- Renu Juneja: Hospitality and Cultural Contradictions
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- Education and Scholarship in Theonomous Perspective

A review of Literature, the Arts, and Public Affairs
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Above: J. Ottis Adams, American (Indiana), 1851-1926. Brookville, view to the east showing this southeastern Indiana town with its county courthouse tower and two church steeples all nestled in the hills surrounding the Whitewater River, after 1898, reproduction of a pen and ink drawing. Courtesy, Indianapolis Museum of Art.

Cover: Theodore C. Steele, American (Indiana), 1847-1926. Brookville, view to the west showing the northern edge of town, c. 1903-07, oil on canvas, 16x28 inches. This fine Hoosier Impressionist painting is being purchased for the VU Museum of Art by the FRIENDS OF ART.
IN LUCE TUA

Comment on Contemporary Affairs by the Editor

Valedictory

After seven and a half years, 68 issues, and some 130,000 words of editorial wisdom and unwisdom in In Luce Tua, this marks the last issue of The Cresset under my editorship. Beginning with the new year, I leave Valparaiso University and The Cresset for New York City, where I will enter on new duties as Editor of This World, a quarterly journal of religion and public life, and Associate Director of the Rockford Institute Center on Religion and Society.

Starting next month and continuing through the end of the publishing year in May, Richard Maxwell, who has graced the Cresset’s pages with his brilliant film criticism for many years, will serve as interim Editor. At the end of that time the Publisher will name a permanent replacement. My heartfelt benedictions on Mr. Maxwell and whoever, at whatever point, follows upon him. I leave confident that The Cresset will rest in capable hands.

Editing this journal has been a constant challenge, an occasional aggravation, and a continuing joy. It is work I have entered into with enthusiasm and excitement. I leave The Cresset with no small regret. I leave the University of which it is a part with even greater regret. In the more than three decades since I first came to the place as an undergraduate, I have never ceased to love it, and I have been honored in recent years to serve it.

To the staff and contributors of The Cresset over these years my deepest thanks. We have been part of a great adventure, and you have my eternal admiration and gratitude. God bless you all.

James Nuechterlein, Editor

September, 1981-January, 1989

A Farewell to Ronald Reagan

This month the Reagan era—and that, despite his critics, is what indeed it has been—comes to an end. Any President dominates the political landscape (that comes with the office), but this President has done so in a way unmatched for half a century. Not since Franklin Roosevelt has a Chief Executive so left his mark on the nation. Those who argue to the contrary lack historical perspective. Ronald Reagan has done what only a handful of his predecessors have accomplished: he has reconstructed not just the national policy debate but the very terms in which that debate is carried on. The Democratic party, in order to avoid entirely being blown out of the political water, has had to adjust itself to Reagan’s framework of discourse and to distance itself from the liberalism that has been for so long now its ideological reason for being. It’s now the Democrats, not the Republicans, who are the “me too” party.

Reagan established a “center” considerably to the right of where it had been located.

It is currently fashionable to argue that the Reagan Administration garnered whatever success it did only by forsaking its conservative ideological dreams and acting in a centrist manner. But the center is not a fixed place. If Reagan often acted more pragmatically than his rhetoric might have suggested he would, he still established for himself a “center” considerably to the right of where it had previously been located. Reagan tacked with the political winds, but his doing so made him no less a genuine conservative in policy than FDR’s similar maneuvering at the other end of the political spectrum made him anything other than a genuine liberal.

To make this sort of analytical judgment, it must be emphasized, is to say nothing at all about the substance of the Reagan presidency. One can concede that Reagan has made a substantial difference without in any way conceding that this has been a change for the better. Indeed, the policy arguments concerning the Reagan Administration go back and forth inconclusively.

Defenders point in domestic affairs to prosperity, the end of inflation, tax reform, and a newly confident entrepreneurial spirit. In foreign policy, they emphasize a positive U.S.-Soviet relationship built on terms favorable to America, a restored sense of American leadership in the Western alliance, and in general a reinvigoration of national purpose and of democratic capitalist values throughout the world. Compare the nation either at home or abroad to where it was eight years ago, they say, and by that measure Reagan’s success. George Bush won election, in this view, by claiming ownership to the peace, prosperity, and stability that constituted the legacy of the Reagan era.

Critics see things entirely differently. To them, ours is an illusionary prosperity, built on a crumbling...
foundation of deficits, debt, and an ominous trade imbalance. And even that largely spurious prosperity, in their view, has been fashioned in such a way as to benefit those already well off while consciously ignoring the needs of the socially disadvantaged. As to foreign policy, Reagan's detractors see belligerence and oppression in Central America, failure in the Middle East, excessive militarization in Grenada, Libya, and elsewhere—and above all, the utter fiasco of the Iran/contran affair. Whatever improvements have been made in U.S.-Soviet relations they credit not to Reagan but to an imaginatively forthcoming Mikhail Gorbachev. In general they see a Reagan who has been more lucky than wise in policy and the damage of whose simplistic and nostalgia-ridden political philosophy has been limited only by liberal opposition, popular skepticism, and the President's own laziness and negligence.

People no longer speak of the nation as ungovernable and they no longer fear that for a President to be effective he must act as an autocrat.

Disagreements about Reagan stem not only from differing ideological angles of vision but from the necessarily indeterminate state of evaluations of his presidency. Much of the final verdict on the Reagan years will depend, for example, on the course of the economy over the next several years. If prosperity extends through Bush's first (only?) term, the Reagan abundance will have to be considered a reality and an extraordinary success. If, however, the economy collapses, the Reagan era will very much resemble in retrospect the prelude to disaster we now see in the Coolidge presidency. (It may turn out to be of ironic significance that Calvin Coolidge was one of Reagan's favorite predecessors.) In the meantime, our evaluations must remain preliminary.

Yet policy outcomes aside, there are things that can already be said about the Reagan years with some confidence. Even Reagan's most adamant critics must concede—the evidence of the polls is overwhelming—that he has restored popular faith in the presidential office. During the 1970s we heard a great deal about the "ungovernability" of the American nation, and the divisions and rancorousness of the Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter Administrations gave no little credence to that theory. America seemed to have come apart, and critics of our political machinery came increasingly to suspect that its problems had become systemic. The governing process had grown gargantuan and out of control, and Presidents veered erratically between temptations to authoritarianism and intimations of constitutional impotence. Thus Sixties' fears of an imperial presidency faded a decade later into concerns over a presidency in twilight.

Ronald Reagan has, in the short run at least, changed all that. People no longer speak of the nation as ungovernable and they no longer fear that for a President to be effective he must act as autocrat. Reagan has restored confidence in the workability of the presidential office and, by extension, of the nation itself. His has been a quite remarkable triumph of personality, and he has established himself, by any objective reckoning, as the most outstanding "outdoor" President since FDR. That is, he has conducted the public and ceremonial functions of his office with abundant charm, eloquence, and grace. He has made governing look easy. Reagan's is a remarkably stable and centered personality, and whether Americans agree with his policies or not, they admire his innate decency, his psychological good health, and his personal courage (recall his behavior following the assassination attempt).

Critics insist that the Reagan presidential style, like the Reagan prosperity, is based largely on illusion. They see behind the facade of confident control a vacancy of mind and absence of coherent purpose, and they suspect that at the heart of the Reagan Administration lies simply an elaborate contrivance built of blue smoke and mirrors.

One cannot dismiss that possibility out of hand. There have been continuing signs in the Reagan presidency of inattentiveness, wavering intellectual grasp, and narrowness of vision. No one has ever claimed in Ronald Reagan's behalf that he is an intellectually curious or adventurous man. The President's beliefs and values run deep, but that does not seem to be the case with the intellectual structure that supports them.

Yet successful presidencies have always been built more on character than intellect. People follow those whose personalities they trust rather than those whose minds they admire, which is why Dwight Eisenhower twice easily defeated Adlai Stevenson for the White House. Reagan has made a majority of Americans believe in him and his leadership, and that is a very large part of what being President is all about. Does anyone really believe that he managed to sustain his popularity for eight years simply by virtue of knowing how to read a script plausibly? It doesn't take a populist to find that a dubious proposition and to conclude that there's considerably more to Reagan—and to the Reagan presidency—than many of his contemporaries suspect.
THE VISE OF HOSPITALITY

Tensions and Contradictions in Cultural Values

It's 5 p.m. I have been home for an hour, but must leave again in a few minutes to join a picnic welcoming new students on campus, and then teach a class at 6:30. I look forward to the picnic as, among other reasons, an escape from having to cook supper. I will take the children along and my husband will meet me at the picnic so that I can go on to my class while he brings the children home. As I am struggling to get my squirming toddler's shoes on her feet, the phone rings.

"Hello, Renu, this is Vasu."
"Uh, hello, how nice to hear from you."
"We are in Chicago, and we will come to see you."
"How nice. When will you come?"
"Tonight, and can we spend the night?"
"Yes, of course, but I am going out right now to the University and will not be back until eight. Jim should be home by seven, though."
"That's all right. We still have some shopping to do. We don't want to bother you too much. Just cook a simple supper."

I have gathered during the conversation that "we" includes my friend's parents, an uncle visiting from India, and her two young boys. I have also gathered that my friend has been in Chicago for three days, had stayed with other friends, had planned to go back to Ohio today but got delayed at shopping in Indian stores on Devon Avenue. There is no great intimacy between this friend and me. In fact, we share little in mental habits or attitudes. We do not even share a common ethnic background or language since she comes from a different part of India. What bonds us together is our national origin and the few years she spent in Valparaiso before moving to Ohio. When she lived in Valparaiso, she was part of a very small group of Indian families in town. Then, our Indianness had seemed sufficient to draw us together. And it seemed to exert a sufficient force now so that I could not bring myself to tell my friend how inconvenient was her visit. I could at least have told her to have supper before arriving here. But I did not.

That evening as I rushed home from work to prepare an Indian meal (uncertain if the elderly relatives from India could be fed on a pizza), I pondered on my compulsion to be hospitable. I knew that I was motivated, in this instance, by some abstract conception of hospitality, not any warm feelings for this friend. Since then I have continued to wonder. Why should I feel compelled to appear warm and welcoming to someone who invites herself without prior notice, in the middle of the week, and who is obviously using me as a rest stop? What makes me go through all the rituals of hospitality—staying up late to entertain them, getting up early next morning to provide breakfast—when doing so will hamper my ability to perform well at work? It is not that I lack the ability to be outspoken in other circumstances or to assert my needs. I wonder, too, why my friend should so easily assume that the hospitality will be forthcoming. And I know that if the situation were reversed, this friend would do the same. In other words, I know that this desire to be hospitable is rooted not in individual temperament but in values of a culture I still share with my friend. It is linked to those deepest structures of which define one's sense of identity.

II

This compulsion to be hospitable that I now see as a part of my Indian self is surely not exclusive to Indians. Within Western culture, as well, hospitality once reigned as a virtue of supreme importance, a fact well confirmed by several texts I taught during the semester.

Thus the story of Lot in Genesis, despite common misconceptions about the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, is essentially a narrative about unforgiveable inhos-
pitality. John Boswell, summarizing modern scholarship, speaks of Lot as “violating the custom of Sodom (where he himself was not a citizen but only a ‘sojourner’) by entertaining unknown guests within the city walls at night without obtaining permission of elders of the city.” The Biblical account of the episode opens with Lot “sitting in the gate of Sodom” (19:1). As Bruce Vawter points out, the city gate would be “the equivalent of today’s civic center or city hall, where the acknowledged leaders of the community gathered to discuss matters that affected them all.” When Lot sees the unannounced visitors, he rises to meet them, bows low, and invites them to spend the night in his house. His hospitable gesture here reminds us, therefore, merit ing approval, of Abraham’s similar reaction in 18:2-5. True, the strangers have their own agenda, and so intend to sleep in the streets rather than seek shelter. But Lot’s hospitality will not be denied. Once the guests are inside his house, Lot entertains them in a manner befitting a good host. The food is set forth by Lot; “cakes without leaven” are acceptable given the lateness of the night, especially when we recall that Abraham too had offered unleavened bread to his guests.

Yet while inhospitality is a great sin, Lot’s zeal as a host may strike the modern reader as somewhat excessive. His attempt to offer his virginal daughters to the mob outside can only offend our sensibilities. I have always felt the need, however, to push my students beyond their Sunday School image of Lot as a selfish and a self-serving man. We need the necessary historical perspective to remind ourselves of the low regard for the female child in this society. The Israelites would have found Lot’s behavior far less reprehensible than we do. In a similar story in Judges, the behavior of the host offering his daughter to save his guests does not draw any condemnation. The Levite of Ephraim and his concubines seek hospitality in Gibeah and find it only in the home of an old man. When the men of Gibeah mob the old man’s house, seeking as in Genesis to know the man inside, the old man offers

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The Cresset
his daughter as a bribe. Once again, the bribe is unacceptable and, in this instance, the guest saves himself by pushing his concubine outside so that she is ravished all night and falls dead outside the door (19:16-26).

We may concede that Lot is weak and foolish, but we must also recognize that within the value system of his culture, hospitality may rank higher than filial regard for daughters. Lot may even have loved his daughters and prized their virginity. If his willingness to offer his daughters as a bribe is an indication of his haplessness, it may also indicate that in giving up something so dear to him he reveals what is even dearer—his duty as a host.

In fact, the story of Lot has a folkloric motif that finds echoes in different parts of the world. The *Encyclopedia Biblica* mentions a similar tale where a place on the Lake of Thun is destroyed because a dwarf is denied hospitality during a storm by all inhabitants except a poor, aged couple (4670). In another legend belonging to Syria, the crater of an extinct volcano, Birket Ram, covers a village also destroyed because it refused hospitality to a poor traveller. The Chinese traveller, Hiouen Thsang, visiting India in the seventh century, records the destruction of a city called Holaolokia for similar offenses. The city mistreated a visiting Arahat (a visionary prophet). Once again, only one pious man offers hospitality. “Then said the Arahat to him, ‘Escape; in seven days a rain of earth and sand will fall upon the city, and no one will be left, because they threw earth upon me.’ The man went into the city and told his relations; but they mocked him. The storm came, and the man was the only one who, by an underground passage, escaped.”

Evidently, the Gods of the old world did not look kindly on unkind hosts. From a different part of the Western tradition, the Greek world of Homer, come equally strong injunctions against inhospitality. Much like Yahweh in his concern for the welfare of guests, Zeus too is a god of strangers, so that to mistreat a guest is to offend Zeus. Throughout Homer’s *The Odyssey*, the duties and obligations of both the host and the guest form an extremely important subtext that weaves itself through most of the central episodes. The epic makes fine distinctions between these obligations and privileges, and, in each instance, our response to the characters involved depends on our assessment of their behavior as guest or host.

The epic opens with Telemachos, who has trouble managing his role as a host, and is, essentially, being driven out of his house by unruly guests. As he jour-

neys to discover news of his father, he is treated well by Nestor and Menelaos. These two are companions of his father and owe friendship to Odysseus’ son. But the text makes it clear that the hospitality is forthcoming even before Nestor or Menelaos become aware of the identity of Telemachos. When Telemachos arrives at Nestor’s citadel, a feast is already in progress. On sighting the strangers, Nestor’s kin at once break off from their revelry to welcome the uninvited guests:

> These men, when they sighted the strangers, all came together
> And gave them greeting with their hands and offered them places . . .
> And took them both by the hands, and seated them at the feasting on soft rugs. . . .
> . . . gave them portions of the vitals, and poured wine for them in a golden cup.

We may concede that Lot is weak and foolish, but we must also recognize that within the value system of his culture, hospitality may rank higher than filial regard for daughters. Lot may even have loved his daughters and prized their virginity.

In contrast, the misadventures of Odysseus begin with the Cyclopes episode, a telling representation of an extreme violation of the code of hospitality. Instead of feasting his guests, Polyphemos feasts on his guests. Instead of sending forth his guests with gifts, he traps his guests within his house barring their escape. Interestingly, Homer links the Cyclopes’ uncivilized behavior with their inability to form a community, even the elemental bonds of kinship. They live isolated without any vestige of a social life. The barbaric Cyclopes have no civic institutions, hence no codes or laws to regulate their conduct: “These people have no institutions, no meetings for counsels . . . and each one is the law for his own wives and children, and cares nothing for others” (140). It is as if without community, we are mere monsters, one-eyed monsters at that, suffering from an obsessive, self-regarding tunnel vision. Our very humanity is defined by our ability to form social relationships, so that the supreme test of our humanity and civility must be our ability to honor our bond even with those strangers with whom we have no obvious, clearly defined bonds.

At the other end of the spectrum, Homer offers the

*Both the Syrian tale and the Hiouen Thsang record are mentioned in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*, p. 4666.

extreme hospitality of Kalypso, significantly a self-sufficient Goddess who lives isolated on an island far removed from normal, human traffic. Kalypso is a kind host, so kind that she showers love and benediction on Odysseus, even the promise of immortality. Everything about Kalypso suggests her civility, not her barbarity, yet she too oversteps the bounds of legitimate hospitality in forcing Odysseus to remain beyond his natural inclination. When we meet Odysseus at Kalypso's island, he has been there for seven years, the first three or four of which, we may assume, he has spent willingly with her.

But now he is an unwilling guest, languishing his days on the island's rocky shore and obsessed with the desire to return home. And home for Odysseus represents not only a reunion with Penelope, but also a reestablishing of those communal bonds within which human beings fulfill their human potential. When we are overpowered by another's generosity, however well meaning such kindness, we humans tend to lose our sense of self-worth, our distinctness as individuals. Odysseus, in the midst of this fulfillment of any male's fantasy—perpetual youth lavished upon him by a beautiful, sexually-attentive goddess—is ready to break away because he is no longer his own master, exerting his will, directing his life. If unkind hosts refuse to acknowledge the common human bond between host and guest, then overly kind hosts undermine that humanity by refusing to recognize the fundamental autonomy of the self.

The equally dangerous Circe reminds us a little of both the monstrous Polyphemos and the divine Kalypso. When the unwary guests first make their appearance at Circe's door, they are likely to be turned into swine to later furnish her feasting. However, once Circe decides to be hospitable, she is equally kind as Kalypso, although perfectly willing to let her guest go when Odysseus so desires. The problem with Circe is that she lacks those feelings which are nourished through a communal life. Circe has handmaidens for companions, not equals. So she is incapable of understanding on her own that Odysseus will have trouble enjoying the feast she offers while his companions remain pigs grovelling outside. Significantly, Circe only practices hospitality once she is mastered by Odysseus, reduced to a subordinate role. True hospitality is a dealing between equals, and even when the relationship between the host and the guest is initially unequal, the very act of hospitality realigns the relationship in the direction of equality. This may explain why in the other narrative of Genesis, a man of Abraham's noble stature deals better with his divine guests than Lot. Once Yahweh has become the guest of Abraham, Abraham can even argue with the Lord about the apparent failure of divine justice in destroying the few virtuous with the wicked in the promised retribution against Sodom.

In the representation of Penelope's unruly suitors, The Odyssey even offers a commentary on the obligations of guests. Whatever else their sins, the suitors are extremely boorish guests who literally take over the household of their host. Their perpetual feasting is likely to reduce their host to indigence; they refuse to leave when they are obviously not welcome; they have subverted the natural authority relationships within the household; they have generated disaffections between members of the household so that Penelope and Telemachos no longer trust each other; and, most horribly, they actually scheme to kill their host, first Telemachos, then Odysseus. Readers who cringe at the naked murder of these suitors by Odysseus should remember this justification: the suitors are enormously guilty of subverting a fundamental structure of this civil society, for reciprocal obligations between the

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**Fog on the Ouachita**

Mallards circled at dawn over fogged Lake Ouachita. We heard them honking
to come down through layers of gray fog. In boats tied to cypress trunks,
armed men swatting mosquitoes waved their shotguns like wands,
cursing fog that wouldn't lift.

In the cabin, rocking, sipping out steaming coffee, we heard them blast at nothing.

At last, they rowed ashore disgusted and roared off in trucks, rocks pinging like buckshot.

Alone, we shoved off to the bass reeds under thousands of unseen wings.

*Walter McDonald*
We no longer think that Zeus will hurl thunderbolts or Yahweh rain brimstones if we fail to welcome strangers or even withhold our best from friends. It is not that we have altogether abandoned hospitality as a virtue to be cultivated. We view it, perhaps, as an old world graciousness no longer fully central to the lives we lead. Given different circumstances, another world, another time, we too might have been dedicated hosts, but now find ourselves directed to other goals, other goods. What has, we may wonder, caused this shift in values?

There are, of course, many explanations. It can be argued that hospitality is more central to societies where mere survival is contingent upon the goodwill of others, where life itself depends on unwritten codes of hospitality. In a danger-ridden world where small, human communities are little enclaves of light in the surrounding darkness, no human commerce or travel would be possible without some assurance that one would be welcome when one arrived at the end of the journey and found oneself amidst a group of strangers. Thomas Cooke has not arranged the tour and no Holiday Inns dot the landscape. In Abraham’s world, the desert outside threatened survival and neighboring tribes were likely to be hostile. It was necessary, then, to have an unwritten code where even your enemies would welcome you as a friend if you arrived at their door as a guest. The seafaring Greeks, moving from island to island, may have needed a similar surety.

Yet the necessity of hospitality for survival does not explain its persistence as a cultural norm in communities which now exist in very different circumstances. For instance, the heavily populated river plains of India from where I come have not been, for thousands of years, the kind of place where human survival is threatened by a hostile environment. As Margaret Mead has pointed out, how a culture defines itself is more important than the dictates of the environment or the kind and level of technology supporting that culture. Different cultures, for reasons not always easy to fathom, privilege different sets of values, and virtues that dominate one culture may well be subordinate in a different culture. To support her claim that “the social conception of success and the structural framework within which it is fitted are more determinate that the state of technology or the plenitude of food,” Mead offers examples of three premodern societies. Among the Zunis, individual success is defined in terms of the good it achieves for the group; hence the Zuni culture values cooperation. The Manus of the Admiralty Islands have developed a competitive system, and among the Manus individual effort determines status. Among the Eskimos of Greenland, the individual exists in a sovereign state, free to do what he or she pleases.

It is within a tradition of normative values that individuals define their conceptions of the good. The problem arises when many of us are no longer secure inheritors of a simple tradition. We then may find ourselves straddling two cultures.

We are on more certain ground, however, if we set out to discover whether a particular virtue is likely to be assigned high value given a specific culture with a particular orientation. Thus we may claim with some assurance that a cultural system which ascribes higher value to communal life is also likely to ascribe higher value to a virtue like hospitality. A recent philosophical treatise by Edmund Pincoffs distinguishes between instrumental and non-instrumental virtues. According to Pincoffs, instrumental virtues contribute directly to success in pursuing goals, ends, or objectives. Thus, “instrumental virtues are at home in talk about winning wars, finding sources of rivers, finishing novels, reducing deficits, and crossing seas.” Non-instrumental virtues are those that contribute to making common life more livable. They ameliorate human contact, and include attributes like civility, modesty, amiability, warmth, gentleness, decency, cheerfulness. Clearly, a society whose fabric of values is woven around non-instrumental virtues is more likely to value hospitality.

It is within a tradition of normative values that individuals define their conceptions of the good or the beautiful. The problem arises when many of us are no longer secure inheritors of a simple tradition. In my case, I find myself straddling two cultures with very different priorities and goals. When I chafe at my addiction to being hospitable, caught as it were in the vise of hospitality, tempted to consider it a vise not a virtue—I do so because the basic structures of my two worlds are in conflict. There is a part of myself, now,

4See Edmund L. Pincoffs, Quandaries and Virtues (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas, 1986), pp. 84-89.
that defines itself through its ability to write essays, if not novels, to teach well, to be a successful academic. My reflections gain an urgency because, surely, my predicament is neither unique nor endemic only to immigrants from cultures radically different from those they now inhabit.

Most modern individuals, it seems to me, certainly those living in modern America (though this should be equally true of modern China or Japan), are no longer members of a community with a single tradition. Modern Americans are caught in a vise of conflicting values caused by a variety of historical circumstances. A once rural society is now largely urban; religion has declined as a single fountain of values. With the rise of non-theological philosophies like Marxism and Existentialism, we are molded by a diversity of philosophies. We have discovered new meanings to the value of equality, extending it to women and even children. We have created new institutions like giant corporations to command our loyalties. And we have invented technologies that are redefining what it means to be human. We are, most of us, caught in a proliferation of oughts.

Caught in this conflict of values, some conservatives among us seek to attach themselves to the tradition, as if it existed in a single, monolithic form, as if the competing ideologies could be wished away, or suppressed. Some liberals, in their honest attempt to confront the moral relativism of our world, are sometimes paralyzed to the point of losing genuine commitment or, at the very least, find themselves worn down by their attempt to balance commitments. William Butler Yeats, recording our predicament at the opening of this century, characterized is as “mere anarchy ... loosed upon the world ... the best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity.”

Is there a balance to be achieved? I am drawn to the communal life of my original culture for its ability to provide security and acceptance, for its capacity to ameliorate the gnawing sense of human isolation, the stress of competition. But these benefits come at the cost of individual satisfaction achieved through fulfillment of needs for individual achievement and creativity. Modern Americans decry excessive taxation and excessive bureaucracy, but are they willing to forego the benefits of a socially responsible state that controls the dumping of toxic wastes in one's backyard or oversees civil aviation so that we fly in reasonably safe planes landing on reasonably safe runways? It is certainly reasonable to look for a way to reconcile diverse moral considerations, but not if this involves simplistic or reductive solutions. It seems also reasonable to assume that there will be no corporate solutions in our immediate future, at least no solutions that will not immediately be challenged by our growing, changing world. The best a liberal like me can hope for is that I will also continue to define and redefine my priorities, to seek a provisional balance, as I too grow and change in the growing, changing world. Of course, I walk on thin ice, but I must learn to accept that as my human condition. It is certainly better than to pretend that I walk on solid ground, to deny the reality of the ground continuing to shake under my feet.

And even from my precarious ground, I am willing to stake claim for one piece of certainty: there is one primary virtue our culture needs to avow—I call it tolerance.

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**The Cloth Flowers**

They last like none of the others,
Like flags on the veterans' graves
One kind of respect this morning
As I stand beside my father
Who brings gladiolas because
It's August, because the flowers
In his gardens vary from March
To November, because he weaves
A wreath in December that does
Evergreen work until crocus
Climbs out of the snow. He takes me,
Finally, past my mother's grave,
Twenty feet to the cloth flowers,
Says "touch them," and I do, thinking
These roses are dresses, almost
Erotic, that the nearest flag,
When it dreams, wishes itself placed
So close to these two-toned petals
They might open. My father waits,
Expects me to find a story
Here, the abstraction in the cloth,
And I, for once, approve, thinking
Asters, thinking
What of the rain on these roses,
Their cloth voices garbled by stain
Or mold, and, if not, what treatments
They have taken to guarantee
One viewing season.

So stable,
These Dorian Grays of flowers,
So permanent, these stay and stay.

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*Gary Fincke*
II

The principle of the Incarnation is that the spiritual is manifest in the material. Just as the divine and human natures of Christ are found to be indissoluble and indistinguishable, so too the understanding of the human coming from the Hebraic heritage of the Christian tradition emphasizes human existence as a somatopsychic unity, a unity of body and soul. The spiritual is not understood as "other worldly" or necessarily "supernatural" but rather as concretely involved in physical existence in this life. The root meaning of spirit in the Old Testament is "wind" or "breath" (ruach) which animates life and moves all of creation. By extension it became the life principle and is also associated with God as life giver and with human beings as beings created in the image of God (IDB, "spirit" pp. 432-433). This is one of the consequences of the doctrine of creation and its innate goodness of which human creaturehood is a part.

The spiritual dimensions of life for Luther, then, following this Hebraic heritage, are to be expressed in this life while also mindful of a life to come. Christian theology formally denies a soul/body dualism as found in classical Greek philosophy, emphasizing rather the resurrection of the body. Whatever eternal life is to be like, it is not a "disembodied" existence but must find some form of physical expression as well, hence St. Paul's reference to "spiritual bodies" in I Corinthians 15:44-50 (IDB, "Spiritual Body," p. 434). Fundamentally, the spiritual finds expression through faith and love in this life and embraces the simultaneous relationships discussed in the first part of this essay. To live out the spiritual character of one's life, then, is to live in faithful trust of God while expressing that faith in loving service to one's neighbor.

Within the Christian tradition this is also understood as a communal activity because the church exists in the world as the body of Christ. This body is animated, enlivened, by the spirit of God and is the third person of the Trinity. It is the continuation of the "symbiosis of love" discussed earlier by which the love of God not only voices forth the creation and incarncates for redemption but also permeates life for sanctification, calling all things closer to God in Christ. (The Holy Spirit "calls," "gathers," "enlightens," and "sanctifies" as the Small Catechism puts it.) It is this theological framework within which Christian liberal arts study is placed and in light of which scholarship itself can be seen as a spiritual endeavor.

The words "scholar" and "scholarship" both derive from the Latin word schola which means "school" and the word "scholastic" from the Greek scholastikos which means to keep a school and is often associated with the scholastic schoolmen of the Middle Ages (Webster's, p. 1051). Study as it was understood within the Christian context of the Middle Ages, at the time of the birth of the university, was seen as exercising one's God given powers of reason and faith to study the works of God in creation. Indeed it was the unity of God's activity in creation which made the universe one, a uni- rather than a multi-verse, and which unified the "university" itself. The study of the liberal arts, which began with the Greeks, chiefly with the Sophists (Narum, p. 3), by the time of the Middle Ages was seen in the theological context of God's creation and as one of the main ways in which to glorify God. Precisely because the liberal arts study life in its diversity...
and the human in particular their study can be seen as a spiritual activity. In their study the living thought of the human spirit is actively engaged in contemplation of the life of creation itself and ultimately that of its Creator.

By the time of the Reformation, education was seen as an office in creation itself created by God. Luther saw education as commanded by God and came to this conclusion on the basis of his work as a biblical expositor (Lotz, p. 9). It was seen as an extension of the family, and the family is one of the basic orders of creation by means of which God seeks to sustain the creation itself. Thus the school, and the scholarship which follows from it, is seen as part of the earthly kingdom and exists for service in this world. As mentioned earlier, Luther understood vocation as a this worldly activity, and it thus exists in service to God through one of the offices or stations which God has established in creation.

**Education and scholarly study, then, is a legitimate expression of one's vocation, particularly when it is understood in the context of creation and done in love for one's neighbor.**

Education and scholarly study, then, is a legitimate expression of one's vocation, particularly when it is understood within the context of creation and done in loving service to one's neighbor. Christian vocation can be legitimately expressed through education and scholarship and need not be seen as simply a means to some other end. Education and scholarship have their own religious integrity, and because they are to be exercised in this world the arts and sciences would have their own integrity as well.

There is no need to "spiritualize" or "Christianize" the study of a particular discipline in order to make it acceptable to the Christian vision. That is part of the power of Luther's dialectical understanding of the two kingdoms. Each realm has its own integrity, and within the realm of the world of today, the earthly kingdom, reason can reign supreme as a gift of God and an expression of the human spirit. As David Lotz points out, "The truth is that no one praised reason more unstintingly than Luther insofar as reason does not claim competence in divine as well as human matters, but limits itself to its own domain. Within its own proper sphere—which is the realm of temporal government and human justice, of social, political, and economic arrangements, of humanistic education, culture, and civilization—reason is God's greatest gift and should rule as queen" (pp. 9-10).

Because this use of reason is conducted in the earthly realm it can be conducted with freedom, for even the human will is not bound in relation to the world, only in relation to God. Lotz remarks, "The earthly kingdom—where reason rules and education finds its unqualified legitimation—is also the realm of human freedom.... Education is itself an instrument and expression of this freedom of will, and exists to instruct the will to choose rightly and wisely" (p. 10).

This education is for service in the world, and both Luther and Melanchthon highly valued classical learning in the shaping of sound political and ethical judgments in worldly affairs. It follows, then, that academic freedom is essential to the pursuit of one's scholarly vocation because all fields have their own integrity and, as long as they remain in their respective spheres of study, should not be interfered with by theological or any other ideological perspectives (see Lotz, p. 11).

In light of this understanding of education as an expression of an office in creation and a legitimate expression of Christian vocation, it is now possible to more directly pursue discussion of scholarship as a spiritual endeavor. Scholarship becomes a spiritual activity particularly when it serves the needs of one's neighbor. As mentioned earlier, the principle of the Incarnation sees the spiritual as manifest in the material so that one need not isolate oneself from the world in order to engage in spiritual activity. That is a false understanding based on a dualistic rather than a dialectical understanding of the two kingdoms. The spiritual permeates all of life in the world because theologically everything exists in the presence of God. There is no place where the spiritual has to be made present or where it is inappropriate to be found.

Accordingly, then, in scholarly study one is also engaged in an aspect of creation, indeed its study, and therefore is in the presence of God. The spiritual dimension of scholarship also enters through the spirituality of the scholar who by viewing his or her study theonomously, in the presence of God's law, is engaged in spiritual activity, for such study is done mindful of the presence of God and is employed in service to one's neighbor by bringing added understanding to students or increased knowledge to the world.

Scholarship then can be a spiritual endeavor done in faith and loving service and when so performed is a legitimate expression of one's Christian vocation. The challenge in our final section is to see how this understanding of scholarship and vocation can be useful in
addressing the false "vocationalism" of our time, particularly as it finds expression in undergraduate liberal arts education.

III

The purpose of liberal arts study is the study of the human in all its diversity and contexts. This is the artes liberales vision of education, which in the West harkens back to Isocrates and was given further definition by Cicero and Quintilian (Gengenbach, 1988, p. 6). Its purpose was to train a good citizen or leader involving the skills of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, what became known as the trivium which was later supplemented in late antiquity by arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, the quadrivium (Narum, p. 4).

For Christian liberal arts study the arts and sciences were affirmed but supplemented by theology. The fundamental context which provides unity to their study is the theological (see both Narum and Quanbeck's articles); indeed it is the commitment to God as creator which permits the affirmation of the cosmos itself as a united cosmos, a uni-verse. In light of this orientation all studies of humanity and nature are seen as valid in their own right, with their own inherent dignity and integrity. All studies are done, to borrow a phrase, sola Deo gloria.

Today, as has been alluded to, we face a number of challenges in undergraduate liberal arts study. This essay has chosen to focus on only one, the issue of "vocationalism," which seems to undermine the integrity and classical purpose of liberal arts education. In light of our brief study of the Christian doctrine of vocation, at least three possible responses to this contemporary condition can be formulated: first of all the need to deal with the dualistic stage of faith and psychological development which most college undergraduates enter with; secondly, to show the value of incarnational theology for connecting faith and life; and finally the importance, within a Christian context, of seeing all study theonomously. Let us turn briefly to each of these by way of concluding our discussion.

According to much recent research on college-age students and work coming out of adult psychological development most students around 18-20 years of age are in a dualistic mind set (see the work of William Perry in psychology as well as James Fowler and Sharon Parks in faith development). This of course means that what students want from their instructors are the "right" answers. There is no sensitivity to context—historical, cultural or otherwise—and this dualism carries over to their understanding of faith. One is right and the others are wrong, since there is one true and correct position for everything.

Given this mindset and the dualistic understanding of Christian vocation that many students get from their home congregations, there is little wonder that they see no connection between faith and their choice of career, major, etc. When faith is seen primarily as a personal, private matter, separated from the public realm, the realm of work, then it has little bearing on the understanding of one's vocation, and vocation reduces to the equivalent of an occupation.

This, within the Lutheran framework, is a direct result of the inability of the tradition to keep in dialectical tension the two kingdoms doctrine which Luther formulated. It collapsed into a dualism either of private piety or occupationalism, and our students, given the material pressures of our society, have little with which to resist such a separation. Religious matters become private, personal, and therefore disposable in relation to the realm of work and material success.

One way to respond to this condition is to try to open up for our dualistic students a dialectical way of thinking which can hold positions in tension without necessarily reducing them to one side or the other. The problem is not with a secularized sense of vocation but with only a secularized sense, that is, a non-dialectical one which does not relate vocation to the tension with faith and hope. It is hope and the role of the transcendent future grounded in this hope that can stand in critique over the present. It is in light of what might be that one is empowered to change what is.

This of course will take time and maturation on the students' part, but the point is we do them little service in either their vocational or faith understanding if we simply repeat back to them the dualistic answers they seek. Christian vocation as Luther envisioned it lives within the tensions of life. Faith is necessary precisely because the ways of God are not necessarily perceptible except under masks, which always opens up an element of doubt and uncertainty. Faith gives one the freedom to study this world in the midst of one's doubts and uncertainties.

A more complete understanding of Christian vocation would permit the relating of faith and career in a dialectical fashion as all faith is related to life, and this in turn would begin to provide a basis for transcendent critique of the values of our society and one's place within it. Indeed this is also part of the character of incarnational thinking.

As mentioned earlier, when one has a dualistic framework between faith and life situations it is very difficult to see any of one's ordinary actions as spiritual. The spiritual becomes the exceptional, the "mountaintop experiences," and the rest is just drab old work-a-day flesh. The principle of the Incarnation, that the spiritual is manifest in the material,
stands in direct contradiction to this type of spiritual dualism or separation. The spirit is the animating reality of life itself and as such, in biblical thought, could not be separated from the physical. It was what moved it. The second task, then, is to assist our students in seeing themselves as spiritual beings, not disembodied spirits or despiritualized bodies.

This means bringing spirituality back down to earth where it belongs in the first place. This also means that while students may certainly still see prayer and worship as spiritual activity, they need also to come to see their studies, their dates, their games, indeed their whole life activities, as having a spiritual character. The spiritual means to express one’s faith in loving service to one’s neighbor, proceeding from the love of God experienced in grace for oneself.

Thus as was shown, scholarship can be understood as a spiritual endeavor precisely because it is in service to neighbor and is also a part of one’s vocation because it proceeds from one of the offices of society in service to the creation itself. We need to assist our students in seeing their studies incarnationally rather than carnally. This spiritual character of life opens up when one begins to see all that one does theonomously.

To see theonomously is to see transcendentally, that is, to see beyond the immediately present in a more holistic and inclusive way in light of God’s activity in creation itself. This is not to see things in a “fuzzy” or “weak-headed” way, but is rather to see the horizons of meaning that are present in every occasion of life. It is not out of life but places the occurrences of life in a wider context of meaning.

Since the time of Aristotle the West has been impressed with the value and power of reductive analysis. To break a whole down into its constituent parts and to classify was seen to be “knowing” what that whole was. This tradition became codified in natural science from the time of the Renaissance and is still with us today.

More recently, an additional movement of “holism” has developed to help balance the reductive influences of analysis. It does not disallow the value of the part but seeks to see the whole as well. The whole is more than the sum of its parts and one needs to deal with wholes as wholes. Holism focuses on the interconnections between elements in physical existence, particularly seeing their interdependency. This has given rise to symbiosis on a global scale, and theologically it can be seen as based upon the symbiosis of God’s love in creation itself as discussed earlier. All life exists in interdependence precisely because it is a product of divine love, a symbiosis of love.

The environmental crisis was one of the first issues to raise this need for “holism,” and more recently space exploration has allowed us to see the earth as a totality, what Frank White calls the “Overview Effect,” which gives us a more inclusive perspective upon ourselves. Perhaps this experience is not dissimilar from that of the earlier age of exploration and how it redefined the place of Europe in the world. The point is that this holism, deriving from a global perspective and done in faith, can be seen as one of the direct results of viewing one’s life and studies theonomously.

What one studies are the “laws” God has placed in the world, indeed the cosmos, by which unity and wholeness is possible at all, why there is a creation rather than a chaos. Now this does not mean that one will verify divine theonomy in the physics lab; that is to confuse the two kingdoms again. Physics, as with all disciplines, has its own integrity, but there is the need for greater networking, for a more inclusive, holistic perspective in light of which these occurrences in physics can find meaning even beyond the discipline of physics.

In the final analysis, what has been described under the concept of Christian vocation is nothing less than the practice of character formation. This includes integration of the spiritual and the material.

Traditionally, this is known as a metaphysic or a worldview, and part of the mission of a Christian liberal arts college is to communicate the Christian worldview to its students through all disciplines of the liberal arts. It is partly the freedom of the Christian faith that makes the liberal arts “liberating,” for it assists that process of opening horizons of meaning and understanding by providing a ground or vision from which they can be related.

In the final analysis what has been described under the concept of Christian vocation is nothing less than the practice of spiritual formation. Such formation includes the integration of the spiritual and the material, the overcoming of false dualisms which separate faith from life, and the cultivation of a more inclusive perspective grounded in the unity of the Creator with the creation itself. A more careful consideration of the Christian understanding of vocation within the liberal arts context would assist such spiritual formation.

In conclusion, then, it has been shown that scholarship itself is a spiritual endeavor and worthy of Christian vocation. This understanding of work in scholarly
tasks is seen as a vocation through which the neighbor and creation itself are served. It can then be used as a corrective to the self-indulgent occupationalism of many of our students by assisting in opening them out of dualistic ways of thinking, seeing their own spiritual lives more incarnationally and their tasks as students and workers theonomously. To see one's scholarship as a legitimate expression of Christian vocation is to see it theonomously, and to assist our students in doing so for themselves is to partly fulfill the mission of the church in higher education.

**Works Consulted**


Come, Let Us Colleague

Linda Ferguson

At a recent faculty retreat, a campus visitor lectured on commitment to liberal and humane learning. Towards the end he made specific recommendations in the areas of self-development, faculty community, and curriculum; the essential factor common to all three areas seemed to be "collegiality." He exhorted us to strive for collegiality apart from that togetherness dictated by our campus responsibilities and apart also, I believe, from simple social interaction. He spoke of "faculty development" to be fostered but not dictated by the institution. He urged that we strive for human renewal rather than professional advancement, that we read books and discuss them, even when, in his words, "the busyness of our lives and the ways our institutions are organized . . . militate against such conversations."

Many of us in the "university community" do spend large amounts of time together. Most of us have casual interactions in the course of our usual days; many have sustained, intense encounters through committee and department assignments; some associate together outside the academic framework in religious and civic organizations and in private socializing. These interactions do contribute to a spirit of community, but the sum of these does not seem to constitute "collegiality."

My Merriam-Webster lists two entries s.v. "colleague," the first a noun ("an associate or co-worker typically in a profession or a civil or ecclesiastical office and often of similar rank or state"), and the second a verb ("to enter into an alliance"). Noun and verb have distinct histories, the noun deriving from collega ("one chosen at the same time with another partner in office"), and the verb descending from collegare ("to bind together").

The synonyms under the verb entry, "join," "unite," "cooperate" and "conspire," suggest that our colleagues are more than those with whom we associate; they are those with whom we cooperate, those with whom we conspire. "To conspire" requires more energy and imagination than "to associate," and conspiring need not result in illegal, treacherous, or evil acts. The Latin conspírare meant "to breathe together," certainly a virtue if the musical ensemble can be taken as a positive model of cooperation. And musicians use the Italian phrase con spirito as a performance direction for "lively, with spirit."

I never feel more conspiratorial than at the Thursday "brown bag" meetings arranged by the faculty club for any members of the university community who can sneak away to attend them. After informal conversations over lunch, a presentation is made by a volunteer from the faculty or staff on any matter of scholarly interest to the presenter. (It is assumed that if a colleague finds a topic interesting, it holds potential interest for all.) Similarly, those of us who do regularly conspire through reading and discussing books on a self-determined schedule can testify to the enlivening effects of such enterprise.

"Assigned readings," voluntary presentations, and more appointments marked into one's daybook may seem unlikely ways to "liberate" over-committed hard-working faculty. But conspiring can only take place apart from imposed obligations, apart from what is expected of us as professionals advancing in our fields, apart from continual charges in our committees to solve practical problems, apart from our daily responsibilities to our students. Once we choose to practice liberal learning ourselves, and integrate it into our own development, we are better equipped to meet those obligations and responsibilities.

Brown bag lectures and faculty-instigated seminars cannot substitute for the institutes, workshops, and conferences sponsored by universities, departments, and professional societies. But neither can we expect those "official" events to renew us with the same liveliness (con spirito) we can inspire in one another. Teaching one's peers and learning from them on occasion can revive our enthusiasm for teaching and learning at precisely the points in the semester when students seem most resistant to our best efforts. We often need help in recalling why we became professors in the first place and how it feels to rejoice in learning something new from someone else. Further, as our guest speaker implied, if we practice teaching and learning as colleagues outside the structures of dictated responsibility, then we will find it easier to work together within these structures toward creative and humane solutions to problems of pedagogy, governance, curriculum, and campus life.

Let us conspire more in the new year.
American Religion

Charles Vandersee

Dear Editor:

The town of Dogwood, Virginia, about 40,000 people, is a sort of microcosm of American religion, denominationally speaking. Not only the mainline Protestant churches, three Roman Catholic parishes, and Congregation Beth Israel, but also a Greek Orthodox church, a large Mormon church, the Seventh-Day Adventists, and an Assembly of God (the Jimmy Swaggart persuasion).

There is a black Pentecostal group (spelled thus, on the bungalow-size chapel), also a black Episcopal congregation. We have an active Quaker meeting and a Unitarian church named after Thomas Jefferson. Just outside of town, in Albermarle County's green and pleasant land, you will find an Anglican church, using the 1928 Book of Common Prayer.

There are three Lutheran congregations, one Missouri Synod and two ELCA (one was ALC and the other LCA). The denomination most prominent on the Saturday church page of the Daily Progress and the Sunday morning airwaves is Baptist.

All this is quite different from an Indiana town I once knew fairly well, rambling its perimeter by bicycle from the fairgrounds to the cemetery to the golf ball factory to the abandoned shell of the old brewery. Within that circuit we did have a Christian Science meeting house, actually on Main Street, and in a frame building the size of a large garage, a Church of the Nazarene. There were Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Disciples of Christ, Baptists, Reformed, and Brethren. But no Episcopal church or Unitarian church; no mosque, tabernacle, temple, revival tent, or storefront chapel.

Years later, reading the town weekly paper while in California in graduate school (I still take it), I saw that Jorbin the tailor had died and that last rites were in Chicago at a synagogue. That was my first inkling that our town had a Jew.

Strange, as I ponder small-town life ages ago, is the extraordinary lack of curiosity that seemed to be taken for granted. St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church was then and still is the largest non-commercial structure in town—aside from the huge brick courthouse of 1878, now on the National Register of Historic Places. The tower of St. Mary's, with its cross on top, was and still is a landmark visible from all directions. Yet I have never been inside the building.

I remember going into the Methodist church once. It was a new building of contemporary design; I was architecturally curious; access was through the son of the minister, a high school classmate. Literally never (if memory is correct) have I ventured inside any of the other churches in town, and certainly not for a service of worship. True, I once entered the so-called "parlors" of the old Methodist church (which they tore down for a Marathon gas station), forced to participate in a piano recital. But that experience was far from spiritual; next door to the church was the county jail, and on that night both brick buildings looked exactly alike.

Happily, adults are bolder than adolescents. And in remote central Virginia the ecumenical movement that had not reached Indiana in the 1950s has in the 1980s not much waned, regardless of what may be happening elsewhere.

The Lutheran congregation to which I belong has on occasion conducted Lenten programs, followed by Communion liturgy, with Presbyterians and with Episcopalians both black and white. We seem to have a mini-tradition of going to Mount Zion, one of the several downtown black Baptist churches, for Sunday worship with Communion once a year, and then Mount Zion comes out to our University location the next year.

We seem to have a mini-tradition of going to Mount Zion, one of the several downtown black churches, for Sunday worship with Communion once a year.

Church buildings now get used more for special events. I have heard the Heidelberg Chamber Orchestra in St. Paul's, the University area Episcopal church, also there a first-rate black gospel choir from Richmond. Westminster Presbyterian Church has a tracker-action pipe organ from Taylor and Boody, a new firm over in the Shenandoah Valley; on many occasions I've gone to Friday night recitals. On a Sunday afternoon in January I find myself at First Baptist downtown (the black First Baptist), or else at Mount Zion—we have
an annual community-wide memorial service for Martin Luther King. At “First Night” festivities on New Year’s Eve all the downtown churches and the synagogue stand open for events: a recorder consort here, there the Oratorio Society doing a few numbers, in another sanctuary a gamelan ensemble playing music from India.

People die. I have sat in the austere Unitarian church for memorial services, in St. Thomas Aquinas for funeral mass, in our Gothic Revival university chapel (one of those curious anomalies at an American state university) for Christian rites.

What these recollections lead up to is only the well-known fact that in America the styles of worship and architecture are quite varied. I watch new families come to my own church; some stay, and others leave for another church. Then you see the latter at concerts or supermarkets and chat amiably about why one church was not right for them. They couldn’t tolerate no worship other than Roman Catholic, but also she could not bear the torture of a Christian congregation as community.

Equally inflexible is a case on the opposite end of the Christian spectrum. On Sunday morning I often turn on the Northside Baptist broadcast while driving to St. Mark. There you hear this kind of righteous outburst, after some chatty fellowship announcements or a fervent extemporaneous prayer: “Aren’t you glad we don’t have here one of those cold, formal, liturgical services?” The word liturgical uttered with the same intonation as, say, the word pornography.

Perhaps people also select their denomination as you’re supposed to select your wardrobe: imitating people on the next rung of the ladder of your choice.

Yet it’s unfair to dismiss O’Connor and Northside as quirky. Miss O’Connor would firmly insist that worship is a private matter even though done publicly. And that even if a congregation is supposed to be a “support group,” surely not every individual need stay after worship for tidings of those in travail. And that post-worship tidings under these towering crosses are often banalities at best, teeth-clenching intrusions at worst. Better to flee that devilment and stand before God with integrity intact.

Northside would argue—does, in fact, argue—that a highly structured liturgy inhibits the descent of the Holy Spirit. How can God break through a firm “order” of worship? The order of the Latin mass that the modern liturgical churches still follow (without the delicious Latin itself—“Quinquagesima Sunday!”) is not merely a tedious ritual but actually hostile to the Spirit. Better to resist that devilment and open oneself to God.

As a Lutheran, eternally sitting somewhere between the immersion tank and the Lady chapel (hovering somewhere perhaps, eternally and rationally above them both), I’m naturally able to see the Devil in both directions. Or unable—the reason for pity and hilarity.

Pity because I know how much I have gained from occasionally venturing into other traditions, and I suspect other people, oblivious, might prize it too. Music is the best example. Though untalented, I can coax an octave out of a recorder, and certain books on my shelf reveal the limitations of Lutheran hymnals. To be fair, the Lutheran Book of Worship pleasingly introduces some fine tunes from the shapenote tradition of old New England and the Southern mountains. But one needs the whole Sacred Harp itself, still published in Cullman, Alabama. You also need James Weldon Johnson’s American Negro Spirituals, George Pullen Jackson’s Spiritual Folk Songs of Early America, Music from Taize, and the Oxford Book of Carols.

You even need Selected Songs of Thomas Campion (“Out of my soul’s depth to thee my cries have sounded”), the second volume of William Billings’ Complete Works (actually bought here in Dogwood, used, for $10), and a little paperback, The Singing Irish, bought in Yorkshire, with a splendid Good Friday lament sung by Mary:

Hard is the iron which holds Him there,
Sharp are the thorns on His dark hair,
But harder far and darker still
Are the hands which nailed Him up on Calvary Hill.
Then hilarity. This because I sense how comic I myself sound when occasionally reacting to disagreeable worship experiences, and I know how comic others are. The funeral mass last spring for poor C.P., prematurely dead of a brain tumor, I positively hated. And tactlessly said so, when tapped on the shoulder after the service by a Presbyterian friend who often worships with Episcopalians. I hated it because it was all obeisance to God and no appreciation for Carlo, except briefly in the prayer. It was all form and no tribute, except to God, and we always, ad infinitum, keep talking about God. Here for our possible enlargement was an actual human being, an exemplary steward of his talents, but ignored. It was the church as coldly correct, and much wanting in witness.

The funeral mass last spring for poor C.P., prematurely dead of a brain tumor, I positively hated. And tactlessly said so, when tapped after the service by a friend.

Later I laughed at myself for being theatrical, which is to say expressing my feelings exactly. What was the good of it? A debate on which of us was more right, the church or I, would be the kind of entertainment called farce. Different traditions do things in different ways, and they always have their reasons. The newspaper reports that the top ten Baptist hymns start with “Amazing Grace” and end with “At the Cross” and “At Calvary.” Why not? Why should they sing from dark Germany, “This world’s prince may still / Scowl fierce as he will”?

The worship and music committee does not know how blessed it is that I refrain from joining. At Communion, I’ve found out, venturing into other churches, the Baptists and Presbyterians of Dogwood don’t form a queue and proceed into the chancel. They stay in their seats. Probably they have their reasons. This discovery has made me see the Lutheran habit with a new eye. Using this new eye, I see the spectacle of postures, gaits, costumes, coiffures, backsides, and enigmatic faces as precious little edification. So in the committee I might campaign for the quiet Calvinist mode.

Over the years, under the influence of other music and other worship traditions, experiences that seem to reach regions of the mind and soul not tapped on the typical Lutheran Sunday, I find certain broad reflections emerging:

Surely the grand vision of the “Church Universal” or the body of Christ everywhere in the world forming a weekly bond by sharing the same ancient order of worship and the same Scripture readings on a given day is as sentimental a notion as the “me-and-Jesus” piety of the fundamentalists.

Conversely, surely the idea that the Holy Spirit cannot break through formal ritual and quiet reflection, and instead requires spontaneous prayers, tempests of tears, and the outstretched arms of strong-lunged evangelists, is ludicrous and indeed blasphemous.

Surely the transforming of both the sentimental and the blasphemous into firm and uncompromising stances (which means, in effect, doctrines) is well, as the Church Lady says, on Saturday Night Live, “Isn’t that special?”

In our era institutions are said to be “groping,” “unsure of themselves,” unsettled in values and principles and priorities and verities. Yet when one enters a particular church building or monitors the utterances of a particular denomination, “liberal” or “conservative,” one realizes that one has entered a theater of the predictable and wholly self-satisfied. The high feasts of the church are agreeably movable, but not the way people do things. The chief Sunday proclamation and witness still seems to be: “We do it our way.” Meaning, loftily (sadly), “We do it the only right way.”

From Dogwood, yours faithfully,

C.V.

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James Combs

Television veterans will recall the brief but truly pioneering career during the late 1960s of syndicated TV talk host Joe Pyne.

Remember that very early on in the history of television the networks discovered, a bit to their astonishment, that television viewers would sit down at home and silently watch people on TV talk to each other. Talk-show formats began to develop, and made the hosts of such shows into unlikely celebrities. Dave Garroway established the low-key style and casual pace that made NBC’s Today Show an early success. Jack Paar demonstrated that people would actually stay up late to watch the chatter of an endless succession of celebrities who shared with Jack in public their firm conviction of their own importance. Arthur Godfrey brought his affable combination of casual talk interspersed with performers from radio. And there were others.

But the success of these early figures gave credence to the myth, most famously expressed by Marshall McLuhan, that television is a “cool” medium that does not favor hot confrontation, irreconcilable airing of controversy, loud and offensive behavior. Early television was cooler, I suspect, because of network control. They established “Standards and Practices” offices, preferred predictable TV hosts, and feared public and political reprisals if some network figure became embroiled in an on-camera conflict that would be unsettling to people. Audiences were supposed to be lulled (“narcotized,” as one critic of the time claimed) by TV, not enraged at it.

Conflicts there were—Godfrey’s firings, Paar’s feuds, and Edward R. Murrow himself criticized Joe McCarthy on See It Now (although not face to face). But McCarthy’s “fall” after the televised Army-McCarthy hearings was explained by the argument that he was too “hot” for TV, coming off as a bully, lout, and character assassin. But this was the age, recall, which had convinced itself that the “vital center” would hold because of an abiding “consensus” that we had been “given,” and figures like McCarthy were just too ungentlemanly and boorish to be part of it. Television showed the self-confidence that the believed consensus on standards and practices began: host Ronald Reagan of the General Electric Hour reminded us weekly that “progress is our most important product,” as if progress was something safe and unthreatening, like a new toaster.

But progress, as we have found from bitter experience, is not always as progressive as it might seem. We believed that innovation and “initiative” were always good, when what they always meant was simply change. Television emerged in a context of corporate competition, relatively free expression, and technological innovation, a combination that can be pretty lethal for constricting programming fare to the “good taste” of cultural guardians.

Some of the classical critics of capitalism, such as Werner Sombart, have a point when they argue that capitalism as a value can supersede and subordinate every other value—tradition, community, religion, and so on. As the structure of the television industry has changed with the advent of independents, cable “narrowcasting,” and corporate takeovers of the networks by “bottom line” executives who care about nothing but ratings and profits, values such as “television’s responsibility for cultural uplift” and “television’s responsibility for maintaining the quality of public discourse” are now solely the province of Communication Ethics texts, irrelevant to the decisions made in boardrooms and cutting rooms at Fox, MTV, and ABC.

Conflicts there were—

Godfrey’s firings, Paar’s feuds, and Edward R. Murrow himself criticized Joe McCarthy on See It Now (although not face to face.)

The “progress” of the television industry is certainly producing a different product than the old days of Leonard Bernstein teaching kids about classical music on Sunday afternoon and Ed Murrow hosting CBS Reports in prime time. Can you imagine a corporate executive at CBS now seriously proposing the network pre-empt the Bears-Vikings game for the New York Philharmonic, or that it increase the amount of prime time devoted to reportage of social problems?

Perhaps the early visionaries who saw television as a great educational
medium that would produce a better informed and more empathic public just expected too much. Television, even in the control of elites, had to be a popular medium that could be no better or worse than the culture that spawned and supported it. Television is the popular representation of our evolution, or devolution, as a people, so we cannot escape at least partial complicity in what it has become. In some sense, we really do get the television we deserve, and if what we see on "the boob tube" is dumb or demeaning, contrived and exploitative, vacuous or degenerate, then we are witnessing a register of the American popular spirit, a condition that is downright dispiriting.

We blame television for everything from the steady drop in voter turnout to the decline in productivity, as if it were something separate from ourselves. We made television into a carnival of desire, a circus and a parade, a raucous sideshow, a hall of crazy mirrors, a vaudeville act. When we watch TV, we are watching ourselves as television sees us, and if we are beginning to resemble the picture of Dorian Gray, that is not entirely the fault of the cynical and manipulative people who decided what goes on television.

Which returns us (you'd forgotten?) to the late Joe Pyne. Joe was a crewcut, chain-smoking ex-Marine who got his start in an "insult-the-caller" radio call-in show in Los Angeles and then moved into syndicated television. On TV, he was the Impresario of the Insult, baiting and sneering at guests who were willing to subject themselves to ridicule. Pyne would enlist the studio audience on his side, question the patriotism, honesty, and sanity of his guests, and transform the show into a degradation ceremony.

Pyne's spiritual heir nowadays is Morton Downey, Jr., who berates "guests" from various causes with the same sort of appeals—"pablum-puking pinkos," "sombres who are running down America," and so on. He works the studio audience up into a fever pitch (these people are the descendants of those who voted "thumbs down" at the Roman Colosseum) as he tells his hapless victims to "zip it, pal." Downey is a master of ceremonies who has everyone shouting at everyone else in a matter of minutes, whose principal discursive motif is the accusation, and who understands the uses of all the informal logical fallacies that have ever existed.

We blame television for everything from the steady drop in voter turnout to the decline in productivity, as if TV were something separate from ourselves.

But unlike, say, Joe McCarthy, Downey understands television. McCalrthy probably in his own way believed in what he said and in the necessity of his methods, but his brutal demeanor was bad television. Downey's genius is that he clearly believes none of what he says, understands that television will tolerate a confrontational style if it is done light-heartedly, and knows that for his audience it is all play and catharsis. (Columnist Clarence Page suggested, quite correctly, that Downey's show was similar to Orwell's "Two Minute Hate" in 1984: "The horrible thing about the two Minute Hate," wrote Orwell, "was not that one was obliged to act a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in.")

Downey understands that the victim is always guilty, and he finds plenty of people willing to be victimized if they can just be on TV. Mort succeeds by brandishing his cynicism, declaring openly that what he is doing is the "fake real" of TV, and that his brand of media hype is no less an admirable performance art than that perfected by other TV personages as Robert Novak and Hulk Hogan (according to a recent poll, wrestler Hogan is the most admired "athlete" among teenagers). Downey is a central figure in the rise of what is variously called "tabloid TV," "confrontainment," and, more broadly, "sleaze TV." For those who suspect that the country is "dumbing down," TV offers plenty of evidence. Consider these facts, O ye guardians of cultural literacy and quality. Downey's show is the most popular syndicated show since Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman. Geraldo Rivera's special for NBC on Satanism was the highest rated two-hour documentary ever broadcast, with an audience of over fifty million. In those media markets where Maury Povich's syndicated schlock-news program goes up against the network news, he blows them out of the water.

That's nothing: during the two party conventions last summer, about 70 per cent of those watching TV were not watching Dukakis or Bush, and on election night in most media markets most people were watching something other than the returns. Meanwhile, talk-show topics have become all the more explicit and lurid. The topics of discussion for one recent week on Donahue went as follows: "Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling," "Parents' Snapshots: Art or kiddie Porn?", "Married Five Times or More," "Killer Baby Sitters," and "Sex Etiquette." And everyone, I am sure, is aware of the increasingly bold themes and images on soap operas, primetime series, and mini-series. One of the most in-
intersting mini-series in the last year was last fall’s “Favorite Son,” run during the presidential campaign, not only because of its sexual sensationalism (even an explicit bondage scene), but also because of its political sensationalism: suffice it to say that it had a thoroughly cynical view of politics, and did well in the ratings, one suspects, because it captured something of the mood of the public.

This remarkable trend, I think, cannot be totally explained by the structural changes in the television industry. If audiences were not interested in this new fare, it wouldn’t last long. The boundaries of television are established by norms of tolerance and taste, and those norms are clearly changing. What kind of people are we becoming, we might ask ourselves, when so many of us enjoy watching Rivera and Downey inciting riots in the studio? (These worthies, by the way, will soon be joined by G. Gordon Liddy of Watergate infamy, who is syndicating his own shout-and-snarl show.) What is it about our time that makes the media his- trionics of wrestling into a major sport? (In the tradition of roller derby, a new syndicated show is due out soon entitled Rollergames, in which contestants on skates attempt to traverse a perilous course.) Why, for that matter, have we made stand-up comedy the blood sport of the Eighties, an occasion for vulgarity, insult, slur, rage, and abuse, much of it directed at the audience? (Sam Kinison has a popular MTV visual out entitled “Wild Thing,” featuring his usual comedic rage over betrayal by women, all the while he is being tempted by a half-naked Jessica Hahn.) And why would nice George Bush, the scion of an Establishment family, the product of an education into being a gentleman at the finest elite schools, run such a tasteless and “negative” presidential campaign?

Explaining what is happening to television, and in the society it serves, isn’t going to be easy. Paul Fussell (see his amusing book Class) might explain all this as the product of “prole drift,” whereby increasingly proletarian tastes dictate the conduct of news, entertainment, and politics. Others have argued that the rise of tabloid TV is the result of a spreading sense of powerlessness: one can’t affect, or even understand, public policy choices, a remote and impersonal government, or an imperial presidency known only through staged appearances, but one can participate in a kind of “existential TV” that condemns the rampant evils of

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Gethsemani Abbey, Kentucky (Remembering)

From Merton’s hermitage I watched the Abbey fade in the dusk where monks blended in the shadows of the crows circling above the iron trees, and I thought of my father on the farm in Illinois, watching his maples fade in to the same night, waiting for me.

And I thought of the other days when my aunt Emma opened her Bible to Revelation and praised God for it and for the TV ministry and looked me in the eye and asked if I was saved.

Then there was the business of the 21 shrimp my father said we had to get at Carlyle Lake on Tuesday night because that’s the only time you got the 21, otherwise it was something like 12 and then not with the cole slaw.

When it was time we drove to the airport through the southern Illinois night, my father silhouetted in the blue ash light, hungry to please me, talking of our woods, how it was time to come home.

And I caught his eyes in the mirror, thinking of my plane waiting in the darkness like my aunt’s fiery cherubim with their wings covering their feet

J.T. Ledbetter
a vicious and pernicious world, thus making us feel superior to Satanists, Harvard lawyers, transvestites, or whatever. Still others think we have entered an age of social fragmentation characterized by a stagnant class system that breaks us up into irreconcilable status groups (skinheads, street gangs, new age religions, and on endlessly) with which people identify rather than the larger society or government. The more bizarre of these then become the fare of television talk, suggesting perhaps that we are becoming a decadent society of Romanesque excess and narcissism. In any case, we seem determined to display in public the thousand sordid images of which our souls are constituted for all to see and respond to.

Americans seem determined to display in public the thousand sordid images of which our souls are constituted for all to see and to respond to.

My own concern about tabloid TV is that such public language tends to become a pervasive habit. The practice of vilification and retribution replaces traditions of discussion and debate; the question, what’s the problem? is replaced by, who’s the enemy?; and we come to expect constant public rancor. We get swept away by the power of negative thinking, and we legitimate mendacity and cynicism as necessary and proper. We have come to expect the appeal to base motives and its destruction of the base of civilization, civilized habits of communication. Television in that case becomes the vehicle of our own cultural diminution, poisoning the well of language and draining it of all sustenance. In such a diminished state of, for example, “tabloid politics,” it will likely be the case that governments will get the people they deserve.

Gerald Mast died last fall: he was 48. Author of A Short History of the Movies; The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies; Film/Cinema/Movie; Howard Hawks, Storyteller; and Can’t Help Singing: The American Musical on Stage and Screen, as well as the editor of two major anthologies, Mast had published more widely and perhaps more intelligently on film than anyone in the English-speaking world.

To the extent that an American intellectual can be “well known” or even “famous” without leaving the academy, Mast achieved this distinction. I want to consider something of his achievement, also, perhaps, to answer a question which has bothered me for some time: why is it, given the quality of Mast’s work and the respect accorded him, that his influence on the American film scene has generally been so small?

Perhaps the best introduction to Mast’s work is Film/Cinema/Movie: A Theory of Experience (1977). There are a number of famous people who have set themselves up as theorists of film among others, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Panofsky, Richard Maxwell teaches in the Department of English at Valparaiso University. He has written on Film for The Cresset for many years.
Bazin, and Arnheim. Their efforts demonstrate the pitfalls. They get to riding hobbyhorses—the dialectical impact of montage, the naturalistic integrity of long shots, the governing influence of physical reality; the hobbyhorse, whatever it may be, is identified as the "essence" of cinema. Mast avoids this difficulty by structuring his book around an elegant but incisive one-sentence definition—"a work of cinema is (1) an integrated (2) succession of (3) projected (4) images and (5) (recorded) sounds." He produces an extended commentary on the five numbered words; each, ultimately, is considered as a form of work; that is, of purposive human activity. By this means, Mast effectively synthesizes half a century of extended speculation on film.

As polemical books go, Film/Cinema/Movie is unusually level-headed: Mast tosses out a lot of garbage along the way, but he makes sure that it lands on no one's head. There is one possible exception. The book is most critical when it treats the most recent theories. Christian Metz's semiotic analysis of film, published in 1968, was fashionable when Mast formulated his own ideas. Metz believed that film could be treated as a language. Working from Ferdinand de Saussure's famous lectures on linguistics, he tried to formulate a system in which shots were analogous to words, images to statements, and so forth.

Mast effectively demolishes this approach, then—perhaps his most unexpected move—substitutes a "semiology" of his own: there is not one language of cinema, there are three languages—of succession, image, and sound, each intertwined with the others. While Mast's account is on the surface rather simple and obvious, it turns out to be bolder than the putatively avant-garde effort: it is not Metz and his cohorts but Mast whose analysis seems genuinely semiological. (Cf. one of the few plausible books in this mode: Roland Barthes' S/Z, a tour de force first published in 1970, where five codes are traced through a short story by Balzac; Barthes' codes are defined through a somewhat different principle than Mast's, but the reliance on languages rather than on a language solves similar problems.)

Film/Cinema/Movie suggests Mast's peculiar relations with the advanced thinkers in his field. He tends to be skeptical about conspicuously difficult systems of thought; at the same time, he is committed to the clear exposition of challenging ideas. This is a difference in style—also, perhaps, a difference in values. So far I know, it was in The Comic Mind (1973) that Mast first set up a context in which ease and clarity could be seen as ordering standards. He writes, "perhaps the only term for describing the successful marriage between comic intention and execution is one of the key concepts of the Renaissance—sprezzatura. Sprezzatura might be defined as the art that conceals art, the supremely artificial that strikes us as supremely natural." Mast is appealing to a fundamentally aristocratic ideal, somehow—he is evasive on this matter—adapted to the purposes of a modern democratic society. He suggests that such an ideal might help the viewer understand the great modern makers of film comedy; implicitly, he sets up a rationale for his own mode of criticism.

Later books hark back to sprezzatura. Mast's most sustained account of art that conceals art comes in his study of Hawks, whom he regards as one of the greatest American directors—despite his apparent anonymity. "The seeming artlessness and ordinariness [of Hawks' films] not only tends to make their creator invisible but also makes it exceedingly difficult to evaluate them according to the existing standards, terms, and values for discussing films." Furthermore, Hawks' "ease represents a kind of midwestern, James Whitcomb Rileyish, American humility...it is the accomplishment, not its maker, which must speak its worth."

The reference to Riley doesn't ring true for me: Fred Astaire and Buster Keaton are more to the point, as an earlier section of this same essay argues. Taken together, the careers of Astaire, Keaton, and Hawks convincingly suggest that there could be such a thing as American sprezzatura, an art which plays down its own intrinsic difficulties and thus communicates with a broadly middlebrow audience. Mast dwells on this possibility throughout his career; the obvious exemplar is Shakespeare—that bourgeois wordmonger—whose plays Mast used to compare with the Astaire-Rogers musicals of the Thirties. ("Why not?" he asked fecklessly in the course of a lecture at Valparaiso University a few years ago; no one stood up and protested, though there may have been silent reservations.)

I have suggested the manner in which Mast's earlier work developed; it remains to see why his example proved hard to follow or assimilate. A consensus is beginning to build that something went drastically wrong in the film criticism of the Seventies and early Eights. One might say that critics retreated to the academy. However, since I like universities, and regard them despite their many failings as valuable islands of intelligence, I find "retrait" the wrong word. (Mast and others did better work within universities than—for example—Pauline Kael without.) One might say that critics discovered psychoanalysis and Marxism. However, since I respect both Freud...
and Marx, I cannot regard their influence as corrupting. One might say that the combination of academic privilege with a heady dose of theory led people astray. This, perhaps, is a more accurate appraisal. Theories have to have some contact with things that actually go on. If universities are islands of intelligence, then the problem with islands is that they may turn out to resemble Gulliver’s Laputa.

During the Seventies, Laputan theories came fast and furious. Christian Metz’s semiology of the cinema had its day, then yielded to this, perhaps, is a more accurate appraisal. Theories have to have some contact with things that actually go on. If universities are islands of intelligence, then the problem with islands is that they may turn out to resemble Gulliver’s Laputa.

During the Seventies, Laputan theories came fast and furious. Christian Metz’s semiology of the cinema had its day, then yielded to the Marxist/psychoanalytical systems of Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, and a host of other (usually French) thinkers. Out of material provided by these people, enterprising disciples—American as well as French—constructed Rube Goldberg apparatuses of extraordinary shakiness.

One example, a bit of a famous discussion by Jean-Pierre Oudart on the shot/reverse shot (e.g. cuts between two speakers in a conversation), will suggest the general tone: “The viewer of the cinematic spectacle experiences shot 1 as an imaginary plenitude, unbounded by any gaze, and unmarked by difference. Shot 1 is thus the site of jouissance akin to that of the mirror stage prior to the child’s discovery of its separation from the ideal image which it has discovered in the reflecting glass.” I don’t want to condemn this kind of comment (obviously taken out of context) for its complexity. More dubious is the a priori, idealized approach: Oudart is so busy cramming his description into a confining Lacanian terminology that one tends to lose sight of any actual viewer. Theory floats free of practice. To put the point another way, Procrustes is not the sort of fellow to practice sprezzatura.

Mast had rejected Metz’s semiology in order to replace it with one of his own; his reaction to Marxist/psychoanalytical criticism, a more formidable movement, developed more slowly but similarly—towards emulation rather than mere rejection. In 1983, the preface to a new edition of Film/Cinema/Movie sets out a contrast between Mast’s “humanist” criticism and the “poststructuralist” (Marxist/psychoanalytical) school which had, by then, gained a conclusive dominance within American and European universities.

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Mast states that he is committed to studying “the interrelationship of empirical data that can be demonstrated to exist in the work itself and the interpretation of that data by its receiver”—a dry but clear formulation. The poststructuralist, by contrast, “wishes to understand a film in so far as it reveals (and conceals) the cultural attitudes that produced it and the cultural interests which it serves.” Each approach has its problems. Humanist critics fetishize the coherence of individual works as well as the “visions” of film artists; they might learn from the poststructuralists that “films are the expensive products of both a societal system and an industrial process.” Poststructuralists produce the same readings over and over: “inevitably the art work is ‘demystified’ to reveal its fealty to bourgeois capitalism and psychoanalyzed to reveal the underlying repressions and aggressions of patriarchal sexism.” Such critics might do well to admit that they tend to overlook historical particulars (particulars are often screened out by too arbitrary a theoretical commitment); they should also face up to the fact that they value some art works more than others—and do so for aesthetic reasons, just like humanists.

In making this comparison, Mast seems pessimistic about the possibility of dialogue between humanists and poststructuralists. A language problem, he asserts, would get in the way: humanists write clearly, poststructuralists don’t. Moreover, poststructuralists look down on clear writing (as they would, presumably, condescend to any form of sprezzatura). In practice, the language problem did not prove so devastating as he anticipated. By the mid-Eighties poststructuralist criticism had begun splintering: among thinkers committed to the study of movies as cultural products rather than as art works, there was suddenly a good deal of embarrassing disagreement; empirical thought and simple writing, which Mast identifies exclusively with humanistic thought, seemed attractive again.

Furthermore, if poststructuralism moved towards a supposedly humanist position, a correction from the opposite side also proved possible. The fourth edition of Mast’s Short History of the Movies (1986) “has not deserted its primary commitment to the major styles, periods, genres, and works of film art”; “on the other hand, even the most expressive and distinctive examples of film art reveal clear signs of the way our culture defines social, sexual, and personal relationships, of the ways that artistic texts . . . represent certain emotional and social relationships, so that highly artificial conventions of fictional construction come to seem ‘natural,’ ‘inevitable,’ and ‘simply true.’” Note that for Mast this is a major turnabout. One of the basic premises in his criticism up to this moment had been to praise art that
seemed natural, inevitable, and simply true. Now he tells us that sprezzatura may conceal not only art but oppressive social assumptions.

Where Mast would have gone from here will never be known certainly. The revisions to the Short History show the beginnings of an attempt to reconcile a love for art with a consciousness of the role that art plays in particular historical circumstances. The same theme is confronted at length in a marvellous anthology called The Movies in Our Midst: Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America (1982).

Equally notable is Mast's most recent book, Can't Help Singin' (1987), its title a reference to a governing fiction of American musicals, the illusion of inspired spontaneity—sprezzatura again. Singin' is the most autobiographical among Mast's works. The preface, "In Some Secluded Rondaydoo," is a serio-comic account of the author's show-business career, evidently between the ages of eight and ten, on a TV show called "Sandy Dreams." The rest of the book is written in the third rather than in the first person but also has personal resonance.

As Mast points out, the American musical theater was created in large part by classic outsiders: Jews (Irving Berlin), homosexuals (Cole Porter), worst of all, Jewish homosexuals (Lorenz Hart). Mast had not excluded the subject of homosexuality from previous works—his essay on Hawks' "Bringing Up Baby" has a funny section about Cary Grant (in Grant's words) going "gay all of a sudden"—but Can't Help Singin' foregrounds this theme. Mast writes well on the tension between outsider-artists and the popular audiences for whom they create. In his own understated way, he addresses what had become the problem of the hour: the discrepancy, or at least the very odd fit, between artistic representation and social circumstance.

Mast's own homosexuality starts to be an issue in these pages; this previously forbidden subject seems close to the surface. It is the cruellest kind of chance that he was killed by AIDS, "a fact," according to the Chicago Tribune, "that he wanted mentioned in his obituary." Mentioned it was.

Still unresolved is the question of Mast's career, where he typically functioned as an ideological rather than a sexual outsider. His movement towards an inclusive criticism—his effort to value art as art while treating social and historical factors as more than "background" data—comes closer to a usable synthesis than anyone else's, even if he didn't discover any ultimate answers. Not that this point has been very widely acknowledged. A look through recent issues of Film Quarterly, say, shows eminent critics reinventing wheels which Mast designed some time ago. Mast's death might at least prompt his contemporaries to take a close look at Film/Cinema/Movie, Can't Help Singin', and The Comic Mind; to treat these works, with the others, as the major efforts they are and not as peripheral exhibitions set up far away from the lights of the big top.
Review Essay

On Living the Christian Life

Dale Lasky

Ordinary Saints


From Robert Benne’s opening line that “Teaching religion and ethics to college students, like facing a firing squad, concentrates the mind wonderfully,” you know clearly the project he has undertaken. He intends to provide a straightforward and comprehensive account of the Christian life. Although his envisioned audience clearly extends beyond the college classroom, the directness and clarity of address never flags.

To execute his purpose, Benne has chosen to describe and interpret the Christian life in terms of the Reformation concept of the Christian calling or Christian vocation. In itself, this is a major contribution of his volume. Although references to the calling are common in Christian talk both from the pulpit and the printed page, precisely what it entails has too often remained unclear. Although we have possessed historical works, such as Gustaf Wingren’s book Luther on Vocation and Einar Billing’s highly regarded monograph, Our Calling, we have lacked a comprehensive articulation of the meaning of vocation for English-speaking readers.

But Benne has chosen to offer his reader something other than an analysis of the doctrine of the calling. Instead, in both style and substance, he addresses the Christian reader in terms of “your” calling. And this theme provides the tripartite division of the book’s beginning with The Call of God, moving to The Calling of the Christian, and concluding with the final and most extended discussion of The Callings of the Christian. It is a logic which moves from who you are, to where you are, to what you are to be about doing.

Before setting about his task, however, Benne sketches the forces which often leave us feeling confused and bewildered. Building upon the analysis of mentors such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Daniel Bell, he focuses upon five factors. The explosion of technical reason has increased our knowledge and power without an accompanying growth in wisdom. Our historical sense has made us aware of historical change and cultural diversity without providing the means to turn this new knowledge into a resource for understanding and direction. The liberal spirit, which freed us from past dogmatisms and irrationalities, has too frequently severed us from the traditions and communities which could provide inner strength and orientation. The popular emphasis on self-enhancement calls for self-realization, but its moral lassitude often proves counter-productive to its espoused purpose of personal growth. And the gradual secularization of society, to which the church has contributed by petty and vicious infighting, has too often diminished our sense of the deep meaning and mystery of life.

It is to those sensitive to such perplexity that Benne makes the unabashed claim that “the central affirmations of the Christian faith correspond with the deepest aspirations of the human spirit for a meaningful world, personal significance, affirmation and forgiveness, moral purpose, and hope for the future.” Benne surveys the offerings provided by current theologies of liberation, the new socially conscious “sectarians,” the evangelicals, the fundamentalists, the mainline tradition, and the Roman Catholic church, and his writing repeatedly demonstrates that he has learned well from each of these groups.

He himself intends to offer a contribution from the frequently too-silent minority of Lutherans. The theologically alert reader, however, will recognize that Benne’s Lutheranism has enjoyed an enlivening transfusion from the work of Reinhold Niebuhr. And just as it was the bane of Niebuhr’s own career that conservatives criticized him for being a liberal and the liberals criticized him for being a conservative, Benne too would find such labels not only discomforting but a misreading of his work.

The alternative perspective he suggests, however, is not a golden mean which learns from the strengths of two extremes while eschewing their excesses. Rather, life is interpreted in new categories which seek to break out of the framework of the prevailing alternatives. There is the Niebuhrian sense that people struggle with their finitude and their sinfulness. In the face of both their limits and their aspirations to something more, people too often choose to surrender into passivity, to find a sense of vitality in the pleasures of the sensuous or to establish them-

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selves by wielding power in its most diverse forms. The problem is how realistically to unleash the full powers and potential of our being in response to the challenges which confront us. That is the agenda of the Christian calling.

Benne's elaboration of the Call of God is the briefest section in the book. Because of the audience to which he directs himself, he may consider this to be familiar territory. He highlights the themes of sin, grace, and personal growth as he quickly traces the biblical story and sketches the story of the church. Novel is his brief narrative of his own personal story from childhood and youth in small-town Nebraska, to college and graduate school, and finally to his successive positions as seminary and then college professor. As he turns from this brief critical, rather than nostalgic, narration of his own story to inviting the reader to reflect on his or her own story, his point becomes clear. Christian faith is not simply a matter of beliefs or convictions, but of understanding at depth the story of one's own life. The invitation, valid for each reader, in quite personal terms is to return to that story at depth. Such depth is attained not primarily by a new and deeper study of Christian teaching, but by examining one's personal place of competence and struggle in society.

The turn outward, however, dare not overlook the personal nurture essential in following the path to fuller maturity. Here, as repeatedly throughout the book, Benne emphasizes the communal nature of life. For it is in community that we share the insights of others, learn from their critique and questions, and receive support and encouragement. Within this communal context we are to engage in the continued activities of reflection and meditation, and nurture of the multi-dimensional self.

It is in his treatment of the Call-

ing of the Christian that Benne makes his most creative contribution to the traditional discussion of the calling. He begins conventionally with the place of the calling as defined by the current projects of the society and the need for each person to develop the technical excellences required for the tasks to be performed. The calling assigns roles, but the individual remains a creative center. And the calling needs to be one that fits the divine will and purpose as perceived by the individual and the Christian community.

In his description of the place of calling as dynamic, Benne overcomes the conservative tendency to assume that responsibility implies merely the doing of one's assigned duty.

In his description of the place of calling as dynamic, Benne overcomes the conservative tendency to assume that responsibility implies merely the doing of one's assigned duty. And in his discussion of the ambiguous nature of the calling, Benne analyzes how even the best social structures may become destructive either as they are manipulated by those who direct them or through their own internal dynamics.

More significant is his use of contemporary theories of moral development to sketch stages of personal growth from egoism, which is self-oriented, to heteronomy, where action serves the primary group to which an individual belongs, to autonomy, wherein an individual achieves the personal capacity to make moral judgments in universal terms. To these stages, which Benne considers a common human possibility, he adds the stage of theonomy, that of a moral life lived in terms of grace in a continuing attitude of response. To this last stage Benne devotes an entire chapter, which he judges to be the heart of his topic. His elaboration of theonomy according to the Pauline themes of Faith, Love, and Hope provides the grid through which he interprets each of the specific places of calling analyzed in the final section of his work.

Faith provides perception of a deeper meaning of both the place of calling and how a Christian enters into and acts within the calling. It provides what Benne terms a strengthened intentionality. This deeper discernment seeks out a person's abilities and interests, interprets the world's needs, and then locates the particular place of engagement at their juncture. The reader may be reminded of Jacques Ellul's injunction to "think globally and act locally." There follows participation in terms of a "disciplined detachment," which combines being pragmatically flexible with being willing to compromise and to rethink strategy. And, finally, our world of rapid change may require a "disciplined detachment" when what was a calling no longer serves a real need or when personal examination may require that a person move on.

It is Christian love, argues Benne, which provides the unique moral content for the activities of the Christian calling. This is a disinterested love which does not depend upon the social valuation of another person, which combines a universal concern with particular attention to the vulnerable in society, which aims at growth, healing, and community rather than dependence, and which demonstrates a readiness to suffer.

Benne's contention that such love provides a unique moral content is
problematic. Without denying that the qualities he describes are essential and indispensable to Christian love and too frequently absent from society, both logic and experience may question whether they are uniquely Christian. Nor do they provide moral content as described, since they do not define what finally will prove beneficial rather than harmful when aimed universally and with special concern for the vulnerable. Even the reader who agrees with the moral judgments Benne later makes in his analysis of particular callings may wonder how they have been derived from love. Perhaps the connection can be argued, but it needs to be made more explicit.

Even the reader who agrees with the moral judgments Benne makes in his analysis of particular callings may wonder how they have been derived from the Christian virtue of love.

Finally, the Christian faith provides hope because it does not allow success or failure in the calling to define personal worth and dignity. And in the midst of the mixed motives and ambiguous effects of human efforts, faith affirms that finally a sovereign God of history will accomplish the divine good purposes.

Despite the crisp and insightful depiction of theonomy, Benne’s schema is problematic. The claim is made that the hierarchical structure is not simply a logical ordering of the modes of moral living, but represents developmental stages. Taken at face value, it resembles H. Richard Niebuhr’s model of Christ above culture or grace ful-

The Park

That picture, was it always on the wall? Always there above the painting I am here to see? Three cocky gents in the park, gazing aside, off into a sunset. Or are they looking at me? Perhaps they see something I no longer know, something I have over time forgotten under the duress of pleasure. This park reminds me of the May pole dances we did as children, of May Court in the woods—wickedness in the guise of art, as is all of life I suppose, or is it guise in the form of wickedness? Those three know, but they will not tell me. Maybe they already have, but I’ve buried it with the other fantasies around that bend in the walkway, inside some unscruttable mystery of the tame ram at their heels. See, he looks up to them, and they look askance again, plying my soul with gaiety. What do they see? Were they too in the children’s forest, running naked from some neglected wound, or are they simply there as a statue would be, telling me nothing I don’t already know?

Travis Du Priest
his bibilographic recommendations for further study. The reader who follows that lead will quickly discover that many of the recommended works entail a quantum leap from the direct, everyday quality of Benne's work to a world of technical complexity.

Let me raise just two critical questions by way of analysis. The first derives from Benne's use of the traditional four categories for the Christian calling. As a result of that framework, this fine work omits any treatment of ecological questions. They do receive passing mention at some points in the work, but they are not treated sufficiently even to merit inclusion in the volume's index. Of course, they could be treated under one of the four major categories, but this would restrict the Christian understanding of nature and creation to resources for responsible human use and would contradict Benne's own avowed purpose to avoid an anthropocentric ethics. Anyone who knows the author knows his appreciation for nature and sensitivity to ecological issues. It would seem that in this case the conventional categories have not served him well.

**Ecological questions do receive passing mention at some points in the work, but they are not treated sufficiently even to merit inclusion in the volume's index.**

The problem of omission appears in the brief treatment of questions of medical ethics. The judgment that these appear to be relegated to works dealing with more specialized moral issues is buttressed by the inclusion of a brief bibliography of technical studies in medical ethics after the chapter on work. But the questions of abortion, euthanasia, genetic counselling, care for the elderly, and provision of health care are scarcely any longer questions primarily for medical professionals. Perhaps they could have been discussed under the category of medical life, where the question of abortion is treated briefly.

The second question stems from Benne's treatment of the topic of work. He quite consciously restricts his consideration to work done "for pay." Building upon his major work on the ethics of democratic capitalism, Benne presents pertinent and cogent arguments. Nevertheless, the vision seems too constricted. Historically, the category of work originally belonged to the *oeconomicus*, or household. As such, it comprehended culture as well as the economic realm, at least according to the contemporary narrow definition of the latter term. This calling, then, includes a larger concern for the institutions, values, and general quality of life that extends beyond either the callings of work or public life as described by Benne. Benne himself highlighted this fact in his earlier work, but has not here followed his own good insights.

In this writer's judgment, Benne has executed well the goal he set for himself. And his very style of writing conveys the sense of hope which runs through the work. He leads his reader to making the first step toward a return at depth to the faith confessed, whether with conviction or uncertainty. After the long, hot, dry summer of 1988, I have only one ill wish for the author. Would that he had lost that bet with his high school teacher Mrs. Beckenhauer, who predicted that in twenty years humans would be able to control the weather.

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**An Education President?**

Gail McGrew Eifrig

What is an "education president"? Are we likely to have one? Read my lips . . . N-O. Though I don't mean to add my comments on Allan Bloom's book *The Closing of the American Mind* to those already skillfully expressed in these pages by several other contributors, the response to that book demonstrates that the President of the United States has no sort of mandate whatever about education in this country. We are, I think, in a period of uneasy confusion and mistrust about education, a period brought about by a severe test of our amazing trust in a democratic system and a pluralistic culture.

Such trust is certainly eroding in many places, geographical as well as social. What is becoming a commonplace in so-called sleaze television—the skillfully exploitative maneuvers of professional entertainers/journalists to encourage expressions of hatred and fear in an

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atmosphere of excited voyeurism—attest to a weakening of the concept on which much American culture has traditionally been based, the concept of difference as strength. Recent victories of state referenda making English an official language, as another example, mark a militance in the ranks of those for whom difference is a threat. Most notable in the examples of this mistrust, precisely because it came in the place where one least likes to see it, was George Bush’s decision to make one’s willingness to impose the Pledge of Allegiance on everyone a mark of the true American.

“Pledges” of any sort it seems to me ought to give any person pause, and most particularly Americans. Some formulation by a nineteenth-century political crackpot, promoted by a journalistic enterprise to boost up sales of flags, or whatever, does have a certain twangy, loose-jawed, frontier medicine show flavor about it, so I suppose one might grant that it fits with American experience in that sense. The writing and promotion of the Pledge of Allegiance has about it the atmosphere of simple-minded guile to which all our Snopeses should respond with sly grins of recognition—"You gotta good thing there, boy."

It reminds me irresistibly of a postcard photo I found recently in a bookstore. The photo, taken in a schoolyard in the early Thirties, judging by the clothes, shows what might be an entire rural school population, lined up in ranks, standing solemnly about an arm’s length apart. Each one holds a toothbrush up to his or her mouth with one hand, in correct brushing position, and near the back, someone is holding up the staff of a large American flag.

That seems a long way from Allan Bloom, but I think there is more of a connection than at first meets the eye. Among other things, Bloom faults American education, particularly university education because of the enormous influence that it has had over the culture as a whole, for failing to provide a reasonable social consensus about beliefs and practices. But I think he wants the schoolyard of my postcard.

All the people there look like they think more or less the same about important things. They are all wearing shoes and socks, their skirts are all about the same length, all the boys are wearing shirts and ties with their kickers, and nobody—or at least we surmise that nobody—questioned whether the Constitution gave him the right to refuse to stand there, under the waving American flag, in correct brushing position. Nobody is wearing a concert tee-shirt that appears to be promoting something into which you’d rather not inquire too closely. Nobody is making rude gestures to the camera. Nobody is holding her baby, the kind that used to be called for some reason “the unfortunate fatherless infant.” No, this group looks unanimous, and passive, and very controllable, or at least controlled.

Of course a video of a class of publically educated youth today would look very different. And maybe scarier. But some of its scariness would be the result of that trust I began with, the trust that democracy will be possible when all the people are trusted. We are in a period of confusion about what we want from education because we have not determined that we want large, uniform groups of people who, by their majority status, define what is correct brushing procedure, the official language, the true American.

Do we really want to define ourselves not by the ideas in the Pledge of Allegiance but by a willingness to be forced to say it? Many of those people who elected Bush as President, and doubtless many of those who voted on the other side, do want education to work so as to produce just that. But I don’t believe that there is a consensus about that goal.

If George Bush wants to be an “education president,” he’ll have to talk to a wide range of people with a great many different ideas about what education should or should not be. I would really like to discuss my postcard with him.
THE LAST WORD

Yea Rah,
Greek Life

Dot Neuchterlein

When I was a college freshman I thought long and hard about whether or not to join a social sorority. As an independent-minded person engaged in many interests and activities, I wondered if being in such a group would squeeze me into a mold or stifle my outside involvements.

On the other hand I wanted to experience everything open to me. I'd had a semester as a GDI—an "expletive-deleted Independent"—but what was it like to be a "sister"? Also, I noticed that most of the upperclass students I'd met in other campus groups were Greeks, so it seemed possible to connect the two worlds. (In those days it was also cheaper to live in the sorority house than in a dorm. Some things change!)

So I pledged, and never regretted it, either then or now. And if I were a student today—at least on this same campus—I would join again.

Some colleagues do not understand that. There is much bad-mouthing of Greeks and Greek life nowadays; some faculty members think the groups per se are bad influences on too many students, that they are anti-intellectual, and that they are a colossal waste of time.

Those blanket statements are uninformed hogwash, based not so much on direct experience as on second- or third-hand (or further) rumor and misconception. Naturally there are some individuals who are no credit to themselves or to their groups, and perhaps occasionally too many of that sort congregate in the same society; but the same is true of any human endeavor, and to castigate all on the basis of some is prejudice unworthy of a university.

I invite my peers to go see for themselves what is taking place in our Greek-letter organizations, and here is what I think they'll find:

A. Greek participation forces individuals to take seriously community, commitment, and responsibility to and for others. This cannot be done as successfully in dorms or apartments because they are business arrangements: as long as you are quiet, non-disruptive, and law-abiding, you are entitled to privacy, and nobody can compel you to do anything or to interact with anyone.

In a brotherhood or sisterhood, problems between individuals or within the group must be dealt with, because all have a stake in them. This can be a struggle and it can be painful, but it is also part of the maturation process. Too, the group provides some means of control and problem-solving resources not so readily available elsewhere.

In addition there is a depth of caring for one another that goes far beyond the rah-rah-rah sometimes so visible to the inquiring eye. Common experiences promote bonding, ties that can last decades into the future—but also in the here and now, members often truly "bear one another's burdens." Can that happen outside the Greek system? Of course: but post-adolescents can be quite self-centered and not much inclined to give support to one another; the option to hide away in one's own private misery, or to avoid getting involved in someone else's sorrow, is more readily available to the independent.

B. Some things don't change. On this campus, leadership positions of all sorts—cultural, governmental, honors-based, religious, athletic—tend to be held overwhelmingly by Greeks. So: A waste of time? I think not; pledges learn time management or they're doomed, and those skills carry over to other things. Anti-intellectual? Not on your life; check the commencement honors list every year and you will find the societies' representation highly disproportionate to their total population share.

Why is it that so many of our most talented, creative, involved students want to be Greeks? Partly because it expands their world, giving them outlets and experiences not so easily attained otherwise. (I recall a frat treasurer telling how impressed his soon-to-be employer was with the fact that he had already responsibly handled thousands of dollars of other people's money.) Partly because young adulthood involves the search for identity, and we measure our strengths and weaknesses by comparing our attitudes and actions to our significant others.

And why do our Greeks provide so much campus leadership? Partly, believe it or not, because they have some time to spare: much of their social life is prearranged, so the hours and energy others spend creating friendships and finding sociability can be used instead for the good of the community.

C. Fraternities and sororities, along with other extracurricular activities, help to make the bureaucratic institution a human place. I'm not sure what it's like at other schools, but when my fellow alumni and I discuss our days at dear old alma mater, we remember people—a handful of profs, but mostly our peers, those we lived and worked and played with. I, for one, think especially of my special group, and I am grateful to have experienced the university—to learn and grow and become who I am—in close companionship with them. Yea rah.