VOCATION AND THE WORSHIP OF WORK

BERNHARD HILLILA

A BABE IN A MANGER (Verse)

PETER AUGUSTINE LAWLER

BELIEF, NON-BELIEF, AND THE COURT

TRAVIS DUPRIEST

POEMS WITH NO NAMES: THE SACRED PATHWAY I (Verse)

LINDA FERGUSON

CULTURAL ILLITERACY?

CHARLES VANDERSEE

C.F.W. WALTHER REDIVIDED

BERNHARD HILLILA

AIR TRAFFIC (Verse)

JAMES COMBS

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF SCHOOL

LOIS REINER

AS DEGREED (Verse)

GAIL MCGREW EIFRIG

GAMESMANSHIP?

EDWARD BYRNE

FILM & THE NOVEL

THOMAS A. DROEGE

FAITH-FULL OPINIONS

DOT NUECHTERLEIN

"TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

DEPARTMENTAL EDITORS

JILL BAUMGAERTNER, Poetry Editor
RICHARD H. W. BRAUER, Art Editor
SARA COMBS, Copy Editor

ADVISORY BOARD

JAMES ALBERS

FREDERICK NIEDNER

RICHARD BAEPLER

MEL PIEHL

JAMES CARISTI

MARK SCHWEHN

ALFRED MEYER

SUE WIENHORST

BUSINESS MANAGERS

WILBUR H. HUTCHINS, Finance
BETTY WAGNER, Administration and Circulation

THE CRESSET is published monthly during the academic year, September through May, by the Valparaiso University Press as a forum for ideas and informed opinion. The views expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the preponderance of opinion at Valparaiso University. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor and accompanied by return postage. Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity. The Book Review Index and the American Humanities Index list Cresset reviews. Second class postage paid at Valparaiso, Indiana. Regular subscription rates: one year—$8.50; two years—$14.75; single copy—$1.25. Student subscription rates: one year—$4.00; single copy—$7.75. Entire contents copyrighted 1987 by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383, without whose written permission reproduction in whole or in part for any purpose whatsoever is expressly forbidden.

Above: Theodore C. Steele, American 1847-1926,
Summer Landscape, 1899, oil on canvas, 22 x 29 inches. Private Collection.

Cover: Theodore C. Steele, American 1847-1926,
Hill Forest—Winter Morning, 1912, oil on canvas, 22 x 29 inches. Private Collection.

These two paintings were on view in October at Valparaiso University as part of a special loan exhibit celebrating the achievements of the pioneer Indiana Impressionist painter, T. C. Steele. Included were examples of his dark Munich-manner landscapes as well as the brighter Brown County paintings.
Compassion, Truth, and AIDS

When Christians start to talk about AIDS, they rightly begin with expressions of compassion for its victims. So charity requires. This modern scourge takes its toll in terrible ways, and those who suffer from the disease (as well as their families) deserve our compassionate attention and our sympathy. We must attend to them and wait and endure with them; it is intolerable that those facing inevitable and often agonizing death should have their misery compounded by ostracism, indifference, or moralizing condemnation. One can only be appalled at the images of God that must be present in the minds of those who would presume to see the disease as an act of divine retribution for immoral behavior.

At a more public level, Christians—with other citizens of good will—should be active in encouraging government to act with utmost urgency to fund the research necessary to find an AIDS cure. Even from a vantage point of lay ignorance we recognize the extraordinary complexities that attend that search and we are aware as well that the research community cannot usefully absorb and allocate unlimited resources for any one project at any one time, but the critical nature of the situation dictates that we not let normally justified concern over waste hinder the search for an early scientific breakthrough, however long we know the odds against such a breakthrough to be.

In addition to the imperatives of personal compassion and public generosity, it is important to encourage a mood of sobriety, careful analysis, and steadiness of view as society addresses itself to the difficult social questions associated with the AIDS epidemic. That's unfortunately easier prescribed than practiced. Complaints of public "hysteria" on matters surrounding the AIDS issue have become almost as common as alarms concerning the disease itself. The problem is that the purported hysteria is so ill-defined, or is defined in such contradictory ways, that we are left uncertain as to just how we might go about maintaining our proper non-hysterical equilibrium. But sober truth-tellers we ought nonetheless try to be, even if truths about AIDS are notably difficult to sort out and isolate.

The complexities begin with defining the population that is at risk of infection from the AIDS virus. Is AIDS primarily a "gay disease"—with significant secondary target groups among hemophiliacs and intravenous (IV) drug users sharing contaminated needles—or is its present concentration in such groups an epidemiological fluke that will soon be superseded by a general "breakout" into the larger heterosexual population? The answer to this question is critical in assessing the danger of the epidemic to the public health of the nation. A disease largely restricted to homosexuals, hemophiliacs, and IV drug abusers remains a terrible and immediate problem for those within those populations—one that of course requires a sense of urgency among all of us to combat—but it does not take on the plague-like implications for the population as a whole that many have feared and anticipated.

Talk of a general breakout ("everyone is at risk") has been widespread not only in the popular media but among key personnel in the public health community, including most particularly the Surgeon General of the United States, C. Everett Koop, who has argued that AIDS is "exploding" into the heterosexual population. But now along comes a report in the November Commentary by Michael A. Fumento, "AIDS: Are Heterosexuals at Risk?" which argues persuasively that not only has such a breakout not yet occurred or begun to occur but that there is very little likelihood of anything like it happening in the foreseeable future. If Fumento is right—and we urge all interested parties to check his arguments for themselves—then a considerable part of our public conversation concerning AIDS needs to be re-evaluated and probably revised.

According to Fumento, the presumed recent increase in the incidence of AIDS among heterosexuals is a statistical artifact occasioned by dubious rearranging of categories by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the fear of an AIDS breakout a subsequent false extrapolation from those jumbled figures. In fact, he insists, the evidence available indicates that the population substantially at risk of contracting AIDS remains what it has always been—gays, IV drug users, hemophiliacs, and those who are regular sex partners of individuals within those categories.

Why the unlikelihood of breakout? Because, Fumento says, AIDS is "extraordinarily difficult" to transmit or contract. Unlike other sexually-transmitted diseases—syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes—AIDS is essentially blood-borne and cannot be transmitted simply by the juxtaposition of genitalia. It is not at all easily passed through vaginal intercourse, especially from women to men, and it is this fundamental difficulty of transmission that secures the protection of the heterosexual population. There is no good evidence to lead us to expect, Fumento says, a general breakout of AIDS from the present at-risk groups to the hetero-

December, 1987
The spread of the disease will have to be far more specific among gays. The more sexual encounters one engages in, the higher the likelihood of contracting the disease. Fumento cites a 1981 CDC study of homosexual AIDS victims that found that they had averaged 61 different sex partners a year.

All this suggests, Fumento concludes, that a truly honest and effective education program to arrest the spread of the disease will have to be far more specific and focused than has been the case to date: "Every dollar spent, every commercial made, every health warning released, that does not specify promiscuous anal intercourse and needle-sharing as the overwhelming risk factors in the transmission of AIDS is a lie, a waste of funds and energy, and a cruel diversion."

If Fumento's case concerning the nature of AIDS transmission and the relative safety of heterosexuals from that transmission is sound, what explains the large amount of public comment to the contrary? Ignorance, partly, a good portion of it understandable; AIDS, after all, is a recent phenomenon, and we are even yet in the learning state concerning many aspects of it. Prudence as well, particularly, one suspects, among public health officials; since there's a lot about the disease we don't yet know, since it is at least conceivable that heterosexuals might yet turn out to be widely at risk, it might be the wiser course to assume a worst-case scenario and protect against it.

But there would seem to be other factors at work in the evasive, even misleading way our public conversation about AIDS has sometimes been conducted. One would be the laudable desire to avoid having the AIDS debate turn into an occasion for gay-bashing. If the discussion of the disease focuses explicitly on certain sexual practices more prevalent in the gay community than outside of it, then it allows for the further stigmatizing of homosexuality as an enemy of the public good. A related consideration involves the mustering of public support for the allocation of financial and other resources to meet the AIDS challenge. One suspects that many public health officers and gay activists fear that emphasis on the gay-related aspects of the disease will make the rallying of the necessary support to fight AIDS more difficult (or, to put the matter in a more charitable light, the more widespread the AIDS threat is perceived to be, the more likely the possibility of forging a public consensus to combat it.)

Those concerns are entirely understandable. The discussion of the AIDS threat must remain resolutely focused on its public health aspects; concern over the practice of anal sex in this context must focus on the health questions involved, not on anyone's moral, esthetic, or other views on the practice or on those who engage in it. The message here must be that promiscuous anal sex can kill you, not that it is bad for your soul (though promiscuity of any kind most certainly is). Those in the Christian community who see homosexual behavior as a violation of the divine or natural order or who for whatever reason question its sanctioning in law have nonetheless a moral duty not to let those objections and reservations interfere with their zeal in seeing that the scourge of AIDS be overcome. In talking about AIDS, consideration of homosexuality qua homosexuality must be laid aside.

At the same time, however, elements of equivocation and evasion, however innocent the motives behind them, should not be allowed to corrupt the conduct of public policy debate. With respect to AIDS, generalized admonitions to the public to indulge only in "safe sex" or intimations that heterosexuals are as likely as gays to be at risk obscure the truth and make more difficult a concerted attack on the disease.

Besides which, promulgation of a myth of widespread heterosexual susceptibility to AIDS must sooner or later be found out. What sort of reaction can we expect, Fumento asks, when a few years down the road people begin to notice that heterosexuals are not getting the disease and they catch on that the general public has been duped into an unnecessary panic? Then we will likely learn what we should have known all along: that the most responsible policy for AIDS would have been to tell the fullest known truth from the beginning.
THE SECULARIZATION OF VOCATION AND THE WORSHIP OF WORK

Reflections on the Meaning of Christian Vocation

( Editor's Note: This is the first part of a two-part essay. )

Today's college students and faculty have many confused associations with the term vocation. Imagine a group of them trying to define the term.

At a church college someone would surely mention the Christian vocation. One is called by God, so vocation must be a good thing. But called exactly to what? A student might comment that vocation has to do with work, perhaps a life's work, the academic vocation. This topic I will take up in the second part of this essay.

Our imaginary college might have at least one secularist, who would point out that many people have lived lives which could be defined as callings. They have helped the world, or pursued knowledge, and all the while explicitly denied the name of a Caller. The secularist might mention the vision of calling in artists such as Camus or Thomas Mann, the academic calling in Max Weber, the priesthood of music claimed by Wagner, and the healing role claimed for psychoanalysis by Freud.

Here an intrepid defender of the liberal arts might interrupt, and change the subject entirely, to bewail the dangers of vocationalism—mere technical training directed toward marketability, destructive of the true ends of higher education. S/he might indignantly point out that such training is not vocation at all, but a corruption of language revealing the unfortunate secularization undergone by the term. Speakers for Christian vocation might agree, and identify secularization as the evil force that would allow God's call to degenerate into Camus' practice of literary art, or Freud's psychoanalysis.

History, according to one definition, is "all the parts you can remember, including one hundred and three good things," a few bad ones, and two genuine dates. For many people, secularization clearly belongs in the category of "bad things."

History, according to one definition, is "all the parts you can remember, including one hundred and three good things," a few bad ones, and two genuine dates.¹ According to the participants in this imaginary conversation, secularization could clearly be added to the category of "bad things." But has the secularization of the Christian concept of vocation really been an unfortunate development in Western history? It is my contention that it has not. Rather, the secularization of the concept of calling has allowed Christians a more vivid experience of the meaning of God's Grace and Judgment within human life. The seculum, or this age, can never simply be dismissed as worldly and evil because for Christians, as Martin Marty has so eloquently asserted, "this age is still something that unfolds under the creative and governing power of God. And though the demonic may be present in it, this world is also God's world."² It is God's creation, and in it he became and becomes flesh.

What then is Christian vocation and how has sec-

¹Paraphrased from W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, 1066 and All That (New York, 1951).

Constance Gengenbach completed this essay shortly before her death from cancer in early September at the age of 42. She was Associate Professor of History and Senior Tutor of the Paracollege at St. Olaf College.

December, 1987
ularization affected it? At the outset I should say that I realize defining Christian vocation properly requires a vast amount of exegesis, and a fully developed doctrine of the church, of the ordained ministry, and of all of ethics. There is indeed bountiful wealth here for the theologian, but embarrassment and some terror for the historian. So I will try to serve up the pie of Christian vocation historically rather than theologically, by tracing the original meaning of the term and what happened to it as it encountered the changing circumstances of several centuries. Since it will be impossible to avoid theological issues completely, I must confess in advance that I will wander through that garden not as a systematic reaper, but simply to pick a few flowers that attract my eye.

How was the biblical concept of calling transformed into worldly work? Considerable attention has been devoted to this subject since German sociologist Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* exploded on the scholarly scene in essay form in 1904. Weber identified the Reformation concept of divine or godly vocation in the world—especially in its Calvinist variation—as a primary contributor to the western mentality that created capitalism. He also noted the difference between this usage of the term and both biblical and medieval uses, and saw the Reformation concept as a more secularized version of calling.

While compared to most medieval notions the Reformation did represent a secularization of vocation, that secularization helped to recapture the vivid incarnational quality present in the biblical use of the term. In both Old and New Testament, God's call is by Grace and to Grace, a call to share in his blessings. It is not a call out of the world, but an encounter with God and his purposes in the world. The Old Testament shows this dimension most richly, because it covers a period of a thousand years, and shows the covenant people as they lived out their faith in the context of their culture.

### In the Old Testament, calling is self-disclosure on God's part, and the human response is obedience. The call is corporate, addressed to all Israel, but obedience is individual. To be obedient means to show forth justice and bear God's light to all.

In the Old Testament, calling is self-disclosure on God's part, and the human response is obedience. The call is corporate, addressed to all Israel, but obedience is individual. To be obedient to God's call means to show forth justice and bear his light to all nations. (Is. 45:22, 42:4, 49:3-6) It may be that the word obedience is insufficient because it is predicated on a culture-bound, patriarchal vision of a God who is external to creation and unrelated to his creatures. If so, one could describe the appropriate human response to God's call not as obedience to authority but cooperation. Through the willing use of life and work to achieve those ends of bringing forth peace and blessings.

---

justice, one can participate in the world as a creature truly in God's image. In either case, however, response to the call is in the activities of everyday life, work among them.

In the Old Testament, calling is not completely separate from work, nor is it submerged in it. God’s call includes the whole of Israel’s life—work, leisure, and worship. Claus Westermann points out that the Hebrew word used in the Genesis charge to “cultivate the earth” gradually came to have a much broader meaning, of serving God, and even of worship, or cult.

Response to God’s call is therefore within and through life, including work. Calling touches not just some work, but all kinds. There are special religious callings of particular individuals (Abraham, Joseph, Moses, the prophets) but they function as part of the covenant with the whole people, and never are their professions distinguished from other kinds of work. Nor does the Bible give evidence of a distinction between manual and mental labor. Meaning in work depends on the purpose in the worker’s life—on his calling—rather than on the kind of work, its social utility, or the quality of the achievement. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Ps. 127:1). Neither is work an absolute value in the Old Testament. The commandment to rest on the seventh day points beyond work “to the whole of human life, whose goal is not the performance of work, but something beyond that.” The purpose of the whole, both work and rest, is the enjoyment of God’s promised blessings.

In the New Testament, the figure of Jesus can be seen as the representation of perfect vocation in the Old Testament sense, in that he was fully aware of the central purpose of life and perfectly faithful to it. The life and death of Jesus also seals the promise implicit in the Old Testament, that God comes to us incarnate within the world. In his epistles, Paul continues the Old Testament usage of calling (klēsis) by seeing it as both a summons of the community and as God’s election or choosing of each believer. The calling is to faith in the promises of God in Jesus; it is questionable whether Paul in I Cor. 7:20 added earthly station to the meaning of vocation. This is more likely to have been Luther’s innovation in translating the passage.

The New Testament is so focused on the message about Christ and about the first century of the church’s existence that it is left to the rest of church history, our own age included, to work out the full implications of the relationship of Christ’s call to discipleship with work and daily life. Clear indications are given in the New Testament, however. Especially in his parables Jesus weaves the call to repentance and salvation into the whole fabric of everyday life. Claus Westermann says of the parables,

It is only when we see these against the background of the similes, metaphors, and comparative aphorisms in the Old Testament that it becomes clear that they deal very largely with what we call civilization and culture. Jesus’ parables show a keen appreciation of this part of life. The correspondence between different things which is expressed here means that man’s labour and his civilization and culture are included when we talk about God’s activity. In this way Jesus includes these aspects of life in the total happening between God and man, the Creator and his creation.

If man’s work is part of “the total happening between God and man” to which the New Testament testifies, this is not by any means the whole story about work. Both New and Old are rich in warnings about excessive focus on human earthly activity. Perhaps most notable in the New Testament is the story where Jesus berates the rich farmer (Luke 12:13-41) for thinking that work well done is sufficient for human beings. The oft-quoted injunction to “consider the lilies of the field” in the Sermon on the Mount bears the same message. The Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel is a model of warning against overvaluing human achievements.

What then is the verdict about calling in the Bible and its relationship to work? Calling is clearly to salvation and to the proclamation of the promises of God, but it takes shape in human lives as they are lived, including human work. Eastern Christianity seems to have grasped this biblical vision better than the West. According to Gregory of Nyssa, man is a being with a special “vocation to spread the Grace of God through the whole creation, animate and inanimate.”

In the Western church the definitions of calling as God’s summons and election were maintained and even extended in infant baptism to those not actively receiving the call. But the sense of living out the call in daily life was almost entirely collapsed into monasticism. Although there was an occasional intimation that the believer must recognize God’s presence in daily life and work, this was not called vocation. Instead, voca-

7Soelle, To Work and To Love, pp. 17, 66.
8Westermann, p. 82.
9Ibid., p. 90.
10Kittel, pp. 492-93.

December, 1987
tion was identified with the decision to seek "Christian perfection" through poverty, celibacy, and the contemplative life. The lives of Augustine and his friends as seen in the Confessions attest to this equation. When they experienced the call of God, it meant that they had to leave "worldly" occupations, wife and family, and if they were unable to do so, it was a cause of terrible sadness for them and an experience of what they saw as sin.

Although work later played an important part in most monastic rules, it was not primarily work which connected monks to vocation, but rather their works of the spirit—religious observances, contemplation, and the dedication of their lives to God. By the later Middle Ages the very words vocatio and Ruf meant only the official calling of a candidate to a clerical benefice by those who had power of ecclesiastical appointment. Christian vocation was thus split off from the ordinary life of human beings in the world. Only in the late Middle Ages with the rise of mysticism do we see a reinstitution of the biblical notion of worldly work as an arena for receiving and obeying the summons of God. Max Weber reports that Johannes Tauler saw divine calling in all work, and even found peasants spreading their fields with manure superior in godliness to clergy who don't do their calling (Ruf). 15

The connection of vocation with labor and life in the world becomes firmer with a pre-Reformation figure such as Wycliff, and especially with Luther and whomever his reformation touches. Probably the clearest passage is Luther’s sermon on John 21:19-24. 16

You may reply: But how if I am not called? Answer: How is it possible that you are not called? You have always been in some state or station; you have always been a husband or wife, a boy or girl, or servant. Picture before you the humblest state. Are you a husband, and you think you have not enough to do in that sphere to govern your wife, children, domestics, and property so that all may be obedient to God and you do no one any wrong? . . . Again: Are you a son or daughter, and do you think you have not enough work with yourself, to continue chaste, pure, and temperate during your youth, obey your parents, and offend no one by word or deed? . . . Again: Are you a domestic servant, and do you think you would go idle if you were to serve your lord or mistress with all faithfulness as your station and orders require, and also keep your mouth under control as with a bridle? . . . And again: Are you a prince, a lord, spiritual or secular—who has more to do than you, in order that your subjects may do right, preserve peace, and wrong is done by no one? . . . See, as no one is without some commission and calling, so no one is without some kind of work, if he desires to take heed to continue in his calling, look to himself, faithfully do what is commanded, and serve God and keep his commandments; then he will have so much to do that all time will be too short, all places too cramped, all resources of help too weak.

The passage clearly indicates that work in the world is not merely profane or secular. It is not an arena from which God is absent, but the proper one in which God is to be served. Not just high social status but also work of all kinds is the appropriate context for response to God's grace and forgiveness by service to others. Again Luther:

If you are a manual laborer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools—at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales or yardstick or measure—and you will read this statement inscribed on them. Everywhere you look, it stares at you. Nothing that you handle every day is so tiny that it does not continually tell you this, if you will only listen. Indeed, there is no shortage of preaching. You have as many preachers as you have transactions, goods, tools, and other equipment in your house and home. All this is continually crying out to you: "Friend, use me in your relations with your neighbor just as you would want your neighbor to use his property in his relations with you.” 17

Luther’s position does accommodate calling to the secular dimension of everyday human life, and so “secularizes” vocation beyond what was the case in the Middle Ages. Is this good or bad? It depends on how one views the saeculum, life in this world. If it is opposed to Christian life, the spirit and the achievement of God's will, then secularization is clearly bad. If God is incarnate in this world and works his ways within its realities, the secularization of vocation is in fact good, because it leads people back to the arena where God's promise and his judgment can be encountered.

The difficulty with assessing the real value of Luther's view of vocation is that his theology is neither radically dualistic nor fully incarnational. The incarnational side of Luther's theology is to be found not only in the vision of calling quoted above, but also with great power elsewhere in his works. His delight in nature is such that he could scold Erasmus for his indifference to the sheer beauty of God's creation. His sermons on Christmas, baptism, and most of all his understanding of the Eucharist show deep appreciation

16Luther, Church Postils, Gospel for the Day of St. John the Evangelist, (Works, vol. 22).
17Luther, Sermon on Matthew 5-7 (1532), Works, 21:237.
of the way in which God's grace is to be found in, with, and under the experiences and activities of ordinary human life.

Especially in his writings on education Luther is quite explicit in affirming that the gifts of language, reason, and song are from God, and that God expects them to be used. "God will not perform miracles as long as men can solve their problems by means of the other gifts he has already given them." Luther expects Christians to live their faith actively, and they can be helped to such a life by this-worldly knowledge.

If children were instructed and trained in schools . . . they would hear of the doings and sayings of the entire world, and how things went with various cities, kingdoms, princes, men and women. Thus they could in a short time set before themselves as in a mirror the character, life, counsels, and purposes—successful and unsuccessful—of the whole world from the beginning; on the basis of which they could then draw the proper inferences and in the fear of God take their own place in the stream of human events. 

**Luther's incarnational view of life is tempered and intermingled with strong language of dualism between the Two Kingdoms. There is the left-hand Kingdom of Law and the right-hand Kingdom of the Gospel.**

In his own proud but ironic relationship to his German heritage, Luther exhorts his people:

> We have been German beasts all too long. Let us for once make use of our reason, that God may perceive our thankfulness for his benefits, and other nations see that we too are human beings, able either to learn something useful from others or to teach them in order that even through us the world may be made better.

These passages have in common the affirmation of secular knowledge and activity. God not only provides the gifts but sets the context and standard for our activity. It is typical of Luther to say "in the fear of God," but we could also say in praise or love of God. The warning against excessive investment in the wisdom or work of the world is in either case clear.

But Luther did not stop with such a warning. He developed an elaborate structure of established authorities which also limited and commanded the way the Christian responds to the love and fear of God in daily life. Thus his incarnational view is tempered and intermingled with strong language of dualism between the Two Kingdoms. There is the left-hand Kingdom of Law and the right-hand Kingdom of the Gospel, but both are God's and He works in both. The orders of creation (state, family, and church) provide structure and order in the left hand kingdom and operate by coercion as a punishment and constraint for sin, yet they are also God's good gifts to bless human life. Work is the punishment for sin, but also a "mask" of God through which we are blessed. Work is an avenue for loving service to others, yet it comes in the shape of obey! obey! obey! authorities at all levels of life.

Therefore God speaks to us and deals with us through the ministers of the Word, through parents and superiors, lest we be carried about by every wind of doctrine. Let children listen to their parents, let the citizens listen to the magistrate, let the Christian listen to the elder and the ministers of the Word, let the pupil listen to the teacher. Outside of this Word all life is damned and all conduct doomed. But if the Word is present, I have sure consolation: whether I am a father, mother, or son, I hear the word and I know what I ought to believe and do, for God speaks to me in that very station of life in which I happen to live.

It is scarcely surprising that there has been lively historical debate about whether Luther was a dualist. The issues in this debate are interesting, and not irrelevant to our problem of vocation for the twenty-first century. Of the dualists (Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, and R. H. Tawney), Troeltsch is the most sophisticated. He claims that Luther froze vocation into the public duties of one's social calling, to be called Christian not because of love or service but because of obedience to God's Law expressed in the orders of creation. "Increasingly the Lutheran ethic is summed up in the following characteristic features: confidence in God founded on his grace and the love of one's neighbor, which is exercised in the social duties of one's calling, combined with an obedient surrender to the order of society. . . ." The radical ethic of love and service is confined, according to Troeltsch, to personal relationships; thus no demands for social change or justice can be founded upon it. Tawney sums up the dualists' position on Lutheran social ethics with the statement that social policy was allocated to "that rare

---

9Luther, *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524) *Works*, 44:356.  
10Ibid., 368-69.  
11Ibid., 372.
monster, in the age of Machiavelli and Henry VIII, the God-fearing prince.23

Those who reject the dualists’ arguments—from Karl Holl and Gustav Wingren through George Forell, William Lazareth, and most modern Lutheran theologians—deny any inclination on Luther’s part to apply the radical demands of love to only one part of existence and ignore the rest. Instead they see Luther’s doctrine of vocation as a radical reassertion of Christ over culture within the field of daily work. “Luther insisted that God does not call you to do something but to be something, a Christian servant. Every person has an economic occupation, but the Christian views it as part of his/her religious vocation.”24 Despite this verdict, it is hard to hold on to an incarnational view of vocation when reading Luther. It is too often overwhelmed by his dualistic language and the emphasis on authority that dominated the social world of which he was a part.

This authoritarian social view dominated Lutheran practice in the centuries after Luther. While Lutheranism may have produced a sound evangelical personal ethic, it produced no equivalent social ethic.25 Patriarchy, authority, and public passivity became the watchwords of orthodox Lutherans through the nineteenth century. According to H. Richard Niebuhr, Luther’s answer to the Christ-and-culture question was that of a dynamic, dialectical thinker. Its reproductions by many who called themselves his followers were static and undialectical. They substituted two parallel moralities for his closely related ethics. As faith became a matter of belief rather than the fundamental, trustful orientation of the person in every moment toward God, so the freedom of the Christian man became autonomy in all the special spheres of culture. It is a great error to confuse the parallelistic dualism of separated spiritual and temporal life with the interactionism of Luther’s gospel of faith in Christ working by love in the world of culture.26

By separating the two kingdoms Lutherans hoped to preserve the Gospel from corruption by earthly ambitions and concerns. In effect they only removed the perspective of God’s promises of wholeness, mercy, peace, and justice from public life. When the temporal kingdom is completely autonomous it is not treated incarnationally but carnally, where no aim or standard of aspiration is acknowledged beyond what is given in the world itself. Thus for politics only the will of the prince remains, and for work only the professional standards of job performance or production.

This approach is unfortunately all too familiar. A recent article describes it as “limiting God’s place in the workplace to providing talents in the beginning and the rewards at the end.”27 According to George Forell, it is “the belief that work itself is service to God... that faithfulness in our job saves us, that the life of Christian discipleship is achieved when we are good shoemakers, good butchers, good teachers, good welders, good pastors, and last but by no means least, good bankers.”28

**Lutherans are not responsible for the final conversion of work as vocation into work as worldly success.**

**Ironically it was not Lutheran dualism but the opposite stance in Calvinism which effected the change.**

Lutherans are not responsible for the final conversion of work as vocation into work as worldly success. Ironically it was not Lutheran dualism but the opposite stance in Calvinism which effected the change. The story is a complicated one, told brilliantly by Max Weber and provided with ample evidence from among seventeenth-century Puritan laymen by R. H. Tawney. Simply stated, the concern of the Calvinist to find signs of his election led to the formation of rigorous, orderly, and moral habits of life, and also the inclination to see worldly success as a mark of divine favor.

As Weber puts it, “if the God whose hand the Puritan sees at work in all the occurrences of life shows to one of his elect a chance of profit, he must do it with a purpose. Hence the faithful Christian must follow the call by taking advantage of the opportunity.”29 Worldly success and wealth therefore become both marks of election and Christian duties. The poor, on the other hand, were no longer God’s special children but both abandoned and derelict in their duty.

25Ibid., p. 53.
29Weber, Protestant Ethic, pp. 176-177. Tawney has shown convincingly that the change was carried out in the teeth of the majority of Puritan clergy, who continued to condemn the active pursuit of wealth through interest on investment as the sin of usury.
Weber's thesis was that both the inspiration to be successful and the orderly and simple habits of life rendered the Calvinist particularly suitable to create the first rational capitalist economy. Over this claim and over the role of socio-economic factors in general in the Reformation, scholarly controversy still rages eighty years later. However, this concerns us much less than the portrait of work and its meaning that had developed among Protestants by the seventeenth century, often in the teeth of opposition from their own clergy.

With the consciousness of standing in the fullness of God's grace and being visibly blessed by Him, the bourgeois business man, as long as he remained within the bounds of formal correctness, as long as his moral conduct was spotless and the use to which he put his interests was not objectionable, could follow his pecuniary interests as he would and feel that he was fulfilling a duty in doing so. It gave him the comforting assurance that the unequal distribution of the goods of this world was a special dispensation of Divine Providence, which in these differences, as in particular grace, pursued secret ends unknown to men.30

Success or failure in the world had become a mark of God's election or rejection, the wages of either righteousness or sin. While God's seal was upon such work, he did not become flesh and dwell in it. Instead it was a "contraction of the territory in which the spirit of religion was conceived to run." 31 As the world of work became completely material with little incarnational content, Christian calling again became identified with formally religious work.

Calling now belonged to the pastor, Luther's healthy "secularization" of vocation was de facto reversed, and the original biblical interplay between calling and work was lost. Pietistic and evangelical revivals periodically attempted to revivify the connection, but they more frequently associated calling with specifically religious work such as evangelization, or with personal moral behavior, frequently revolving around the non-use of alcohol. Christian vocation as work in the world was not a central issue.

To what extent can we in the twentieth century celebrate work as an avenue for Christian vocation? The slow slide of Christian vocation into work that occurred up through the seventeenth century both inflated and degraded our view of work. On one hand success in the economic world became a sign of God's election, and therefore of ultimate significance. Work not marked by economic rewards—the dull, mechanical daily struggle in which so many live—was also affirmed as God's will, as punishment for sin and a test of obedience. In neither case did this carnal version of vocation allow faith a way to hold the world of work accountable to a higher standard for human life. Thus work stood autonomous and was blessed, but not judged.

The meaning of work was also deflated, however. The work itself was not important, only the obedience or punishment it represented. The Protestant tradition in particular belittled the human capacity to contribute through work to the achievement of God's purposes for human life. 32 In this way, the modern carnal concept of vocation as work helped reconcile people to meaningless, pernicious, or degrading work, and render them passive to economic injustice.

The carnalized vocation of work has also served to exacerbate our divisions from one another. Poor from rich, unsuccessful from powerful, manual laborers from professionals, the technically trained from the liberally educated—these divisions are realities, but carnalized views of vocation buttressed them by the rhetoric of theology, liberal education, and idealist philosophy, and reinforced aggressive individualism by continually narrowing community.

There is no fruitful answer to our confusion about work in dualistic theology. It will not help to lecture our students or parishioners on the evils of self-seeking and the duties of love to the brother, and solicit them to abandon the flesh and seek the spirit. Nor can we simply say "do your work carefully and well, because God is in it, somewhere." What is needed is a genuinely incarnational view of work, which does not deny the self, but sets its relationship to the other; which does not deny the secular, but sees in it both Grace and Judgment; which does not renounce the private, but fulfills it in the public and communal.

The thread of work as vocation meets especially the church college audience from many different directions. One way is in the academic vocation claimed by faculty, and that will be the subject of the second part of this article. For now, what of the work our students will encounter? Colleges are part of a complex technical-industrial economy. They have traditionally provided skills which foster mobility and often lead to careers of considerable social status and/or economic power.

The economy which provides the framework for our work life now is at the stage of service capitalism, but its growth sectors are dominated by very sophisticated "high tech" industries. We have industries which once employed less skilled labor, but they are in serious decline. Educational, human, and geographic barriers prevent alleviation of those social and economic dislo-

30Ibid., p. 177.
31Tawney, p. 228.
32Soelle, pp. 66, 72-73.
cations. Our economy is based on consumption rather than geared to production of durable goods, and our consumptive habits are inflated still more by mass media and advertising. On the international scene, it is necessary for us to have a whole cadre of underdeveloped countries in a state of permanent dependency to provide us with raw materials, investment opportunities, and markets.

Liberal arts colleges, church colleges among them, offer a fine education to groups who can benefit in this state of society. Frequently they become professionals or managers, or go on to school for necessary training to become leaders in high tech jobs. Many, though certainly not all, come to our colleges as economically and educationally privileged young people. Urban and suburban geography and the demographics of the geographic regions where some church colleges are located offer many of our students no substantial exposure to urban or racial problems in their life before college. They share ideals of personal liberation and self realization, and are optimistic about their own futures, but they are pessimistic about the institutional future of our society and the world. Some care deeply about this but feel powerless, anonymous, uninvolved. Others are indifferent to social concerns or find politics dirty. They are almost all obsessed with what job they will get, what work they will do.

Many of our students are or will be "yuppies." The following assessment of yuppie culture comes from James M. Wall:

What seems to be missing at the heart of much of this popular culture is what we might call a "religious sensibility." That term is not meant to suggest simply piety or churchgoing, though both could be included in such a description. Religious sensibility suggests a willingness to take seriously one's place in the world as a member of a loving community linked tightly with all other living creatures and living things. It also presumes that reality has a transcendent dimension.

This is a dark assessment. It sets aside for the moment all those who enter into careers of service to others, and they are many. We have not personally created this world, but in it many of us must live out our work lives. What can church colleges offer to help us ally our work to our vocation as Christians?

One perspective is the theological one. The world of work can be affirmed as a positive avenue for service to God, for participation in his continuing creation of the world, but it must also be held accountable to a higher purpose than maximum production or profit or personal success. We must disarm the deadly earnest success orientation and worship of work shared by our students—and perhaps by us as well—and replace them with a bigger view of life's purpose. This higher purpose for work has a public dimension. Dorothy Soelle has called it affirmation of life rather than death by fighting against the disposition of the West to extermination shown in the rape of the earth, the war against the poor, and the threat of nuclear annihilation. The affirmation of life in work will take the shape of what Joseph Sittler has called "the care of the earth." It will also be willing to meet the needs created by economic structures with "structured love" in the form of social justice.

The affirmation of life in work will take the shape of what Joseph Sittler has called "the care of the earth." It will also be willing to meet the needs created by economic structures with "structured love"—social justice.

The affirmation of life rather than death has a more personal side too. It leads us to accept anew the biblical view that the person who works is more important than the product, and that God's call to personhood is lived out in many contexts, not just in work. The acknowledgment of a fuller sense of personhood can in turn help us toward an allegiance to community in the broadest sense, of connectedness to the whole human race.

We can also offer students a richer understanding of what work will mean in their lives by marshalling all the various disciplinary perspectives available—psychological ideas of human fulfillment in work and in rest, sociological ideas about work in organization, economic ideas about labor organization, and historical treatments from the west and non-west about differing patterns and valuations for work. In our concern for our students' future we have supported them too much in their worship of work. We now need to provide antidotes both theological and disciplinary for the resulting imbalance.

See Herman Diers, "Education for Participatory Citizenship" (Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa, 1984).

Finally, we can challenge students to a richer understanding of their own personhood if we challenge their total self-investment in paid work. Christian vocation is singular—one is called by God to join in completing his creation and enjoying his grace in all life. But the arenas for encountering and living that calling are multiple, and all of equal value. There is no natural, patriarchal division of labor that says certain spheres belong to woman and others to man. It is not greed and selfishness to want to share in many settings for vocation (working, parenting, childing, spouses, volunteering) as long as they are viewed as settings for encountering grace and judgment and not as ends in themselves. The demand for total allegiance to the workplace and the elevation of economic productivity above all other dimensions of human life is idolatry, and we must say so. It does not matter if that work setting is General Motors, or the local congregation, or the church college.

The history of Christian vocation and work challenges us to reflect our incarnational view of vocation in the policies of our institutions. This holds true for our policies as employers and investors as well as educators. Is our policy toward workers good stewardship of the college resources or is it stingy and exploitative? Is our investment policy good stewardship or global exploitation? Do we affirm the multiple settings for the vocation of our employees, or do we demand their time and energy all for ourselves? Do we innovate in developing employment policies that bespeak peace, dignity, and reconciliation, or are we too conservative (of our possessions) for that?37

These are radical demands. Our current confusion of Christian vocation with any kind of work has not helped us to set the limits properly between what we should celebrate and what we should renounce. Yet if we seriously confront the demands of an incarnational understanding of vocation for our lives as academics and for our institutions, it is a terrifying prospect. We long for the protective paradoxes of the Two Kingdoms to let us keep doing what we, and everyone else, have been doing all along.

Indeed, there are risks in the radical demands of an incarnational view of vocation, and to face them it requires an equally radical faith—a faith that God is at work in the world we face, not only to sustain it but to bless it, and to make it more just and more loving.

37 Some interesting ways to include grace in the workplace are mentioned in “Clairton, USA.” They include removal of merit ratings and other “objective” evaluations of service, “deep delegation” of authority, needs as a determinant of income and hours (e.g. flex-time). Also rich in this regard is John Simmons and William Mares, Working Together (1983).

As H. Richard Niebuhr said of the reality Luther tried so hard to capture in his theological concepts:

These are abstractions; the reality is the continuing dialogue and struggle of the person with God, with its questions and answers, its divine victories that look like defeats, its human defeats that turn into victories.38

Truly secularized or incarnational vocation means living this dialogue, and it is a very good thing.

38 Christ and Culture, p. 158.

A Babe in a Manger

Angels quickly diagnosed the child’s humanity and wept: “A birth defect in the genotype, passed down in the Adamic gene through Mary, skipping the Father’s divinity—such a creature begins to die the day it is born!”

Understanding perfectly the empathy of millions of sinless minions, yet absolutely unworried about any recessive genes he’d passed on, the Father buoyed all spirits: “He’s a normally human phenotype, of a species with no wings but with navel, tear ducts, hands and feet, sides and back, ears, eyes and tongue—all vulnerable but wondrously working natural human parts.”

Passing out the lyrics and the scores for the various voices of the angelic community chorus with harp accompaniment, he cued them in: “Sing! For heaven’s sake, sing, voicing my rejoicing, and send out announcements: the baby and mother are doing well, and the Father is proud of his Son!”

Bernhard Hillila

December, 1987
BELIEF, NON-BELIEF, AND THE COURT

Is the Constitution Neutral on the Existence of God?

According to the Supreme Court, the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment requires that government not only remain absolutely neutral in the disputes of opinion among the various forms of religious belief, but also in the dispute between belief and non-belief. The Constitution in no way requires or allows government to be a partisan of God's or the Creator's existence. Nothing must be said or done that would deny equal respect to the opinions of non-believers.

This principle of neutrality, since it was promulgated by the Court in *Everson v. Board of Education* in 1947, has remained controversial. It, in truth, has become more controversial as the Court has deduced more and more of its implications in, as Justice Stevens put it in *Wallace v. Jaffree* (1985), "the crucible of litigation." Although the Court has, along the way, made a few prudential concessions to time-tested practices such as prayer by legislative chaplains, its general propensity has been to promote the total secularization of public life.

This principle of neutrality, with its practical effect of more or less total secularization, can reasonably be challenged on at least two levels. First, it can be wondered whether American "public morality" or "public philosophy" can be articulated persuasively without any reference to God's existence. If "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" are not the foundation of our political morality, then what is? Does not America's cherished idea of equality, in particular, depend upon the common perception that all human beings are "created equal" and hence have, as Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "God-given rights"? When Richard John Neuhaus not long ago wrote powerfully of *The Naked Public Square*, his fear was that the commonly-perceived political purposes of Americans would dissolve if stripped of all religious or divine support.

A second set of questions about the principle of neutrality concerns its practicality. Can government really extend equal respect to both belief and non-belief? Can all opinions about religious matters be given the same dignity? Perhaps this unlimited or promiscuous openness will inevitably tend to favor non-belief or skepticism about the truth of any particular assertion about divine reality. Such a denial of the reality of the supra-human could not possibly be conceived by a decent people as a destruction of morality or human distinctiveness. Hence it will have the propensity to establish "secular humanism" as America's most credible and respected view about the foundation of morality and politics.

These two challenges to the principle of neutrality were thrust forcefully into public discussion early in 1987 by Federal District Court Judge Brevard Hand of Mobile, Alabama. He banned forty-five textbooks from the public schools on the grounds that their use constituted the establishment of the religion of secular humanism. Although in some respects even sympathetic observers must consider this decision an imprudent assertion of morally conservative judicial activism, its guiding thought may be theoretically sound and hence serve to instruct Americans about the meaning of their fundamental principles. Judge Hand's primary intention, of course, must have been theoretical. He could not have expected his sweeping, unprecedented decision to prevail on appeal (as, indeed, it has not). He could not really have meant to do more than to call public attention to a neglected and widely misunderstood constitutional problem.

Much of the evidence presented in Judge Hand's court concerned what the public schools and their textbooks seem to have understood the neutrality principle to require of them. To avoid controversial or potentially litigation-producing conclusions, they seem to have decided to say nothing or as little as possible.

Peter Augustine Lawler teaches in the Department of Social Science at Berry College in Georgia. His most recent contribution to *The Cresset*, "Public Promotion of Silent Prayer," appeared in January, 1986.
about religion, and especially to avoid saying anything that could conceivably be construed as favorable about religious belief. According to New York University psychologist Paul Vitz, primary school textbooks simply no longer acknowledge that Americans have or have had a religious life. To remain neutral means to ignore or, better, to lie about a fundamental part of human reality.

Johns Hopkins historian Timothy L. Smith was able to find some references to religion in history texts, but they were invariably made to present religion or religiously-based motivations as obstacles to America's progress toward equality and liberty. The political relevance of the religious beliefs of slaveholders and those opposing women's rights is discussed, but there is no comparable account of the religiously-based enthusiasm of the Civil Rights Movement or the nineteenth-century women's rights advocates. The guiding thought seems to be that the movement toward social justice is one away from religious belief. Surely this perception of a connection between the achievement of moral and political liberty and freedom from religion is at the heart of what is called secular humanism.

The libertarian bias against the possibility that human liberty could be compatible with or even depend upon belief in God is really a bias against moral absolutism of any sort.

This libertarian bias against the possibility that human liberty could be compatible with or even depend upon belief in God is really a bias against moral absolutism of every sort, even that of the Declaration of Independence. Morality is seen as merely a matter of personal choice, and all choices, as long as they are made freely or sincerely, are equally worthy of respect.

Morality, as a result, does not depend upon the individual's perception of some non-idiomatic or objective reality that exists independently of human will. Moral reality is, ultimately, made quite arbitrarily by human beings. The foundation of all moral community is also, ultimately, equally arbitrary or accidental. The textbooks' statements concerning "values" that emerge from these conclusions are, as Robert Coles testified in court, typically egoistic and superficial, not to say "perverse." They are quite unfriendly to the thought that the human individual really has duties to his Creator or his fellow creatures.

The principle of neutrality has led today's textbooks to tend to regard liberty as dependent on a candid affirmation of a moral relativism that prevents one from having any disrespect for the "value judgments" of other human beings. But even this rule necessarily implies an exception: those judgments that falsely and perniciously claim to be more than idiosyncratic self-assertions. Into this category, surely, falls almost all theistic belief. It must be said that the Court's command to be neutral has produced a bias against moral and religious doctrines that are based on the untruth of moral relativism, that see moral principles as more than merely subjective "values."

This bias, interpreted as part of a constitutional mandate, must be theoretically unsound. It is incompatible with American political principles as articulated in the Declaration and the Constitution. Despite its silence on God and religious belief, the American Constitution could hardly be construed to require or even allow public neutrality on the question of the objective foundation of public morality and even on the existence of God. The Constitution is also silent on the Declaration's "inalienable rights," but any reader of The Federalist and the Anti-Federalist writings knows that it was universally assumed that the purpose of government is to protect rights which exist prior to any human creation or "by nature."

The Declaration's idea of the inalienability of natural rights depends upon "natural theology," the clear articulation of the distinctions which separate beast, man, and God. Consequently, it can be said truly that the political institutions established by the Constitution, as Justice Douglas said in Zorach v. Clauson (1952), do "presuppose a Supreme Being."

The Declaration's thought that rights are inalienable means that any clear conception of human nature includes rights. Human beings are, essentially, self-conscious and embodied. In their self-consciousness, they are like God; like beasts, they are embodied. They exist, as creatures, somewhere between beast and God. Because of this "inbetweeness," they have rights.

Beasts may, in a way, need rights, in view of their mortality and vulnerability, but they do not in truth possess them because they are unaware of their neediness and hence cannot use or exercise them. God does not have rights because, not being mortal, he does not need them. Human beings have rights because each of them is aware, when he or she thinks clearly or consistently about him- or herself, that he or she is not God. This awareness separates human beings from other creatures. Because it was not created by them, it must have been a gift to them from the Creator.

It is possible to assert, at least for now, that this conception of God is not necessarily the God of the Bible.
"Nature's God" may be, primarily or at least for Jefferson, the Declaration's primary author, the God of the philosophers, a being postulated on the basis of the conviction that nature is partly accessible to human reason and to remind philosophers that they know that they are not and cannot become wise.

At the heart of secular humanism lies the philosophic decision to dispense with the idea of a Supreme Being as an illusionary and undesirable limitation on human freedom.

Socrates knew that, by nature, Socrates was not and could not become God. He had what he knew would be an always elusive conception of divine perfection which ordered and directed his human life. But not all philosophers, it must be added, speak of "Nature's God" or some equivalent, and any thought which dispenses with the idea of a Supreme Being that will always remain beyond human being is incompatible with the Declaration.

At the heart of secular humanism is the philosophic decision to dispense with the idea of a Supreme Being as an illusory and undesirable limitation on human freedom. This decision, as Karl Marx and John Dewey say in different ways, produces the conclusion that "man is the highest being for man." As a result, there are really no longer any perceptible limits to what human beings might do. "Secular humanism" means that human beings can define their humanity without reference to God, though the absence of God would seem to preclude, as a dogmatic limitation of human freedom, any such definition in the precise sense.

American constitutionalism and its doctrine of the inalienability of rights are based on the perception of a certain stability or permanence to human nature. This constitutionalism implies that human beings are "constituted" by nature. They are not indefinitely perfectible and could not be transformed fundamentally by human effort.

This constitutionalism, consequently, opposes the historicism of any form of the "theology of liberation" which holds that "the Kingdom of God" can or will appear on earth through human effort. It affirms, ultimately, the pettiness of all human creation in the light of the Creator, which is not the same thing, of course, as denying that such creation has considerable human value. Human beings are free to improve their human condition, but they cannot fundamentally transform that condition into something else.

The American public morality embodied in the Declaration and the Constitution, which should be at the foundation of the "civic" component of public education, is not neutral or indifferent concerning the existence of God. The origin of the doctrine of neutrality, I suspect, is found in the thought that the truth of the doctrine of inalienable rights can be a matter of indifference for American citizens. Yet even the most "enlightened" or "libertarian" of the founders, such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who are held by the Supreme Court to be the source of the doctrine of neutrality, did not believe that Americans could defend their liberty in theory or in deed if they ceased to believe that human beings, in truth, have rights that are the gift of nature and nature's God.

This limit to American public moral relativism implies nothing, necessarily, about another issue of special concern to Judge Hand, prayer in the public schools. If school prayer were the only exception in a curriculum which otherwise denied the political or educational relevance of the existence of God, then public education would still be fundamentally antagonistic to the truth of American constitutional morality and its doctrine of inalienable rights. How could a teacher explain to children why all human beings are "created equal" without employing some conception of...
In view of its partisanship, Madison’s doctrine, if taught today in public schools as true or even worthy of special consideration, might well be declared unconstitutional. If Judge Hand has done nothing more than to cause Americans to reflect seriously on this remarkable implication of the Supreme Court’s erroneous principle of constitutional interpretation, we are all greatly indebted to him. The principle of absolute neutrality is really theoretically unsound and practically unworkable.

Poems with No Names:
The Sacred Pathway I
(After Lao Tzu)

1.
Some say there are seven types,
All ambiguous,
Each dubious, some even forgotten.
Everyone was in the beginning
A signpost to the right pathway.

2.
The wisest among us were once even wiser
But no one would listen.
They were like
One treading water
One walking on ice
One accepting the cup
One picking a flower
One fighting the rapids
One walking the right path
Always tired, always alert.

3.
Return to where you began
And find there your self.
Pass along the way others leaving
Going from where you return.

Do not pity them,
Walk on where you must go,
Your way is clear; your desire, divine.

Travis DuPriest

December, 1987
Cultural Illiteracy?

Linda Ferguson

Each teaching enterprise has to start somewhere, and lately I'm losing ground. I know I am not alone. E. D. Hirsch's Cultural Literacy has focused public attention on an obstacle which professors have recognized for some time: the absence of cultural consensus about what constitutes "common knowledge."

A colleague laments that music majors stare blankly when he cites the harmonic progression of Old Hundredth. "You know, 'Praise God from Whom all blessings flow,'" he prompts. They stare. He plays and sings it. Some register recognition, but its usefulness to the teacher's point has vanished.

Predicting reliable reference points is risky, so I assigned a selection from the Republic the other day even though it was not in the syllabus. The syllabus had us reading Abbott's Flatland, a nineteenth-century fantasy of a "flatlander's" journey into the third dimension. The students had eagerly discussed the beginning of the narrative: they found humor in two-dimensional society; they understood the mathematical terms of Abbott's created universe and they were engaged by his imparting of personalities, life histories, and social institutions to geometric figures.

But once the terms of life in a world of two dimensions were understood and a few amusing anecdotes digested, the students were stumped. They did not see the traditional motifs: learning as painful; the unrelenting guide for the reluctant learner; the danger of defining reality on the basis of limited experience; the blinding light which temporarily paralyzes the learner; the desire of the liberated learner to teach others the truth; the despair of knowing but not being able to communicate what one knows. These themes resonated with little in their education or experience. Without the cave allegory and the Divided Line we could not unpack our scheduled text.

Further, the sections of Flatland are framed with quotations, undocumented. No students recognize the phrases, except for one young woman who points to "O Brave New World . . ." "We read that book in high school," she says and proposes a vaguely appropriate parallel between that text and this one, concluding that Abbott must be alluding to Huxley.

But, I object, Huxley's Brave New World was written long after Abbott's Flatland. Then Huxley was borrowing from Abbott! But why does Abbott's phrase look like a quotation? Because he was quoting from someone else and (the light bulb goes on here) so was Huxley.

Now we are getting somewhere. The triumph is not that we now can connect Abbott with Huxley or Huxley with Abbott, or that we now connect either of them with Shakespeare. Rather, it lies in recognition that two authors, writing in different times, knew a common source. And perhaps they assume their readers will know it too!

In teaching classical music to "general" students, one of my few safe assumptions is that they will respond to the Overture to Barber of Seville. They think it is funny music, and it is. Its humor emerges from the exaggerated contrasts and gestures of the overture's tonal structures, and also from its associations with the silly story it introduces. But my students' recognition of its humor is neither abstractly musical nor referential to Rossini's comedy. Rather, they know it is funny because it is "from" a Bugs Bunny cartoon ("The Rabbit of Seville"), which apparently everyone has seen but me.

By contrast, I have known the luxury of reading the Aeneid with undergraduates who discussed it as if they had also read the Odyssey and the Iliad, which they had. On a lower plane, I was once delighted to discover that everyone in the classroom knew some songs by Stephen Foster. This in itself was no accomplishment, but it allowed me to delineate types of nineteenth-century popular music and get on with the main lecture. The success of these lessons rested not on teaching skill but on "good starting field position."

A relatively new responsibility of teaching is to cajole students into releasing what they take to be necessary connections (Ravel's Bolero with the movie 10, Pachelbel's Canon with wine commercials) so they can embrace more fundamental ones. I don't mind at all that classical music themes are "borrowed" for popular culture applications. But when Rossini's overture is recognized as funny only because it is associated with cartoons, when these shadowy associations become the basis of "common knowledge," then we push deeper and deeper into the cave, and we name increasingly insubstantial parts. Students are settling for images when they should demand objects, for shadows of images instead of images themselves.

Next week we'll read The Tempest.
C.F.W. Walther

Redivided

Charles Vandersee

Dear Editor:

On the floor there seems to be a small stack of magazines which move from one end of the couch to the other, with each vaccuming. These magazines are open to articles either half-read or wanting further attention, one consisting of 25 "theses" written by a man named Walther. A magazine last spring devoted 15 pages to these theses and some commentary, reprinting them from a 1962 issue of the same magazine. The theses have to do with "properly dividing" the Law and Gospel; they seem to fall into the category of theology.

Noticing these the other day, I remembered third grade at Trinity School. We had workbooks celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Missouri Synod. C. F. W. Walther had a full beard and three initials before you got to his last name—an exotic figure in a smooth-shaven Indiana town with streets blandly named for compass directions and American generals.

From third grade at the corner of North and Grant streets I also remembered Law and Gospel. "The Law shows us our sin; the Gospel shows us our Savior." The Law was a mirror, and the Gospel was the good news. But these were slogans for the young, a different matter from theology. Here in these theses was C. F. W. Walther engaged in actually "doing"—as one sometimes hears it—theology.

He was also, in St. Louis in 1880, doing other things, I noticed. I recognized my own third-grade impulse in the project: making lists. Something I have not outgrown, absorbed lately in a final list of the thousands of letters of Henry Adams, a younger contemporary of Walther, given to doing history rather than theology. Walther had found 21 ways of not properly dividing Law and Gospel, and I could tell from the vigor of his prose that he enjoyed making the list.

Walther was also, it appeared, helping the Synod's clergy write sermons. Third-graders in 1947 were taught to be grateful to God for his mercy, which had now authorized sermons of 20 minutes. In Dr. Walther's day, we often heard, you sat for a full hour. Filling an hour required big theology, and that may have been a reason for the length of the list. The theses seemed addressed to "the preacher," and 21 ways of not properly dividing would help with sermons for the long Trinity season.

So "doing theology" meant satisfying an inner need for making lists, and supplying rural parsons with pulpit material. Indeed, essential pulpit material, since without the 21 ways "Scripture is and remains a sealed book" (Thesis IV).

Right now making a list of my own ("doing speculation," you might say), I can mention other aims of Walther. By choosing to make a list of negatives, he evidently wants to expose the abundance of errors available to the Lutheran preacher. He says mostly "when" rather than "if": "The Word of God is not properly divided [between Law and Gospel] when the Gospel is turned into a preaching of repentance."

A further motive appears to be the affirming of a specific tradition, one that Luther found so valuable: the Law as that voice of God which is "stern" (VI), which strikes down and terrifies (IX), which makes demands and threats (XXIII). In or about third grade, having memorized Psalm 23 a year or two earlier, we were made to memorize Psalm 1. Probably this was Synod's lesson plan going back to 1847. The psalm depicted a man whose "delight" was in the law of the Lord, such that he meditated upon it day and night. In later years, after Trinity School, it was surprising to discover that the Law, or Torah, meant "teaching" and "guidance" as much as it did "mirror" and "terror"; as in Walther's XXIII, it meant "promises," and in the Jewish tradition it meant joy and nourishment, the good news of a God who sent discipline.

But I noticed chiefly in Walther an eagerness to master complexity. Not only complexity but apparent contradictions. "The problem, says Walther, is this: The Bible, more than any other book, seems full of contradictions. It seems to contradict itself not merely at the edges but at its center." Thus the twentieth-century commentators on Walther's theses.

To a thinking being, the perception of problems may be the chief source of life. Without complexity to control and riddles to break, we sense that a kind of death is taking over—a sort of malignant quiescence, rest that is not rest. Walther may wish to safeguard us from this kind of rest. The commentators tell us (IV) that "the great purpose of all of Scripture is to bring men to
the knowledge and appreciation of God’s love for them.” That is a startlingly simple statement. You might think that a reader who has gone through large chunks of the non-chronicle parts of the Hebrew Scriptures and any 20 chapters of the Apostolic Writings would gain some clear sense of God’s love. Even granting the extraordinary tribulations of Israel, God does seem benign now and then.

But President Walther, if I understand him, is impatient with appearances—doubtful of such an unmediated foray into Scripture. As noted, Scripture “remains a sealed book” unless you have prior knowledge of the distinction between Law and Gospel (IV). This is a high order of complexity: not only must a distinction be understood before Scripture is opened, but the complexity of the distinction requires the Waltherian 21 theses as a prior study. That is, the distinction itself is so complex that there exist 21 ways of getting it wrong.

On the other hand, possibly Walther is also fascinated by the complexity of metaphor; does he mean a “sealed book” in the sense that you might as well not open the Bible until you properly divide Law and Gospel, or does he mean that without Law and Gospel properly divided, you can read the Bible all night and all day but will not understand it? That is, narrative without theory is death?

Either way, the path to salvation is formidable, though perhaps not as much as it seems. The Missouri Synod in 1880 was still in a sense an immigrant church, and immigrants came with more energy than most people—more get-up-and-go, as grandparently types used to say, in pauses between chapters of Scripture. And the rural Midwest winter evenings were long and dark, suitable for strenuous effort at properly dividing. To get up to the Bible, and then through it to get saved, you just work hard, until you get things right. If I were a trained Lutheran theologian, I would know whether 21 have since become 22 or more.

Does night come before day? Does day come before night? There’s fascination in doing speculation 100 years after a man has been doing theology.

Does night come before day? Does day come before night? There’s fascination in doing speculation 100 years after a man has been doing theology. Thesis VII deals with way #3 of not properly dividing: When Gospel is preached before (that is, prior to) Law, when sanctification is preached before justification, when faith is preached before repentance, when good works are preached before grace.

Raised in Reading, Pennsylvania, the poet Wallace Stevens in “The Old Lutheran Bells at Home” says those bells are “the voices of the pastors calling / Much rough-end being to smooth Paradise.” In another poem he speaks of the “blessed rage for order” which human beings possess. Calling it “blessed” does not make it so, of course; the impulse, if natural to fallen humanity, could also conceivably—or even necessarily—be called diabolic. Whichever it is, we seem to see it in Walther; propelled into language, possibly by this rage, he proceeds with exceptional firmness and precision, properly dividing, like a highway worker laying a white line. We watch fascinated; he is not looking into the berry bushes on the side.

Still, others may idly do so. There is rough-end being, an iffy-ness.

“If.” Could you not preach faith before repentance once in a while? (For that inexplicable heathen in the German pew idly wondering what the life of faith would be like if he decided to repent?) Could you now and then talk about sanctification before justification, if for some people holiness is a little easier to understand than vicarious atonement? (As certain eerie old ballads are easier to understand than Wallace Stevens, but in the light of their strangeness, Stevens seems less weird.) And good works—somehow this sounds like possibly an effective pedagogical route into grace, if grace can be thought of as God’s own “good work” toward man. For maximum effect, should first things always come first? If it may be that logic does not always match the pluralism of human understanding.

An architect at the University in Dogwood, in a paper for a conference this fall, divides as follows:

A basic theory course should be at the beginning of architectural studies. Too often, we begin not with theory, but with a set of challenging design problems intended to raise issues of “creativity” and “imagination,” stretching the students to the edge of their abilities. Unfortunately, the results often demonstrate that we sometimes push the students beyond their abilities, over the edge and into the abyss of tasteless undigested confusion.

This architect and I enjoy contradicting one another, to cope with the enervating fact that on most matters we agree. In accepting his invitation to critique the paper, I therefore asked:

Could one not argue with some success that architectural education should begin with the ambitious design problems you deplore? That is, the resulting chaos and indigestion might well be the essential
chastening experience that prepares a student to receive ideas.

In other words, there is the logic of intent, and there is the logic of effect. According to Dr. Walther, God's pedagogical logic is the logic of intent; if you intend for a person to attain the proper idea of Gospel, sanctification, faith, and good works, you must precede them, respectively, with Law, justification, repentance, and grace. I don't know how well this works out, but perhaps outcome is not the divine criterion.

It is true that logic comes up against human reality in Thesis VIII, where human reality seems triumphant. "The Word of God is not properly divided when the Law is preached to those who are already in terror on account of their sins, or the Gospel to those who live securely in their sins." Neither of these categories describes anyone I knew in Trinity congregation, but no matter. As to what to do to avoid this improper division, the modern commentators say that the pastor, like his Lord, "must know" when to speak forgiveness to harlots and when to denounce a Pharisee. They grant that in the pulpit it's hard to speak to opposites at once, as on a highway it's hard to pedal down both sides of the white line.

There are dividing lines, and there are circles; should we inquire what Dr. Walther thinks of the "hermeneutical circle"? Whereby you can't understand something unless you already know it, and can't really learn something unless you've already picked up acquaintance with it. A sort of "catch-22." You're not prepared for the taste of each summer's fresh raspberries unless you enjoyed them last summer. The commentators say that "the preaching of the Law prepares the hearer for the Gospel by showing him his need," but still, it was last summer's raspberries that showed me my need for the ones this summer. Not starvation or deprivation, but prior experience of the good. Perhaps a contrivance of God, the way that some things can simultaneously precede and follow some others. Of the line and the circle, which more resembles God?

Still, "doing speculation" is not doing justice to theology, the queen of the sciences. Doing up, as it were, her hair in the golden splendor that God himself, engrossed in mere narrative, seldom perhaps managed. It is foolhardy for an untrained layman to play at catching, in his 21 ways of not dividing, a theologian divided against himself and conceivably in diabolical relation to his God.

Even so, one occasionally sees one's own ignorance touching, like a tangent line in geometry, some circle of profound thought. The Lutheran theologian Richard John Neuhaus has recently discussed "pluralism," pluralism meaning various things, such as the fact that different human beings experience reality in different ways. Or, that different cultures "order human life" in different ways. "The world is pluralistic—in the sense of contradictory definitions of reality at war with one another—because the world is not yet complete." End time is not yet here.

Meanwhile, says Neuhaus, in what I find a helpful gloss on the theses and their commentary: "I think we must be prepared to say that not only is pluralism written into the script of history but that God has done the writing," the God who seems to me more of a circle than a dividing line, despite Trinity's efforts.

From Dogwood, faithfully yours, C.V.

Air Traffic

Awed Mary met one in the light of day, and the heavens were packed with them one night as they came caroling for shepherds.

What would I have hoped and feared, if I had been a pastor in that Christmas pasture? When layers on layers of angels lasered the sky with glory all around, my earthling eyes, more used to bird-watching, would have swung to sparrows with their tiny wings, blinking at that midnight break of daylight.

Then, under incandescent, singing skies, I'd have prayed for Icarus-swallows, winging heaven-bent toward the light, that they would safely land on stable earth.

Bernhard Hillila

December, 1987
The Deconstruction Of School

James Combs

Who invented School? At some early point in the establishment of civilization, someone, to his or her utter infamy, got the pernicious idea to start School. And ever since, we have been deluded by one of the ultimate master-myths, shared by practically every society and ideology: Education is The Answer.

That archetypical fallacy ranks up there in mischief with Love Conquers All, God Is on Our Side, and War Solves Problems for Good. After war and religious fanaticism, School has probably caused humankind the most misery. And since as a species we are all the more ardently committed to the Principle of Self-Inflicted Pain (sometimes called the Joy of the Hammer: we keep beating ourselves over the head with hammers of our own creation because it will feel so good when we stop), School has served us well as an instrument of torture.

This must be its principal function, unless it is to justify our other painful pursuits of violence and prejudice. But at least savagery and bigotry are honest emotions. School proceeds on the uncanny delusion that Humankind is Educable, Reason can Prevail, and Civilization can avert war through Education. School is worse than a fraud; it is a mistake. If the human race is ever to achieve some kind of secular or sacred salvation, it will have to come from somewhere other than School.

Consider our century. In 1914, an educated civilization, led by the highly educated graduates of Oxford and Paris and Heidelberg, blundered into a trap the tribes of New Guinea would avoid. In 1933, Germany was probably the best-educated country in Europe. As our century deteriorates into endless and total war and a variety of conflicting fanaticisms, our commitment to School is all the more ardent. It is as if School is the handmaiden of disaster, expanding exponentially with chaos. In America, the "best and the brightest," the products of elite schools and graduate programs and chart-and-pointer seminars and books and innovative ideas, managed the stock market crash (1929 or 1987, take your pick), thought up the Vietnam War, conceived the Democratic party primary system, and dreamed up the "rules of engagement" in the Persian Gulf. If world war and depression are now in the offing, they will be products of the concerted effort of the Well Schooled. Is it then the case that the more schooling we have, the more ignorantly we act? Or is it rather that School is not so much pernicious as naive, telling us to be Good, Generous, and Peaceable, when there is no way we can be any of those things outside the hallowed halls of ivy?

In any event, everybody nowadays is talking about School—what's wrong with it, where it went awry, what needs to be done, why we need more and better of it. We are told that little kids will have to go to School the year around, with longer hours, more homework, tougher curricula, and more discipline. High schools will have to teach more science, math, and technology; teachers will have to pass competency tests, constantly retool, and be rewarded as individual Master Teachers.

Schools at all levels will have to return to the original intent of educational fundamentalism: no frills, no nonsense, no fun courses. Colleges are urged to put students to contemplating the Great Books. We worry about "cultural literacy," and argue that students should know about such things as the sword of Damocles, neoclassicism, Romulus and Remus, and Zeitgeist. As a nation, it is estimated that we spend around 300 billion dollars on School, more than anyone else, and contend that that is not enough. We are told that we need more School at all levels, for all ages, with the prospect that someday we will turn society into one gigantic School.

It is touching how much faith we have put in the power of School to produce the results we want. But we share only the faith. After that, everybody from Presidents and Secretaries of Education to all varieties of ideological and interest groups have an agenda—X should be taught, Y should not be taught, approach A is the correct pedagogy, approach B is the cause of all the trouble right here in River City.

Although much lip service is given to the myth of education, most of those with an educational agenda understand the true function of School: indoctrination. Those who seek power over curricula and pedagogy are implicitly saying to students, we know what's best for you; we're now going to tell you how you should think and act; if we succeed, you'll become
the kind of person we want, and part of the kind of society we want; if not, there's something wrong with you that has to be either punished or scorned. Those who seek power over School always seem to have what psychologists call a "Pygmalion project": you are to be as I want you to be. It is no wonder the millions of Eliza Doolittles in School come to hate and resent the many Professor Higgenses who try to remodel them.

Students from kindergarten to law school have long since figured all this out, and have devised self-defensive strategies to cope with such a personal onslaught. They do not believe in the official myth of educability, but they certainly believe in sustaining their own sanity and survival. The real learning that goes on at School is students self-educating themselves as to how to use, beat, or avoid the system, skills that do in fact help them in coping with the other systems of power they must face and endure in the course of their lives.

This is evident in the several attitudes toward School students typically take. First, there is the attitude that School is Prison, and students are the inmates. This notion is first acquired in kindergarten, with the child's first encounter with the teacher-warden, who defines the job (like the teacher in About Last Night) as the task of breaking the students' spirit. As in any incarcerated situation, the prisoners learn the system's blind spots, and live and learn in spite of the rules and the rulers. This then is complemented by the idea that School is Leisure, in the interstices of the work day, in courting, grouping, funning, and trashing. Inner-city schools nowadays are viewed by those outside the slums as Reformatories, but for various interest groups—street gangs, drug dealers, prostitutes, policemen—School is a convenient location for their enterprises.

In wealthier suburban schools there is the concept of School as a Commodity, something to be consumed as preparation for a lifetime of Yuppiedom. This includes not only mastery of those technical skills that someday will put the students on the floor of the Stock Exchange, but also the informal skills of social snobbery, making them aware of the proper status hierarchy and the "up-scale" symbols that signify the commodification of their lives. At most residential colleges and universities, the attitude that School is a Party is dominant, especially where an active and powerful fraternity and sorority system thrives. Since such schools are dependent on the good graces and money of alumni who recall the hell-raisin' Party Days of College, instruction proceeds as a minor annoyance that only occasionally interferes with the primary function of the institution.

Students have lost interest in an education that is irrelevant to their lives, and superseded it with popular education, what they learn from mass culture and each other. Kids truly do hate School because it interferes with their Education. They have not the slightest interest in Cultural Literacy, but have a great deal of interest in Cultural Mediacy. Their attention span in the 50-minute lecture is less than zero; but their attention span for MTV is more than rapt. Since they are no longer authority figures, teachers get no respect; but the authority figures of Entertainment Tonight and Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous get nothing but respect. (Students, after all, certainly ask what one fellow called "the American Question": If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?) School is a nineteenth-century institution overwhelmed by changes those that still believe in it cannot comprehend, and undoubtedly by the mid-twenty-first century will be nostalgically remembered with the same curiosity as other archaic practices of the previous century—the industrial assembly-line plant, the printed book, and the Supreme Court.

If all this is the case, then it seems to me that there is only one viable solution: abolish School. Like the American steel and automobile industry, School suffers from gigantism and self-conscious doubt; it produces less at greater cost; and it cannot compete with innovative ways of doing things. The ritual format of School hasn't changed essentially in a hundred years, and to return to a McGuffey's Reader approach would make it all the more
an enshrined Greenfield Village-cum-Little Red Schoolhouse. Indeed, the very communication and technological revolution that destroyed School gives us new ways of organizing it for those who insist upon it. School could now all be done with television and attendant technologies.

Consider the social benefits of such a change. First, think of the savings to taxpayers, tuition-payers, and contributors who support School in its present form. The current inefficient, costly, and outmoded institutions would disappear in favor of a free-enterprise approach: parents would have direct control of their children's education, ending a great deal of useless conflict over what is to be taught. Conservatives would like the familial and local control such a move would entail, and liberals would applaud the inability of state or religious groups to impose their values.

Learning would then be centered in whatever a family chooses—direct home instruction, buying into a cable educational program, sending kids to a neighborhood day school, or better, not sending them to school at all. Video rental stores would include educational tapes parents or students could select, with a wide selection to cater to the diverse interests and needs of those who rent. All of this would strengthen the family unit, free up many billions for use on everything from weaponry to the homeless, and make society happier and freer—children spending more time in play than drudgery, students concentrating in front of home terminals on what they think is worthwhile, small classes of like-minded people discussing a book, a movie, or an improvised play they just enacted.

Political conflict would lessen, social hierarchy would stabilize, and cultural diversity flourish. School would no longer be the focus of irreconcilable clashes; children would learn realistically what their life-chances are and either be resigned to a fate of immobility and penury or emboldened by the promise of mobility and affluence; and if we are to be a post-modern “nation of tribes” (divided, for example, between those who believe in economic regulation and moral freedom on the one hand and those who believe in economic freedom and moral regulation on the other), then at least students would learn where their group stands.

This idea is not only technically feasible, it is also democratically sound, placing the responsibility for education in the hands of parents and groups and indeed even the student's own consideration of what constitutes self-education. And it is not necessarily narrowly intolerant; the availability of a variety of educational channels and tape programs might well teach something of the plurality and legitimacy of different perspectives. Indeed, entertainment channels might come to realize their educational potential and include didactic approaches—rock video channels already propagandize against drugs, and could provide musical education; sports channels could teach about the logic of conflict, strategy, the lessons of sport, and so on; and movie channels could offer discussion of film aesthetics and interpretation. Since much future television will be interactive,
Kids could talk to each other all over the world, making for a global village of wired young communicators in touch with human-kind. Freed from the drudgery of School, each child's room at home could become at once classroom, lab, and window on the world, finally realizing the true promise of television.

When television first came into being, there was much earnest hope that it would serve the purposes of education. The halting attempts at "educational TV"—TV courses, PBS, Sesame Street, and so on—were limited, but may have been the opening rounds of an educational revolution, helping to create a post-School world. School proceeded on the mistake that learning should be induced in the ritual setting of a coercive institution; post-School learning will go forward on the intriguing premise that learning can only occur if it is sought, and that new technology in a non-institutional environment provides the safe and chosen means for those who seek. For those who are uneducable, School was a waste of time anyway; such a new arrangement can't harm them any more than School did, and might even help them, directing them towards understanding their true interests. The college student who really wanted to be an automobile mechanic will discover and seek that end. Those who are educable will not be thwarted or discouraged by School, but rather flourish in a playful and curious personal inquiry.

If television and terminal technology destroy School and enhance Education, they will have served two great historical functions and have realized a truly revolutionary potential to move humankind beyond the pain of School and towards the pleasure of Learning.

One of the problems in listening to the Public Radio news programs is the undocumentable character of its reporting. I certainly do not mean to discredit the reporters, but the medium is hard to quote from. I have just spent an hour or so looking through the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, and the Christian Science Monitor, but none of them quotes what I heard George Shultz say on the afternoon of September 11.

Those who read what I have to say will simply have to trust that I give as accurate a report as I can remember of the words that have been in my mind ever since. He was responding to questions about the message he had just given to congressional leaders about the administration's intention to ask for another large installment of money for the Nicaraguan contras sometime in the near future, or at least by November 7. (The Administration has since postponed its request until at least the beginning of the new year.)

When questioned about whether or not such a request indicated the administration's lack of faith in the Arias peace plan and the ensuing talks, Shultz said that he didn't think it indicated that at all. It was, he said, a matter of having some cards to play when you sat down to the table. We had to have these cards, he said, or we couldn't play.

My mind is active on the subject of metaphor; I teach it all the time, of course, but I am struck with its increasing prevalence in the realm of political and governmental rhetoric. Sometimes it seems to emanate from the media, and sometimes from individual figures, but it is striking how much of it has come into being lately. How often and glibly aren't people now using the "smoking gun" for instance? Of course, politicians are always accusing someone of doing an "end run," and delivering the "knockout punch."

On the same issue of the increased contra aid, some administration official quoted in the press said that the figure of 250 million was not just a "highball" which could be negotiated, but a firm number. I did not understand this one at all, since I could not figure out what a bourbon and soda had to do with the supplying of arms to a group of foreign rebels, but I have to assume that the man who made the statement had some sort of meaning in mind.

The problems of metaphor are manifold, of course. One sacrifices exactness and precision for suggestion, for emphasis, for a direct, often emotional appeal to the hearer's association with the term in another context. "Smoking gun," which presumably means a piece of evidence so direct as to be irrefutable evidence of guilt, has connotations of cowboys shooting it out on the main street, or maybe of Sam Spade throwing open the door of the sleazy apartment to confront the murderer with no chance of escape. Among other things, the term thus brings to mind the inevitable simplification of guilt and innocence that we associate with

Gail McGrew Eifrig teaches English at Valparaiso University.

December, 1987
most crime or western fiction. That simplification is, of course, why we like such terms. But they may not be the best ways in which to try to understand national or international affairs.

Back to George Shultz’s effort. Since I cannot imagine that he is talking about greeting cards, or bingo cards, or baseball cards, I suppose he means playing cards. And probably, being a manly type, he means poker. Now he also said this in his formal remarks to the congressmen: “It is simply not in our interest to leave the Sandinista regime unconstrained by credible resistance forces on the basis of a hope or promise. We have too much at stake.”

This formulation, which was quoted in the Chicago Sun-Times, allows me to ask carefully about what he means by having something at stake. What do we have at stake? What is “our interest” in the area, that must constrain the Nicaraguan government? How “credible” are the contras? Why are not the “promises” of a duly constituted government a sufficient reason for our country to stop putting military pressure on that government? His sentence does allow for discourse, for questions, for clarifications to be made, for nuances of meaning to be explored. But his use of the metaphor, “we have to have cards if we’re going to sit at the table and play,” is an unhelpful, obfuscating, meaningless expression.

Or is it? One of the uses of metaphor is to allow us to explore what is really meant, underneath and along with what is apparently meant. So when I hear our Secretary of State describe our participation in the peace process in Central America in terms of playing poker, I have to pay close attention. It struck me as I listened to him make this comment that his view of “peace talks” and mine are very different.

He wants to “hold cards” so that, presumably, he can win. Winning is the point of playing poker, I guess. Of course, in poker games, part of the object is the camaraderie, the beer and sandwiches, the cigar smoke and so on. (My information here only comes from Matthau and Lemmon in The Odd Couple.) But I don’t imagine that this sociability is part of Shultz’s use of the metaphor. I assume that he uses the game metaphor because he means that when he goes to the table, he wants to win.

It made me wonder, I confess, what would happen with the feminization of political power in this country? I assume that Jeane Kirkpatrick might be perfectly happy with the poker image, but what about other types? Can you imagine a Secretary of State announcing to the press that she wanted such and such a policy to be put into effect so that when the time came to put the quilt together, we would have our blocks ready to bring to the bee? No, I can’t either.

Yet the construction of a quilt, where everybody contributes some time, some talent, some individuality, and works together to produce a useful and satisfying object might be a good image for a peace negotiation. Since it is a process in which the end result must be a community in which all needs have been met to some degree, can we be justified in thinking of it in terms of winning and losing? The image of game, particularly when game means winning and losing, just does not indicate a frame of mind that seems right for the difficult, tedious, painstaking, meticulous process of making a peace within a country suffering from civil war.

While Shultz is thinking in terms of his strategy for game-playing, we have to face the perceptive comments of a person like Donald Castillo, speaking to New York Times writer James LeMayne. In his piece from 4 October, LeMayne quotes Castillo, formerly a Sandinista and now a spokesman for the contras, saying this to Americans: “You have been generous to us—and you have also utilized us and manipulated us as part of your domestic political agenda. . . . But have you been aware that you’re playing with the life and blood of a people and a country?”

What are we playing at in Central America?

Give The Cresset As A Thoughtful Gift

The Cresset
Valparaiso University
Valparaiso, Indiana 46383

Please send one year (nine issues) of The Cresset at $8.50 per year to the address below. My check is enclosed.

Please announce the subscription as a gift from:

________________________________________

Name _________________________________

Street ________________________________

City __________________ State __________ ZIP ________
Film & the Novel

Edward Byrne

The narrative potential of film is so marked that it has developed its strongest bond with the novel, not with painting, not even with drama.
— James Monaco

In a recent issue of the New York Times, John Updike, on the occasion of the release of a movie based upon his novel, The Witches of Eastwick, has resurrected ever-recurring questions about the relative values of books and films, about the influence films command over readers of novels, and about the relationship the serious writer has held with Hollywood.

Somewhat grudgingly, Updike begins his article by declaring that “movie makers, like creative spirits everywhere, must be free; they owe nothing to the authors of books they adapt except the money they have agreed to pay them.” However, his article continues on to proclaim that these filmmakers, despite their best intentions, are creative spirits producing works destined to belong to a lesser art form, an art form for which one must entertain only diminished expectations due, if for no other reason, to the various obstacles presented by the unique characteristics of the medium: “They bring their visions through a welter of props and egos, actors and bankers, that a mere wordmonger would be overwhelmed by.” Updike concludes that today’s films, especially, pandering to the tastes of their predominantly youthful audience, “are inexorably juvenile.” Although, in a hollow afterthought, Updike does suggest that perhaps the movies always were juvenile, but he “was too juvenile to notice.”

I. Film as Literature

Cinema, for me, is an act of prose.
— Francois Truffaut

The questions John Updike raises about film and literature are not new. Ever since the first narrative films began to gain widespread acceptance by the American public at the start of World War I, there has been discussion concerning the position film-making should assume among the arts, particularly in relation to the novel. The increasingly sophisticated storytelling brought to the screen by D. W. Griffith, Sergei Eisenstein, and others by the mid-1920s intensified such discussion. However, it was the success of 1927’s The Jazz Singer, the first full-length narrative with sound, and the introduction of Lichts of New York (1928), the first all-talking feature film, which initiated what eventually evolved into a full-scale debate over the legitimacy of film as a competitor to the novel.

Nevertheless, through to the 1950s filmmakers occupied the lowest levels of respectability among the opinions of literary reviewers, art critics, and academics. One of the directors who had exhibited just such an individual, distinguishable cinematic style, and whose cause was central to their argument, and, therefore, was cham-

Edward Byrne, a new contributor, teaches in the Department of English at Valparaiso University. He has taught Film courses at the University of Utah and served as film critic for two newspapers in Salt Lake City.

December, 1987
pioned by these French students of film, was Alfred Hitchcock. With the advantage of hindsight, it is difficult to understand the non-acceptance of Hitchcock as a great film-maker. However, until the early 1960s Hitchcock's works were viewed with amusement by most critics, but rarely, if ever, taken seriously. As Truffaut states in the preface to his well-known extended interviews of the filmmaker, "American and European critics made him pay for his commercial success by reviewing his work with condescension, and by belittling each new film."

With Hitchcock as their most visible example, Truffaut and his colleagues were determined to right this injustice and to end any doubt as to the credibility of film as a serious art form. As the auteur theory gradually solidified its position among members of the European film community and gathered support from American critics, most notably Andrew Sarris, who expanded its definition in 1962, the reputations of many directors whose decades of artistic contributions to cinema had previously been overlooked suddenly benefitted. In addition to Hitchcock, John Ford, Howard Hawks, Frank Capra, and other American directors whose contributions had been taken for granted in critics' reviews of their films, directors who had been seen merely as cogs in the Hollywood studio machinery, were now finding themselves subjects of the critics' adjusted re-viewings, and their careers as filmmakers re-evaluated, their status elevated from supervision to craftsman to auteur. As Truffaut correctly concluded, the recognition of directors as the "authors" of their films, with all the implications of sole responsibility, of individual vision, of artistry which the title bestows, was the beginning of "the premise that cinema is an art form, on a par with literature."

Undoubtedly, critics' acceptance of this correction in the proper relationship between the director's role in the creation of a film and the esteem he deserved forced studios to conform to new conditions. The recommendation that the directors of serious films be regarded with the same respect reserved for the authors of important novels resulted in a realignment of power in Hollywood. This adjustment, causing greater economic and creative leverage in the relationship between the directors and the studios, as well as the newly-won acquisition of a larger share of control by directors over film production activities, became visible to the public only in the more prominent positioning of directors on the list of credits and the heightening of directors' names above the titles of films on the marquees of movie theatres.

**Over the past 25 years American directors have reaped the rewards accompanying an enhanced recognition of their value in the making of films and their role as artists.**

To average moviegoers this small shift in the appearance of authority might not have gone unnoticed, but might have seemed somewhat insignificant; nevertheless, it signalled the beginning to a new era of film-making. Although the Hollywood executives had not abdicated total control over the production of their movies, this minor transfer of power had a more subtle, more lasting effect on the studios, whose strength had already been eroded by postwar antitrust laws, the mistrust of the film industry caused by the hearings held by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and the paranoid over-reaction of studio heads who, entrusting more power to accountants, enacted hasty, unwise economic cutbacks and ended many exclusive contracts with actors or directors as cost-cutting measures in response to a perceived competition represented by the ever-increasing presence of television sets in the living rooms of America as the 1950s drew to a close.

Over the past 25 years American directors have reaped the rewards accompanying an enhanced recognition of their value in the production of films and of their roles as creative artists. Woody Allen, Francis Ford Coppola, Brian DePalma, Lawrence Kasdan, George Lucas, Martin Scorsese, and Steven Spielberg are among the many American directors who have come to power in an atmosphere made more inviting by two decades which have witnessed the influence of and adherence to the auteur theory.

In addition to critical and popular recognition, in the last 25 years individuals in academia have started to acknowledge a place for film within the walls of our institutions of higher learning. However, although almost all universities have added film courses to their curricula—as a separate department or as a part of communication, theatre, or English—and despite the fact that some of our leading directors are excellent examples of students produced by the film schools which do exist, much reluctance to total acceptance of films as works of literature and to a serious consideration of film studies equal to that accredited to other disciplines continues in the conservative environment of the college.

One of the many flaws in *The Closing of the American Mind*, the current best-seller by Professor Allan Bloom of the University of
Chicago, is the depreciatory manner in which he depicts films as the antithesis of good books. Bloom declares: “Lack of education simply results in students’ seeking for enlightenment wherever it is readily available, without being able to distinguish between the sublime and trash, insight and propaganda. For the most part students turn to the movies. . . . The distance from the contemporary and its high seriousness that students most need in order to discover what is most serious about themselves cannot be found in the cinema, which now knows only the present.” This view of the movies merely as escapist entertainment, the novel as a medium for educational enlightenment, exemplifies an unwavering, elitist attitude toward films which remains today in many of our educators, promoting a schism that values one art form over another and is born of snobbishness.

A further academic argument supporting the superiority of books over films on the basis of a characteristic of temporality thought inherent to film is proposed in the aforementioned article by John Updike in the New York Times. As he develops his discussion of the relationship between films and novels, Updike concedes the possibility of a director as author of a film, but he elaborates upon distinctions he believes exist between the two forms of narrative. Updike writes: “The text is almost infinitely patient, snugly gathering its dust on the shelf; until the continental drift of language turns its English as obscure as Chaucer’s, the text remains readily recoverable and potentially as alive as on the day it was scribbled. Not so film: its chemicals fester in the can, it grows brittle and brown, its Technicolor bleaches, it needs a projector and a screen, it is scratched and pocked and truncated by the wear and tear of its previous projections.” It is surprising, and somewhat puzzling, to discover this new point of debate against consideration of films as serious, lasting works of literature on a par with novels, especially with the growing number of videotapes available to all. The innovation of the videocassette recorder and the coming blossoming of library holdings of movies on videotape have opened up, for the first time, an entire inventory of films, making a movie as accessible to the average viewer as books have been in the past.

John Updike concedes the possibility of a director as author of a film, but he elaborates upon distinctions he believes exist between the two forms of narrative.

In fact, the similarity in size, and sometimes cost, between a boxed videocassette and a hard-cover novel may be coincidental, but more and more Americans are beginning to stock videotapes on their bookshelves beside their novels. The film studios have taken notice: MGM/UA has acknowledged an awareness of this acceptance on the part of the American public and has launched an advertising campaign for its “classic novels on film” series to take advantage of this change in perception. Although these films may not substitute for the great works from which they have been adapted, the series does reinforce the equivalence of films and novels, and it paves the way for affirmation of new films as serious works of art, as narratives which share a parity with the novel.

This attitude of respect toward filmmakers and their works can be detected in the encroachment of terms normally associated with literary criticism into the language emerging alongside auteur to accommodate the adoption of film as another of our literary forms. In his assessment of one of the effects videocassettes have exerted on the film industry, director John Sayles states a further parallel between publishing and film-making: “I see first-run theaters as becoming the ‘loss leader’ for the VCR, like hard-cover books for the paperback industry.” Libraries which have demonstrated prudent foresight by obtaining larger holdings of videocassettes are experiencing increased memberships and greater usage.

Some cinema academics are contributing to the recognition of film as a literary form by using texts such as James Monaco’s How to Read a Film in their classes. In his text, Monaco even points out an inverse influence film has held over the shape of the contemporary novel: “Novelists have learned to narrate their stories in the smaller units common to film. Like contemporary playwrights, they think now more often in scenes rather than in more elaborate acts.” In addition, one of the advantages offered by the videocassette recorder is that its rewind feature allows the viewer to easily go back and “re-read” a section of the film as one might return to a chapter of a novel, or to isolate an important scene as one might highlight a prominent passage in a book.

For years, “Film and Literature” courses have wedged their way into the college curriculum wherever room could be found for them, an indication that film might be an art form to consider more seriously—but only as an adjunct to literature. Perhaps the time has finally arrived to teach “Film as Literature” and acknowledge this narrative form’s true relation to the novel.

[Part 1 of a Series]
Second Opinion: Health, Faith, and Ethics

The Park Ridge Center. Three Issues per Year. $35.00.

Second Opinion is called by its creators “a book-like journal and a journal-like book” because it has characteristics of each. This new publication venture is now over a year old, three volumes having been produced, and its unique perspective and format deserve a review.

Second Opinion is but one piece in an ambitious program of publication by The Park Ridge Center (1875 Dempster St., Suite 175, Park Ridge, IL 60068) called Project Ten, so named because the project is designed to explore ten basic issues within ten different faith traditions. Six volumes have been published (Crossword) in the Health/Medicine and the Faith traditions series, each of them dealing with the following concepts within a particular faith tradition: well-being, sexuality, passages, morality, dignity, justice, sickness and madness, healing and caring, suffering, and dying. Another recent product of the Center’s research program is the publication of Caring and Cur ing (Macmillan, 1986), which contains twenty essays on the major denominational groupings of the traditional Western faiths, each reviewing the relationship between medicine and faith within a particular tradition.

Second Opinion fits within the (larger) framework of Project Ten, though its essays do not focus so much on particular faith traditions or the particular concepts that serve as organizational categories in the publications noted above. Rather, Second Opinion “stimulates interdisciplinary conversations between members of fields relating to health, faith, and ethics.” Each volume has a particular topical focus (Organ Transplants, The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Stigma and Illness) within the field of bioethics.

I find two things that are unique about the contents of this “book-like journal.” One is that the perspective of faith is consistently represented in all of the essays in the three volumes published thus far. Bioethics is at present a secular discipline dominated by the perspectives of medicine, philosophy, and law. Occasionally one will find essays in periodicals and anthologies by theological ethicists like Paul Ramsey and Richard McCormick, but they are rare and usually do not represent the distinctiveness of particular faith traditions. Second Opinion is a welcome corrective to this secular bias, and long overdue.

Another unique characteristic of the approach of Second Opinion is its emphasis on clinical ethics. Case studies have always been a part of bioethics, but only as a point of departure for reasoning on the basis of ethical theories and principles. Second Opinion consistently lifts up the human dimension of the problems being considered, e.g. the victims of AIDS or the parents of infants in neonatal intensive care. It is, I think, the wisdom of faith which highlights the human dimension and shows its importance for serious ethical reflection.

It is not possible to review the contents of all three volumes. What I offer instead is a review of the second volume, which has as its focus the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. This is the best of the volumes in my judgment, partly because it provides a much more sustained focus on one problem area, and partly because it provides ready examples of the particular strengths of Second Opinion already mentioned.

One unique feature of Second Opinion is that the perspective of faith is consistently represented in all of the essays in the volumes published thus far.

The first 90 of the 150 pages of Volume Two are devoted to the focus on neonatal intensive care. The human dimension referred to above comes through in a variety of ways. First, there are three pictorial essays which give the reader an inside look at a neonatal intensive care unit. Second, a case study provides the basis for reflections by two theologians (Roman Catholic and Protestant) and a clinical ethicist. Third, a father’s journal on the experience of 77 days of his infant’s neonatal care is included. All of these factors force the reader to
reflect on ethical problems within the rich diversity of human experience. That is the strength of clinical ethics, which is the subject of an interesting interview with Dr. Mark Siegler in Volume 3.

Including so much material on the human dimension of neonatal intensive care enables the reader to discover some of the problems of modern medical care that might otherwise be overlooked. In commenting on the case study, Richard McCormick notes how completely the family is left out of the care of their imperiled infant, both in the decisions made and in the care provided. The parents were passive and helpless participants in a drama where they were swept along by events over which they had no control. In fact, any decision that they might make to stop the massive technological support system that immediately goes into effect when there is an imperiled life was subject to quick reversal by court order.

One gains the same sense of passive helplessness in reading "77 Days: A Father's Journal." The father is an outside observer of a drama in which one would think he should be a central character. He is told that he will be able to hold the baby when the infant reaches the weight of three pounds, and he poignantly but passively waits for that great moment when he will have some involvement in what is happening to his child. What is it about three pounds that makes it a safe limit for holding and who makes that decision? At the end of three weeks the father is amazed to find that $34,000 has been spent in the care of his child. "My God. We expected it to be expensive, but that's hard to believe." The parents are passive participants in a drama where they play no part—except, of course, to make sure that the bill is paid.

The other unique characteristic of Second Opinion is also well represented in this second volume, and that is the perspective of faith that is brought to every issue under consideration. Richard McCormick, a well-known Roman Catholic commentator on bioethical issues, and Karen Lebacqz, a Protestant Christian ethicist, offer commentary on the case study from their own unique theological perspectives. The two commentaries show a marked difference in theological style between the carefully reasoned approach of McCormick, so typical of the natural law tradition from which he comes, and the "story theology" of Lebacqz, who likens the parent's experience in the NICU to the Israelite wilderness experience in the Old Testament. Theologians are used as commentators on case study in other journals on bioethics, but this is the first such case study that I've read where one has the opportunity to compare commentaries of two very different theological perspectives.

The parents in the case were passive and helpless participants in a drama where they were swept along by events over which they had no control.

The religious perspective is also prominent in all of the other essays in this volume. Robert Weir, Professor of Religious Studies at Oklahoma State University, has written an excellent essay on when it is justifiable not to treat. The interview essay (a regular feature of Second Opinion) with Joseph A. Califano, Jr. on the revolution in American health care contains an interesting section on the role of religion. This volume also contains a brilliant essay by Langdon Gilkey on "Dimensions of Basic Faith and the Special Traditions," in which Gilkey shows the interconnections between a generic or universal faith and the way faith is shaped by special traditions, including the tradition of medicine. This essay is the finest example in all three of the volumes of the kind of thoughtful reflection that Second Opinion is trying to promote in exploring the many-faceted interaction between the areas of health, faith, and ethics.

The format of Second Opinion is also unique. Describing it as a "book-like journal" is apt. It is designed to fit easily on any ordinary bookshelf, making it handy for reference. It might be called a "slick" publication—glossy pages and cover, an abundant use of illustrations, color-coded volumes. It is expensive ($35 for three issues) if one compares it to the cost of other journals. The glossy pages are indeed glossy, and that makes reading difficult unless the light source is somewhat diffused.

The Park Ridge Center is to be commended for its publication of this journal, as well as all of the other ventures of Project Ten. Second Opinion offers what I would call a different level of conversation to those who are interested in questions of health care and bioethics. What makes the conversation different is that those who represent the faith tradition/s are regarded as equal conversation partners. The result is both a deepening and a broadening of the conversation.

I recommend this journal to those who are as impatient as I often am with the secularity and limited focus of so much of the literature in bioethics and health care. If this first year of publication is an example of what is to come, we can look forward to richly textured discussions of issues that are at the forefront of public interest and concern.

December, 1987
Twas the Night Before Christmas

Dot Nuechterlein

Do you believe in the myth of Santa Claus? No, silly, I am not asking if you personally are convinced that a jolly large person with a red suit and a white beard riding an airborne sleigh pulled by eight (nine with Rudolph) reindeer climbs down the chimney at midnight on Dec. 24th and leaves presents for all obedient little boys and girls.

But do you believe in the myth? Do you go along with that story about S. Claus/Kris Kringle/Father Christmas/etc. for the supposed benefit of the small fry who haven't yet turned skeptical about everything? Do you carry out the conspiracy with either your own or other people's kids? Do you get a warm, fuzzy feeling just thinking about it, knowing that Christmas wouldn't be the same if it weren't for the old Ho Ho Ho-er himself?

I can't remember ever believing in Santa Claus, man or myth. For starters, I was brought up in a family that celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve, and it was pretty hard to square our after-the-children's-Christmas-Eve-service-and-family-devotions-gift-exchange-and-getting-up-early-to-go-to-church-again-on-Christmas-morning with the cultural picture of a bare tree the night before and a load of packages under it the next day. It just didn't figure. So Christmas was to celebrate the Birth of Christ, and only shepherds and angels and wise men were allowed.

By the way, when my classes discuss the difficulties of marriage I warn students that the typical obstacles to marital bliss—money, in-laws, sex—are sometimes less difficult to overcome than a difference in family traditions. Effort and logical compromise can help you make reasonable decisions about prioritizing spending, for example; but customs and practices handed down through the ages become part of your self identity, not easily altered or sacrificed, no matter how much you love your mate.

Lucky for me I married a fellow who shared my heritage, and agreed to pass it along to our children. So they didn't learn the Santa stuff, either. Oh, to be sure, they picked up the story from TV and playmates and stores and such. But we made sure they knew it was all make believe, okay to pretend about, but not to take seriously. Christmas, we would say, is because God loved us enough to send Jesus, and presents are because we love one another.

(I might add that we don't follow the culture in a number of ways. No one in the bunch is particularly crazy about turkey, so I have never roasted one. We usually vote on the choice of Christmas dinner: last year we had "traditional lasagna" and the year before I think it was beef bourguignon.)

(We also don't put up our tree or decorate the house until right before the 25th, so that we can pay better attention to Advent. The children have always hated that, especially since it means most trees have been sold weeks before and only scrappy or misshapen ones are available. Every year it's a matter of axing the stump end to make it fit the holder—complete with some non-Christmas-type vocabulary—and often the poor thing remains upright only because of wires attached to the wall.

(Then we leave the rapidly-defoliating bush up until Epiphany, which also strikes some as a quaint observance; I remember the time our tree didn't go up until the night of the 23rd and the people down the street pitched theirs on the afternoon of the 25th. Plus we once had neighbors who noticed ours was the only house on the block lacking a gaudy display beginning in about mid-November, and they wondered if we were Jewish.)

A certain amount of mythology is good for a society, but I haven't yet determined whether the Santa myth is helpful or hurtful. True, I've never run into anyone whose life was bent out of shape because of an early faith, with its concomitant disillusionment. If that happens, we don't hear about it.

Yet the fable is so pervasive, so woven into the fabric of our everyday life, that it makes me uneasy. How can any ultimate good come from such a monstrous falsehood? It is probably ridiculous to link the demythologized Santa with the fact that American kids get suspicious and cynical and worldly wise at such an early age these days, but I can't help wondering if that doesn't play at least a part.

Well, it really doesn't matter what I think. The old boy has been around for a long time, in a number of guises in various countries, and there's no sign of a let up. I am curious, however, to see what will happen in the next generation. If I have grandchildren someday, will their parents stick to family tradition, or will they follow the general culture?

Chances are if my kids marry they will find partners who were brought up with the folkways of the majority, so I'm prepared for the worst. But here's one granny who will never be able to read aloud that "beloved" Christmas poem with much conviction. Sorry about that.

The Cresset