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C^{the}resset



A Review of Literature, Arts, and Public Affairs

Pentecost (May) 1996

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the Cresset

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Cover: Emil Armin, Romanian-American (1883-1971) VLAD'S FARM, watercolor. Collection of Gilbert and Marilyn Lehmann.

Back cover: Charles Burchfield, (1893-1967) American, EARLY SPRING, watercolor and charcoal on paper, 37-1/8 x 42-1/4; The Charles Rand Penney Collection at the Burchfield-Penney Art Center, Buffalo State College.

This issue makes reference to a significant exhibition of the works of Charles Burchfield, held on the VU campus as part of the Center for the Arts Inaugural Year. Consisting of over 60 works, curated by Nancy Weekly from the Burchfield-Penney Center, the exhibit ran from April 16 to May 26, 1996, and included several satellite events. Sibelius, a composer who inspired the painter, was represented by performances by the Valparaiso Symphony in February, and by a song recital in April by Professor Virginia Oram. Also in April, their poems inspired by the paintings were read by Professors Mullen, Hiller, Ruff, Hillila and Byrne. A program of dance, created and performed by students Chad Lindsey with David Baumann, Sarah Scherschligt and Jill Stevenson took place in April also. Unfortunately, the limitations of the print medium dictate that only the poetry can be presented in these pages.

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IN LUCE TUA

Creation

"A new created world, a new created world, springs forth, springs forth at God's command!" In Haydn's magnificent chorus, the notes may be complicated to perform, but the thought is simplicity itself. Creation—all the physical world—is the product of God's imagination expressed in word.

This issue of *The Cresset* is devoted to the subject of the Christian and the earth, and as I sat yesterday during the quite fortuitous campus performance of Haydn's oratorio *The Creation*, thoughts about our understanding of our place here swirled through my consciousness in patterns not unlike those I was hearing. The baritone intones an act of creation, and follows the mere announcement with elaborate detail, specifying in deliciously rotund phrases each aspect of the world's fact. (It is hard to choose, but dull would he be of soul who doesn't relish with especial enthusiasm the words, "in long dimension creeps, with sinuous trace, the worm.") Haydn's text—a sort of melange of Milton filtered through a translation into German and back again into another English, in this instance rendered singable by Robert Shaw and Alice Parker—through all its vicissitudes still witnesses to a fundamentally simple assertion: God made the world and everything in it.

Amen! one can say, humming along and aiming breathlessly toward the final cadence. Nevertheless, we cannot help but hear those words and make those assertions in a far different way than did their originators. Our Amen may be emphatic, but it stands as an affirmation of an understanding of creation, and our place in it, now bafflingly complex, and, like so many things to which human understanding has been applied, nearly overwhelmingly difficult.

Nowhere more so than when the tenor—who else?—flourishes forth the moment we've all been waiting for:

In native worth and honor clad,
with beauty, strength and courage formed,
toward heaven raised uprightly,
stands a man, the lord and king of nature
all. His broad and arching, noble brow
proclaims of wisdom's deep abode,
and in his eyes with brightness shines
the soul, the breath and image of his God.

Heady stuff. Seeing ourselves from this perspective we are impressive material. How then to reconcile this view with the frightful wastes created in the world by its "lord and king"?

This is the question that believing people cannot escape. Unlike the environmentalists who reject the Biblical story, or who, denying its literal timetable also deny its assertion of causality in creation, those of us for whom the Bible is normative must embrace two truths: humans were made to be in a particular relation to the earth, and we have not yet found out how to make that relation work right. It is hard to believe that the God who created, say, a world in which "lightly murmuring, gently glides through silent glade the crystal brook" would survey with much satisfaction what we lords of creation in Northwest Indiana have done with the Little Calumet floodplain.

Blame, guilt, hand-wringing, bluster, sorrow, and even shame have been, in recent years, the primary elements when religious belief and concerns about the earth converge. Those who feel both a deep love for the natural world and apprehension about the damage it has sustained through human use shrink from assuming that we know what to do, or what side to stand on. Can a tree-hugger recognize in herself that "broad and arching, noble brow proclaim[ing] wisdom's deep abode"? How can one endorse the Biblical picture of humans as the center of creation, and yet come closer to tending the treasure of the garden? Or is it simply necessary to acknowledge the Fall, and muddle on as best we can?

At *The Cresset* our aim is to contribute to reflection, which means including art and poetry to the discourse on what is usually called "the environment." Our ordinary environment includes too little reflection as a general rule; as a nation of consumers, we take in even a lot more thoughts than we can use. The presence of thought in several forms should make this a good issue for those among our readers who feel uncertainty as they hear themselves proclaimed "the wondrous being" whose creation completes God's design. The way up is the way through, and, breath and image that we are, we continue to rely on that Breath as we pick our way through the rubble we have created of the world.

Peace,

GME

The Fiftieth Day

it is babel falls
crashing words in wind
scattered of city at
babel babel
running fire and blue
down heaps of stony words
unto shinar
tongues of numb
and noises stirring
babel babel
tower lost in dust
of peoples empty
brick and silent
chisels broken rock
babel shattered babel
blown with brazen
pure smoke of wind
tumbles babel
fallen hell and
we are tombed in rubble
choked on dust
silent

dove
oh lift your wings
raise your song
breathe breathe
and breathe

Tim Gustafson



CONVERSION TO EARTHFAITH

Larry Rasmussen

The spectre of eco-apocalypse some people feel is wholly understandable, but it is not the daily bread of this writing, not even when the very soul of responsibility on a planet waving a "No Vacancy" sign requires clear-eyed realism about degraded conditions and entertains the dire warnings of the prophet. Gospel is intended here. And whatever "gospel" may mean, it is not more bad news, or even no more bad news. Something drawing us to life and extending life from us toward others must be uncovered and embraced. It may be ethically earnest and demanding. But it cannot be without joy. Absent the *joie de vivre*, our fate is surely sealed. That is the one apocalyptic thought this work entertains.

Earthbound Loyalty

A chapter in *The Brothers Karamazov* titled "Cana of Galilee" captures the kind of spirit and earthbound loyalty that begins the gospel search. The closing scene centers on Alyosha, "the little man of God" who goes late at night to the monastery cell where his spiritual mentor, the saintly old Zossima, lies in his coffin. The scene comes, of course, only after the tumultuous tears and tortured relationships of love, betrayal, and loyalty that inhabit all thick Russian novels. In the dark candlelight Alyosha hears the account of Jesus's first miracle of water to wine at the wedding in Galilee being read over the coffin. Exhausted, he drifts from the words into prayer and his own running commentary on the familiar verses, all in the presence of old Zossima's body and spirit. In this dreamlike state, Alyosha

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suddenly hears the voice of Zossima, who extends his hand and raises him from his knees. "Let us make merry," the dried-up old man says, "let's drink new wine, the wine of new gladness, of great gladness." And a little later: "Begin your work, my dear one, my gentle one." It is in this moment of tender invitation and new vocation that Alyosha, who had in truth fallen asleep on his knees in prayer, suddenly awakens. He goes to the coffin briefly, turns abruptly and exits the cell. Dostoyevsky writes:

Alyosha did not step on the steps, but went down rapidly. His soul, overflowing with rapture, was craving for freedom and unlimited space. The vault of heaven, studded with softly shining stars, stretched wide and vast over him. From the zenith to the horizon the Milky Way stretched its two arms dimly across the sky. The fresh, motionless, still night enfolded the earth. The white towers and golden domes of the cathedral gleamed against the sapphire sky....the silence of the earth seemed to merge into the silence of the heavens, the mystery of the earth came in contact with the mystery of the stars....Alyosha stood, gazed, and suddenly he threw himself flat upon the earth. He did not know why he was embracing it. He could not have explained to himself why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss it all, but he kissed it, weeping, sobbing and drenching it with his tears, and vowed frenziedly to love it, to love it for ever and ever....He had fallen upon the earth a weak youth, but he rose from it a resolute fighter for the rest of his life, and he realized and felt it suddenly, at the very moment of his rapture. And never, never for the rest of his life could Alyosha forget that moment. (426-7)

There the chapter ends.

Note that Alyosha threw himself upon the *earth* and arose from it a resolute fighter. He did not throw himself upon "the environment!" The difference is not slight, and is the reason this is not a treatise on the environment and its distress but a meditation on earth. If the subject were the environment, earth's distress would be a crisis of nature in which nature is the sumptuous stage of the human drama and its stock of steady resources. In this environ-

mentalist view nature is threatened by human use and encroachment. The crisis is thus the degradation of natural habitat and capital. So considered, "the environment" gets slotted somewhere on the same miserable list with racism, poverty, domestic violence, crime, and homelessness, and joins the unhappy competition for attention and resources.

People who speak of earth's distress as a crisis of the environment are certainly correct about one thing: what is happening to earth *is* the great drama of our time. The crisis is not one of nature, however, as nature is commonly conceived. Nature, however degraded and diminished, will survive in a million different forms and for a very long time. Earth's distress is a crisis of culture. More precisely, the crisis is that a now-globalizing culture *in* nature and wholly *of* nature runs full grain *against* it. A virile, comprehensive, and attractive way of life is destructive of nature and human community together—this is the crisis. Soils, peoples, air and water are being depleted and degraded together. (Or, on our better days, are being sustained together.) It is not "the environment" that is unsustainable. It is a much more inclusive reality, something like "life-as-we-have-come-to-know-it." What we call "the environmental crisis" is a sign of cultural failure, then. It is the failure to submit human power to grace and humility, and to work as David Toole has said "toward the habitation of the places in which we live" on terms that respect both human limits and the rest of nature's (87). "Life-as-we-have-come-to-know-it" is eating itself alive. Modernity devours its own children.

Here the whiff of apocalypse is in the wind and blows strong. The foreboding is captured in two modern renditions of the most famous of Chinese poems, "Spring View." Composed by Du Fu and quoted by Gary Snyder, "Spring View" was written at the time of the An Lushan rebellion in 755 C.E. Lamenting the rebellion and in search of consolation, the poet opens with this line:

"The State is destroyed, but the mountains and rivers survive."

A 20th c. Japanese poet, Nanao Sakaki, has seen fit to reverse Du Fu:

"The mountains and rivers are destroyed, but the State survives" (175).

As though this reversal were not enough, studies like those by Thomas Fraser Homer-Dixon allow us to extend Sakaki to something like:

"The mountains and rivers are destroyed, and the State survives— but society unravels."

Most North American readers have to travel to appreciate this fully. To China itself, to Papua New Guinea, to the Philippines and communities in Latin America, to West Africa and India, to Haiti, to tracts in Siberia and Eastern

Europe, to Egypt, or to the homelands of native and indigenous peoples most anywhere.

For even when degradation is apparent, most people do not truly comprehend what is happening to earth. Peoples of dominant cultures and their extensions around the world lack the right categories. "For too long," Homer-Dixon says, quoting Daniel Deudney, "we've been prisoners of 'social-social' theory, which assumes there are only social causes for social and political changes, rather than natural causes, too" (cited in Kaplan, 60). This habit of mind has been regnant since the Industrial Revolution, a revolution that lifted us wholesale from the rest of nature as a species apart. In both working habits and morality, industrialism assumed the universe that counts is the human universe, plus props. That remains the active assumption of most daily practices. So it is only now, when nature shows both vengeance and vulnerability, and suffers the grim interplay of demographic, environmental and social stress, that children of industrialized civilizations finally discover what most other civilizations knew: the fate of mountains, rivers, and societies is a single fate; nature is not what is around us or where we live, but the reason we are alive at all; nature is the reason each and every society and culture that ever existed did so.

This *internal*, not external, linkage of society and environment, and of nature, history and culture, all of a piece at century's end, is what I have called, borrowing from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "earth and its distress" (58). We speak only occasionally of "the environmental crisis" or "the ecocrisis," since the proper name is some variation on the threat and promise to all things as they are bundled together from the inside out. Society and nature together now—earth—are a community, without an exit.

In this light, Alyosha's moving moment serves only as the prelude to a prolonged conversion to earth. Reconciled of soul with earth, falling to earth a weak being and rising a resolute fighter with a new vocation—this image serves us well, as does Alyosha's weeping and watering the earth with the tears of gladness, and loving those tears. ("The capacity to weep and then do something is worth everything," as Greta Gaard writes in *Ecofeminism*, 3.) Yet the figure of Alyosha does not convey the complexity of earth and its distress. Alas, there is no *one* best analysis for our reality. Nor does one figure, picture, or model fit it, unless perhaps it be earth itself as *oikos*, as Habitat Earth, the only life form in the universe we know of to date. Unless it be earth *as* comprehensive community.

We do not, however, have a common language, even for something as basic as earth community. We are temporarily stuck in the awkward space between worlds we trusted and ones strangely new to us. This is a puzzling, sometimes bizarre place to be. And because it is difficult to

comprehend, it is difficult to articulate. No doubt a multiplication of strategies and actions as well as symbols, perspectives and voices is essential. Dostoevsky is only one of these stirring conveyors of life's adventure and passion.

Yet certainly the right starting point is the Hebrew prophets: it's mountains and rivers and society all together, or not at all. In Isaiah, the "vines languish" and "the merry-hearted sigh" together or, alternatively, thrive together. Everything is caught up in a complicated fate laced as poet G. M. Hopkins knew, with both "dearest freshness deep down things" and new levels of vulnerability. Creation has its "integrity." But it's for worse as well as for better.

Religion and Fidelity to Earth

Daniel Maguire puts things crisply. "If current trends continue, we will not. And that is qualitatively and epochally true. If religion does not speak to [this], it is an obsolete distraction" (13).

Religion speaking to earth and its distress in nondistracting ways is a challenge! But it is the challenge here. And the thesis is not only that it *should* help effect our conversion to earth, but that it can. At the same time, it cannot do so without reformation. The reformation is that *all* religious and moral impulses of whatever sort must now be matters of unqualified earthbound loyalty and care. Faith is fidelity to earth and full participation in its ecstasy and agony. There is no room, for example, for the earth avoidance carried in the teaching of *contemptus mundi* (contempt of the world); or any other forms of otherworldliness which result in making individuals "think lightly of their responsibilities" as F. D. Maurice put it over a century ago (284-5). Nor is there room for perhaps the most popular religious metaphor of all, the metaphor of ascetic ascent, throwing off the corruptible things of earth for the precious booty of heaven. For these time-honored spiritualities, the entanglements of mundane existence are left behind by ascending the great chain of being step-by-step. Serious devotees climb from the lower regions of the material and base to higher realms of pure spirit and free communion with the divine. Early Christianity, to cite one prominent case, often cited Socrates' statement in Plato's *Theaetetus* so as to bolster this strain of common asceticism: "We ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, as far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise" (176B). Imitating God meant leaving earth behind.

We must, of course, listen with the heart to all human yearnings. This includes those many anguished cries which find no hope or consolation anywhere on earth, much less

joy and quiet satisfaction. Yet precisely in the face of such anguish, this discussion judges as ethically valid only those human and religious energies which unapologetically serve earth's care and redemption. Traditions will be revisited in this view, both in search of treasure still there and in quest of religious creativity which has not yet found its full voice as part of earth's cause.

Let us stay with Christianity as an example of an ambivalent faith which might yet become an earthfaith. Christianity is a radically incarnational faith, chiefly because its elder and birthhome is Judaism and its founder and foundation was a Jew understood as the earthly incarnation of God. Thus Christianity carried from its origins Judaism's age-old insistence that both creation and redemption are matters of earth, affairs of history and nature together in time and space as we know it. Yes, there are classic religious motifs describing sojourn, pilgrimage and world-alienation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These are the familiar motifs describing God's faithful as "strangers and foreigners on the earth" (Hebr. 11); of the life of nomadic wandering; and of apocalyptic overthrow of all that presently oppresses. But in the end even these earth-alien and earth-restless themes are decisively qualified by the foundational conviction that creation is good and the work of a God committed to its fullest possible flourishing, nothing less than its redemption *in toto*. So the pilgrim, sojourner and stranger themes all have variants, only one of which is ascetic ascent and world contempt. There is pilgrimage to *the good land*, for example, or pilgrimage to *the holy mountain*. Both are rich, earthbound images of the very soil from which all things are created, on which they all depend, and to which they all return.

There is another asceticism available in the traditions. It loves the earth fiercely as God's own and understands all the spiritual disciplines to have but one end, namely, to contain the passions as means for making body and self even *more* alive to life, including the life of the senses.

Even nomad is less rootless than it appears. "Nomad" is from the Greek, signifying "law" (*nomos*). It conveyed the notion of dividing justly and splitting up shares properly. Nomads could only survive if they knew how to share pastures with other nomads. Their way of life could survive only if they treated earth as a genuine commons. Without such law, there could not be "nomads." So it is not coincidental that *the* great legislator, Moses, is the leader of a nomadic, sojourning people and the mediator of the covenant between God, this wandering band, and the land.

Even the *contemptus mundi* of some religious traditions can itself be converted to ways that serve rather than abandon earth. In fact, contempt for the world is the first and most basic heresy whenever it means contempt for the good clay of God's earth, human clay included. But its

non-heretical meaning is relevant and powerful. As noted, the purpose of spiritual practices is to make us more fully alive by heightening the capacity of the senses to experience grace and the giftedness of life itself. Feasting and fasting are thus a rhythm, as are self-denial and self-fulfillment, withdrawal to the wilderness and return to the market place, solitary spiritual discipline and vigorous public engagement. *Contemptus mundi* is not contempt for earth, then, but contempt for the world when "world" is shorthand for the "principalities and powers" of inner and outer variety that oppress, enslave and distract. These demons of our lives—structural, cultural, social and psycho-social—merit *contemptus mundi* and call for practices that exorcise powers that plague and enslave.

Even the literature of apocalypse, perhaps the supreme example of world- and earth-hating motifs, can be turned another way to serve the cause of earth. As R. G. Warnock explains it, it is analogous to the language of "heaven" in African-American spirituals, where a radical withdrawal from the world as the place of madness and oppression is matched by a judgment upon that world for its grave injustice. Such a judgment includes a persistent attempt to lay claim to a more equitable world envisioned as "a new earth." "Heaven" in this sense is in fact a way of speaking about earth. It is the dream of a new world and redeemed earth, with the throne of God in the midst of the city and rivers of crystal waters flowing in four directions from the throne, the riverbanks themselves lined with trees of life bearing abundant fruit. Like Maya Angelou's "On the Pulse of Morning," apocalyptic yearning may in fact be the ultimate earth patriotism, since all hope, energy and dedication are here invested in a new earth, despite superhuman odds. The dream of revolt and overthrow that requires the radical transformation of all that is fires an imagination that will not let earth be the enemy's forever. The language of heaven thus works to name the vision of and for earth redeemed. It is creation made new and made whole.

And what is "faith" here but the capacity to see earth as it might be transformed by grace, and to affirm it in spite of everything in us that fears and rejects it? Faith "resists the actual in the name of the possible," fighting "the three great instabilities"—injustice, unpeace, creation's disintegration (Hall, 313). Faith is hope in things yet unseen. It is, as the Indian saying puts it, "a bird at dawn, already singing in the dark."

If we were to extend this analysis of apparently earth-denying themes in Christianity, we would discover that there is even a warning within the apocalyptic and *contemptus* traditions. The warning is not to let worldweariness cut the chord of hope for this world, drain us of action, weaken faith's resolve, or substitute heaven for earth's redemption. Martin Luther King's last and most apocalyptic

sermon, preached the eve of his assassination and entitled "I See the Promised Land," includes the following:

It's alright to talk about "long white robes over yonder," in all of its symbolism. But ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here. It's alright to talk about "streets flowing with milk and honey," but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's alright to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the new New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee. This is what we have to do.

This rereading of apparently earth-distracting traditions acknowledged, the note must be registered again that earth and its present distress call for nothing less than religious and social re-formation, a conversion far from fully effected. It is fundamentally dishonest to argue that believers need only bring to earth's agonies their own favored Vincentian canon ("what the church has always and everywhere taught and believed"). The need for religious and social imagination and reformation is more basic, exacting and far-reaching than that. Christianity, to stay with the example, will have to address far more profoundly than it has what Catherine Keller has called the "residual...ambivalence" it holds "about sex, the body, women's bodies in particular and the natural world in general," perhaps in the direction of "the healthier Hebrew earthiness" still at home in Judaism (302; 306). But even here it bumps up against a residual ambivalence almost as deep and strong—the association in Judaism of pagan taboo with nature religions. So no matter which turn is taken, at some juncture the turn to earth itself rubs up against an internal problematic resident within most every faith or philosophy presently contending for our allegiance. Viable earthfaiths, it seems, require rerooting virtually all religious and moral traditions, even when some meet our trauma better than others. Ours is not a time for the religiously and socially timid or the intellectually fainthearted.

Can these faiths become earthfaiths? Is there a conversion to earth in the making or in the offing? Yes, but it is important to remember that established religions are *never* ready to meet new events and developments. As religious creatures we are never well prepared for emancipation movements of all kinds, the intensity of religious pluralism on our home turf, new technologies, or the eco-social crisis. It isn't only that religions are bridled by the standard weaknesses of mortals tending matters of divinity (a wonderful but plainly foolish vocation). It's that religions are inherently conservative of past meaning, authority, rites, rituals, and moralities. Thus the religiously committed are poorly poised by their traditions to discern the new, the deviant and the non-normative, much less to

judge these with clarity, insight and foresight. At the same time, it is precisely a deep cultural crisis that initially gives birth to religions and later to their reform. Religions typically come to be and take their distinctive shape in the breakup of worlds. They accompany the long and painful birth of epochs in the making and breaking. Such religions and their ways of life do not, of course, start from scratch. In a world long underway, there is no scratch to start from. Rather, new and reforming faiths emerge as major transformations of lively or newly-enlivened traditions and practices. What we should ask, then, is not whether something is orthodox or not. Like ancient and familiar scriptures, the oldest teachings may be generative all over again. What we should ask is whether orthodoxies have grown humorless and constricted. For what is reprehensible about religions (and ways of life generally) is not their initial lack of readiness to meet new crises or their bungling on morally vexed and volatile issues. That can be expected. What is reprehensible is the refusal of such traditions to be transformed, in the Spirit, by their crises and the culture's. What is reprehensible is the unwillingness to wash all things anew "in the purifying waters of contrition and gratitude" (Bonhoeffer, 176).

So the answer to the question of whether religious faiths and other life philosophies can become genuine earthfaiths and potent sources of earth patriotism and earth ethics is an emphatic "Yes." But only on the condition they are open to being transformed by earth and its distress. Truth be told, humans don't really long for another world, far beyond the ordinariness of this one, so much as they long for their own world in all its hidden beauty and possibility. Michael Lerner has reminded us that the insistence of the biblical religions is correct: the universe in its essence has justice and love as its foundation and it is our alienation from a just and loving totality that feeds our deep frustration with the order of things (310). Ridding earth of its distress, in order to bring out its glory for all to see, is the soul's deepest desire. □

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THE THEO-CENTRIC TWO-STEP

Tom Christenson

Focussing The Problem.

Ever since, as an eleven or twelve year old, I first heard the Bible camp song, "Tell Me Why," I have been bothered by its closing line, "Because God made you, that's why I love you." What bothered and still bothers me? It is what I have come to call the "theo-centric two-step" of its implied ethic: that my love for another is mediated by my knowledge of him/her/it as God's creation. My childish response was that this flew in the face of my own experience, for it seemed to me there were those persons and things I loved without thinking of them in relation to God. I loved them because I was intimately and inextricably related to them. They were family and friends to me, home to me, they surrounded me, supported me and made up my identity.

Just recently the memory of that old song flooded back to me as I was reading an assortment of essays articulating an environmental ethic from a Christian viewpoint. I heard a variety of voices among the essayists, expressing a variety of emphases. But they all seemed to agree that we should value and care for the natural order because: 1) It is God's creation 2) God said it was good 3) God loves it and us 4) God takes pleasure in diversity so we should preserve biotic diversity where possible 5) God explicitly made us stewards of his creation.

All of these arguments justified or motivated our love of and care for the earth by reference to God. It is to be loved because God made it, or because God told us to, or because we love it in response to God's love. In all these cases the love and the care are mediated by reference to

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God, as though the earth and its inhabitants could not be well related to except by reference to God.

Once again my response is prompted by memories that go back to my childhood. I remember that my love for people, my regard for and care for a place and its community of various inhabitants grew quite naturally out of the lived relationship. I loved my parents, my brother and sister, and other relatives that now and again lived with us. I loved the place we lived, the trees, the river, the deer, the bears, the birds, the livestock, and even the insects and fierce winters. I understand well what the Sioux mean when they refer to their living place and its inhabitants as part of their family. "Mitak' Oyasin," they say repeatedly, "We are all relatives." In the same way the family of my childhood included people and the place both inside the fence and out, the wild as well as the domesticated.

Lest you assume that these are merely expressions of romantic sentimentality let me insist that it wasn't that they were all loved because they were lovely. My father, for example, in the two years before he died, turned gaunt and yellow, and smelled of urine and the black bile that collected in the drip bag by his bed. He wasn't the "neat dad" a thirteen year old might prefer to hang out with, but he was loved. He was loved because he was part of the web of relation that made us a family, that embraced us. The same could be said for our house. The pipes froze, the screens had holes, the floors sloped. I was ashamed to bring school friends there, but it was, and still is remembered as home, the focus of our togetherness.

Neither do I want to hide from the fact that many of us grow up in dysfunctional relationships to nature and to each other. An old Scandinavian curse, "May you spend eternity with your relatives," bears witness to the mutual destructiveness that can be tightly woven into relationships. But to claim on the basis of such dysfunctionality that relationships can be rightly constituted only by reference to God is to make quite a claim. A claim that, insofar as it is

testable at all, does not stand up to the test of experience.

Our life in nature was not all lovely either. It included beautiful sunsets and flowers, the slim beauty of fawns, the soaring magnificence of eagles, to be sure. But it also contained death and rot and animal and human sewage and carcasses and flies and omnipresent mosquitoes. A culture, like our spreading urban one that is so disconnected from nature, is tempted both to turn its face away from its own death and waste products and to romanticize nature. It wasn't because of the romantic loveliness of nature that I came to love it, but because my lived experiences revealed daily how thoroughly connected we were to it, again part of the web of interdependence, akin to family.

Perhaps largely because of the experiences cited above, I find I respond very positively to ethical theories that are grounded in relationship. One such, authored by Nell Noddings, which focusses on the ethics of personal relationship, argues that caring grows naturally out of relationship, and that an ethic of caring, in turn, grows naturally out of caring. She also argues that women, being persons who more frequently understand themselves as essentially in relationship, find an ethic of caring to spring very naturally out of their lived relationships. In this context, the context of an unmediated ethic of caring, Noddings poses a surgical question to Theists who think about ethics: "What ethical need have women for God?" (97) Paraphrasing her question in a more inclusive way we may ask: "What need for a theo-centric ethic has anyone for whom unmediated relationship is a lived reality?"

Noddings' question brings us around to face a nest of very difficult issues. Why do we need God in order to love each other? Why do we need God in order to love the world? Is our ethical step to God on the way to our neighbor or to the world a symptom that the relationship is not present, or that it is un-natural and alienated? Do we *need*, "Because God made you," in order for love of neighbor or love of the world to be a lived possibility? Must a step in the direction of God always precede any ethical step I take in the direction of neighbor or world?

I am definitely not happy with the alternatives these questions imply. So I naturally am led to ask, are there no other choices than an unmediated ethic without need for God or this theo-centric two-step?

The two-step approach to ethics rests on a common pattern in theological, as well as other kinds of thinking: in an attempt to avoid a temptation we fall into another temptation. The original temptation here is, of course, the temptation to worship nature. But we frequently respond to this temptation by falling into another one, the temptation to dissociate God from the world. The theo-centric two-step in Christian ethics is, I believe, an expression of a kind of deism, an expression of the assumption that God

and nature, or God and neighbor are completely separate and discrete. Our modern view of nature, of course, has played right into such a view, for we have accepted a merely mechanical nature with no place for God (so nature was handed over to the physical and economic sciences), and a temporally and spatially remote God with no essential connection to nature.

One of the frequent images employed to argue (in Christian contexts) for environmental responsibility is the image of the steward. We, as humans, the argument goes, have been called to be faithful stewards of God's creation. Faithful stewards would not destroy what they are given to manage. But the image of the steward is extremely problematic simply because it reinforces the deistic conception of the relation of God to nature. As Matthew Fox has commented, "It [stewardship] reinforces images of God as distant from nature—God as absentee landlord, and we as God's...managers" (64,65). The steward tends the property owned by another, but does it not necessarily out of genuine care for the property, but out of regard for the owner. For it is to the owner that the steward owes responsibility, not to those or that which he manages. Borrowing an argument from Feuerbach and Marx, we might even argue that the steward's owner consciousness is proportional to his/her alienation to that which he/she is steward over. Moreover, the role of steward does not bring with it very much clarification regarding what the steward's responsibility is. The steward's responsibility is to do the will of the owner, surely. But what that will is and what priorities it implies may not be at all obvious even to one willing to take on the steward's role.

Locating An Alternative.

This deistic picture, "God there, world here," and "be nice to the world because God, over there, wants you to and once had something to do with it," should be fundamentally unacceptable to Christians because it denies two things which are, I believe, absolutely essential to a Christian outlook. These are the incarnation (God in the world) and the sacraments (God in, with, and under the world). Neither one of these things makes any real sense in a deistic picture of things. So, in place of the "God there, world here," view I would suggest that we make incarnation and sacrament the foundational metaphors of our thinking about God and world. This is a distinctly un-Cartesian and unacademic thing to do, i.e. to assert the *essential* mixed-togetherness of things that might be clearly and distinctly separated: body/soul, God/world, God/neighbor, Christ's body/bread, Christ's blood/wine, Holy Spirit/Community of Witness. But so much the worse for clearness and distinctness as measures of truth or reality.

If incarnation and sacrament are the models informing our thinking we may find ourselves saying some paradoxical things. If someone were to quiz us about what we mean by saying, "This is the body of Christ," how might we answer? Is this really the body of Christ? Yes. Is it also and at the same time really bread? Yes. Is Jesus truly God? Yes. Is he also and at the same time fully human? Yes. Is the one magically transformed into the other? No. For then the problem is avoided as a before and after. Both must be asserted simultaneously. The one *and* the other, the one *informing* the other, the one *inseparable* from the other.

We have, I believe, two stories of Jesus that recommend such conjunction as a model for our thinking. In the 25th chapter of Matthew, Jesus is shown telling a story about the judgment to come (Matthew 25:31-46). Two groups of people have been gathered, one to be blessed, the other to be cursed. What amazes one about this story is the fact that at the judgment *both* groups are surprised to discover where they stand. To the blessed the king explains, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...." To this the blessed respond, "Lord, when was it we saw you hungry? etc." They cannot, in other words, recall doing anything for their lord, even though they have somehow served the needs of those around them very well. The cursed, on the other hand, seem to be people who would do anything for their lord because they cannot believe they have missed any chance to serve him. "When did we not feed *you*?" But at the same time they have missed serving those in their midst who stood in need of such service. Is it an implausible interpretation of this story to say that though God was not served by those who had God in mind, he was served precisely by those who had no mind to do so, i.e. by those who saw only their hungry neighbor, a stranger, one naked or in prison, etc. The cursed in the story are testimony to the fact that an eagerness to serve God seems to have produced an alienation to those at hand who stand desperately in need of service. To put it in terms of the earlier discussion, is unmediated love precisely where God is served just because an alienating theo-centric consciousness has not entered into the picture? If so, we have a paradox of a high degree: God is in the picture when God does not seem to be in the picture.

An examination of the story of the good Samaritan suggests something similar: that the one who knew how to be a neighbor did so without any reference to God at all (Luke 10:25-27). The focus of the Samaritan's consciousness, as far as we are given to know it within the bounds of the story, is solely the need of the stranger, robbed, beaten, and left for dead in the ditch. Interestingly, the lawyer whose questions occasion Jesus' telling of the story seems not to have had any questions about what it means to love

God with one's whole heart, soul and mind. He seems to suppose there are no problems there, but only with the identification of who is neighbor. Does Jesus' story not destroy such presumptuousness? Does the story not show precisely that the lawyer understands *neither* God love nor neighbor love and that no one can understand the former without embodying the latter?

Testimonials.

The general point of view that my argument expresses did not, of course, originate with me. Many thinkers have articulated aspects of it over a long period of time. So, even though I do not suppose that any would necessarily agree with everything I have argued here, (since they do not all agree with each other) I still offer their testimony in support of aspects of my argument: The rootedness of ethics in human experience, the denial of dualism and the un-mediated character of love.

Christ, the wisdom of the Father, has from the time of Adam spoken of all persons in a manner befitting his diversity, addressing them with the word, "See!" (43)

John Ruusbröec
The Spiritual Espousals

So long as you perform all your works for the sake of The Kingdom of heaven, or for God's sake, or for the sake of your eternal blessedness and you work them from within, you are going completely astray....Because truly, when people think that they are acquiring more of God in inwardness, in devotion, in sweetness and various approaches than they do by the fireside or in the stable, you are acting just as if you took God and muddled his head up in a cloak and pushed him under a bench" (183).

Meister Eckhart
Sermon on I John 4:9

All being is from God...the doctrine of creation is, when properly understood, that which implies the deepest respect for reality and for the being of everything that is.... Do we really choose between the world and Christ as between two conflicting realities absolutely opposed? Or do we choose Christ by choosing the world...? It is not a question of either-or but of all-in-one..., of wholeness, whole heartedness and unity...which finds the same ground of love in everything (71).

Thomas Merton
Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander

This relocation of grace within the actuality of man's life within history and nature, and amidst the most common and formative episodes of experience, is not only a formal requirement of the interior energy of the plenitude of grace itself; it is an absolute requirement....If, therefore, the proposal of grace is not made to man in the matrix of his life-situation, the proposal is either unintelligible or uninteresting.

Joseph Sittler
Essays on Nature and Grace

Reality is known only in relation....There is no ontology of isolated entities, of instances, of forms, of processes, whether we are reflecting about God or man or society or the cosmos. The only adequate ontological structure we may utilize for thinking things Christianly is an ontology of community, communion, ecology—and all three words point conceptually to thought of a common kind. "Being itself" may be a relation, not an entitative thing (174).

Joseph Sittler
"Ecological Commitment as
Theological Responsibility"

Sin is not the negation or diminution of some "endowment" called *justitia originalis* but the abrogation of relationship—of all relationships; it is precisely the attempt to have our being apart from our being-with. Salvation is not a status of the entity, "soul," liberated from the physical encumbrance, "body," but the gift of a new relationship, or rather a whole constellation of new relationships, in which the state of alienation is being replaced by that of reconciliation. God, even God, in this tradition is not "all alone," an Entity, the highest Entity, a Being, "greater than whom none can be conceived;" God is rather the centre and source of all relatedness, the ground of our human restlessness for the other, the counterpart from whose presence creatures cannot ever wholly escape. And the creatures, all of them, from the smallest and invisible to the planets and interstellar spaces, are living things whose life is dependent upon their interaction (20).

Douglas John Hall
"Creation in Crisis"

In industrial Japan it's not that "nothing is sacred," it's that the sacred is sacred and that's all that's sacred....Now we can think what sacred land might be. For a people of an old culture, all their mutually owned territory holds numinous life and spirit....Sacred refers to that which helps take us (not only human beings) out of our little selves into the whole mountains and rivers mandala universe. Inspiration, exaltation, and insight do not end when one steps outside the doors of the church (88,93,94).

Gary Snyder
The Practice of the Wild.

Whatever sin meant, it did not mean that the goodness of God and the creation are at some necessary remove from us until the end of time. Nor that our only foretaste of it is mediated through the Christ. The whole problem with Christianity lay in this tendency to think that goodness is mediated (166,167).

Tom Driver
Patterns of Grace: Human Experience as Word of God.

We think of ourselves as *imago Dei*, not only possessing bodies but being agents...That is, we are the part modeled on the model: self:body::God:world. We are agents and God possesses a body: both sides of the model pertain to both God and ourselves. This implies that we are not mere submerged parts of the body of God but relate to God as to another Thou.

Sallie McFague
Models of God

Drawing water at dawn, making ready to break fast, I watch

the woodchuck at his grazing: I can sense with all the evidence of primordial awareness that he and I are kin. Resting before the house at dusk, I can see the porcupines with their young beneath the boulders on the opposite bank venture forth: even so I had once led my children on their discovery of the world. Hoeing the beans, I watch their tendrils groping for the strings I stretched for them—so I, too have groped for support. I can understand the old age of my apple trees, living past their time: perhaps that, too, will be my lot.

Sensing the life of the forest around me, I think only a person wholly blinded and deafened, rendered insensitive by the glare and the blare of his own devices, could write off that primordial awareness of the human's integral place in the cosmos as mere poetic imagination or as "merely subjective." The opposite seems far closer to the truth. It is what we are accustomed to treating as "objective reality"—the conception of nature as a system of dead matter propelled by blind force—that is in truth the product of a subject's purposeful and strenuous activity, a construct built up in the course of an extended, highly sophisticated abstraction. It is, undeniably, a highly useful construct for accomplishing a whole range of legitimate tasks. Still, it is a construct, not an experiential given. Humans must suspend lived experience to produce the "scientific world view" of physics. Our direct awareness of nature as the meaningful context of our lives, by contrast, presents itself spontaneously, with out a subject's effort. If anything, it requires the very opposite: to suspend effort, to let be and listen, letting nature speak. In a real, though not a customary sense, it is what we mislabel "poetic imagination" that is, "objective," a spontaneous experiential given. It is our image of nature as dead and mechanical—and the image of the human as either a robot or a rebel—that is "subjective," a product of the subject's active imagination rather than a given of lived experience—and actually quite counterintuitive (6,7).

Erazim Kohak
*The Embers and the Stars:
A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature.*

Working Out the Details.

If anyone is the spokesperson for an ethic of unmediated relationship, it is Martin Buber:

The relation to You is unmediated. Nothing conceptual comes between I and You, no prior knowledge and nothing imagined....No purpose intervenes, no greed and no planning. Every mediation is an obstacle. Only where all mediations have disintegrated can encounters occur.... (62,63)

Perhaps now we are more willing to ask the question Nell Noddings poses, what ethical place is there for God if all mediations have disintegrated? Here is Buber's answer:

Extended, the lines of relationships intersect in the eternal You. Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every singular You the basic word addresses the eternal You (123).

Here there is no theo-centric two-step. We do not get

to our neighbor or to the world via God. Rather the relation to God is present *in* the relation to the neighbor and the world. But it is important to insist that the neighbor and the world are not merely the medium here, but the substance of the relationship. We cannot now go seeking the hungry *in order* to feed God. As Buber continues:

The meeting with God does not come to a person in order that he or she may from then on be preoccupied with God, but in order to demonstrate the meaning of true meeting in action in the world. All revelation is calling and sending. But again and again a person avoiding such action, turns back to focus on the revealer. He or she would rather focus on God than face the world, but when turning is no longer met by a You. Instead there is a divine It. . . . the person believes he or she knows this It—God, and talks about him. But just as an ego-maniac does not perceive or feel anything unmediatedly, but reflects instead as the I that perceives or feels, and so misses the point, thus the theo-maniac (who can get along nicely with the ego-maniac in the same soul) will not put the gift into action but focuses instead on the giver and consequently misses the meaning of both . . . Whenever you are sent forth, God remains present for you . . . Turning back to look at God, on the other hand, turns God into an object (164,165).

Buber suggests that alienation can take two forms: one is to turn all that we encounter into an alien thing, a world of things merely to be used. The other is to turn all that we encounter into alien things by means of a God who, because of the way we have removed him from everything else, we have already turned into an alien thing.

Conclusions.

1. Christian ethicists, whether they are addressing our responsibility to our neighbor or to our neighborhood, need to be careful about the kinds of religious justifications or groundings given to their ethical conclusions. In spite of the fact that such issues have been raised broadly and over a long period of time, many Christian ethicists seem to proceed very naively, as though there were no problems of this sort that even needed to be addressed. Christian ethicists need to be at least as aware of this problem as Nell Noddings and Martin Buber are, even if they draw conclusions of a completely different sort.

2. As Christians, we must realize that we bring nothing more to thinking and acting ethically than our fellow humans may bring. If anything we come to action with temptations they do not have (though they may have their own). At best we can stand side by side with our fellow human beings as they work through their care, concern, love, and responsibility. If Buber's model is right, ethics ought to be characterized by the mediation it has gotten away from. Is the ethic of the good Samaritan and of the blessed in Matthew 25 precisely an ethic that has left a lot

of baggage behind? Maybe Jesus' packing advice to his disciples can be a guide for Christian ethicists as well (Matthew 10:10).

3. At present, at least, I cannot recommend a better model than the one Buber presents. But if anyone knows of one, please inform me. For now, I can confess that the rhythm of mediation is very alien to my thinking. On the other hand, the ontology of relationship expressed by Sittler and Hall seem to be moving in the right direction. The denial of God/neighbor and God/world dualisms seem absolutely essential as well.

4. Perhaps Christians (and Christian ethicists in particular) need more stories of the sort that Taoists tell. Here is such a story, transplanted:

An old Christian and a young Christian were preparing to picnic in a forest glade. As they spread their blanket the old Christian said to the younger, "Tell me what you see about you." The young Christian, eager to please, looked about, and answered, "Well, I see trees of many kinds, and vines, and bushy plants, lots of insects, a stream winding down to the river, some birds over there, flowers, a bit of dew left on the grass, and there, some animal darting toward the pond."

At this point the older Christian turned a stern face to the younger and said, "You see in a Godless way. As a Christian you must see instead that this is God's creation, God's creatures, the plenitude of God's creative imagination and preserving love for the world, and the domain of your obedient stewardship." The younger Christian bowed reverently to the older and said, "I am ashamed that I spoke so, I will remember the lesson you have taught me and I will strive to keep God in the front of my mind."

One week later the two ventured forth to picnic in the forest again. Having spread their blanket, the older Christian said to the younger, "Tell me what you see about you." The younger smiled modestly and said, "I see God's creation, God's creatures, the plenitude of God's creative imagination and preserving love for the world, and the domain of my obedient stewardship."

The old Christian turned a wrinkled and quizzical face to the younger and uttered a loud, "Hah!" Then he said, "What a blind one you are. Open your eyes and you will see trees of many kinds, vines including poison ivy, and bushy plants, insects of many species, including the lacy-winged dragonfly that has settled on our bottle of wine, a stream gurgling down to the river, jays, crows, finches, thrushes, sparrows and chickadees, columbine, violets and daisies, fungi of uncountable variety, dew on the grass, and over there, a pregnant muskrat about to go plop into the pond, and me hungrily sitting here across the blanket from you waiting for you to pass the blueberries."

The young Christian, benumbed, with mouth agape for a

long time, finally embarrassedly stammered, "B-b-but, you said...."

The old Christian grinned broadly and held up a hand to secure silence. The old one bowed to the young one and said, "It's all the same thing. So let's savor our blueberries." □

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A LETTER TO MY FATHER, POET OF THE EARTH

Andi Bishman

Dear Dad,

This is your daughter, the second one, the English major. Surprise! “Amazing—a letter from Andi,” I’m sure you’re mumbling to yourself right now. I know it’s a paradox that I’m an English major who doesn’t write home much, but this ought to make up for some of the brevity of the last letters. We were given an assignment in American Literature to write to someone who would be interested about something interesting. Hopefully I was correct in using you to meet the first criteria; you’ll have to let me know how I do in fulfilling the second.

Put simply, this letter is about looking at dirt. Yet it is also about you and me. We are very different, Dad. You are the carpenter, I am the writer. You are wielding a hammer or a shovel as I am wielding this simple pen. Unlike the concrete pillars that hold the bridges you make, it is difficult for you to see what supports my words, and more importantly, if they will ever be able to support me—financially, that is. For the most part, we see things very differently, but in this letter I wanted to tell you about the eyes you have given me to see with. Please, keep reading.

In this same American Literature class we were discussing the importance of the land to the people that inhabit it. I spent much of the time conjuring up images of you growing up with your seven siblings and Grandma and Grandpa in that self-contained farm community. I saw my aunts as girls, in dresses made of feed sacks, and you and

your brothers dressed in oversized overalls. I saw the livestock—the ornery pigs, the lounging cattle and the shifting, squawking constellations of chickens on the ground. But the animals I considered were always eclipsed by images of the land. Grandma never appears just as a figure in my memories; she is always sketched against infinite stalks of corn and soy beans. Immediately I remember her hands, which looked as though they were made of only two ingredients: dirt and callous. They are your hands too, Dad. You have shown me there is nothing ignoble about the travail that gave birth to those callouses. You are not afraid to touch all that God has made.

Grandpa survives in my memories as other memories, because I know him only through what I have been told about him, and what I can conceive from the steely-eyed images in pictures I have seen of him. But I know that he was in all ways a farmer. To your parents, farming seemed not to be an occupation, but a lifestyle. Farming was an ineffaceable part of their being, just as the dirt could never be fully removed from under their fingernails, even for church.

I have seen how this dirt was to them the holiest of all gifts. Grandma told me in her life how after a certain point the land ceases merely “being yours,” and instead it “becomes you.” Sweat and tears fall upon the ground and nurture it, just as do the sunlight and the rain. It is no longer an antagonistic relationship between owner and land, one seeking to conquer the other, but rather a fusion of a single purpose, and this purpose being nothing but “to grow.”

And I’ve witnessed this dirt hallowed by you too, Dad. When you knelt on the plot that you would eventually build our house upon and rolled a clump of dirt in your finger-

Andi Bishman is a current student at VU. Her teacher, John Ruff, Cresset poetry editor, brought this essay in for the environment issue, and we felt it was worth breaking the Cresset’s general rule about undergraduate publication in this journal.

tips like a fine cigar until it crumbled, I was watching. The sublime look that overcame all your features made me believe you were thinking something similar to the sentiment expressed in Crèvecoeur's *Letters From An American Farmer*:

The instant I enter on my own land, the bright idea of property, of exclusive right, of independence, exalt my mind. Precious soil, I say to myself, by what singular custom of law is it that thou wast made to constitute the riches of the freeholder? What should we farmers be without the distinct possession of that soil?

You are a poet to your very marrow, Dad. You are a poet of the earth.

You have shown me that land is a perennial symbol. It is impervious to change, except to those seasonal fluctuations which dictate the life of a farmer. By some inexplicable force, the single seed always orients itself and sprouts, flourishes and is harvested. It is an eternal cycle. Perhaps that is what was so awe-inspiring to Grandma and Grandpa and also became that way for you. The farmer is privileged in that he taps into something which is eternal, and the carpenter similarly blessed with the right to crown that venerated ground with his building.

You have shown me, Dad, how the land tethers each of us to a place, to a tradition. The same ground that witnessed you as a cooing baby, as a boy who poked a pitchfork through his sister's foot, and as a man who blushing introduced your future wife to the rest of the family still remains. The land on which we live is like a silent witness to all that we have been. Chief Seattle in his famous speech said:

Every part of the soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and groove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. Even the rocks, which seem to be dumb and dead as they swelter along the silent shore, thrill with memories of stirring events connected with the lives of my people.

During our many visits to the farmstead, you have told me the story about the time you crashed Grandpa's plane in the cornfield, you have pointed out where the old chicken coop stood, and you have explained how five brothers slept in one bed. In your telling, you have unearthed countless other treasures buried in the past. Thank you for this, Dad. You have bestowed upon me the riches and depth of a past

I would have never otherwise known, and in doing so, gave me an identity. I am a Bishman; I am not ashamed of the dirt.

In writing this, Dad, I have discovered also that we are more alike than I believed we were. You see, I, the English major, the "deep" one in the family, am a farmer and carpenter, just as you are a poet. The paper comes to me like fallow ground, unblemished, waiting to be cultivated. And the words to me are like seeds, which I laboriously plant in straight furrows across the page. But then I become the carpenter and the words slowly assemble into a scaffolding of thought. I board them with long planks of emotion, countless varieties of sweet-smelling wood under my nostrils. Lastly, I rivet them together with punctuation: Here is where I pause, here is where I stop. Here is where I begin . . .

When Mom was driving me to school she interrupted a long spell of silence with the words, "Eight hours, Andi. Just think about it. Eight hours away." I didn't understand her concern, even though I was going further than anyone in our family had ever gone to live. Was she afraid I would betray, forget, or not return to the home that she and you had made for me?

When Grandpa died in the ripeness of autumn, Dad, you didn't live at home anymore. You, the eldest son, had moved on in your life and no longer lived the farming lifestyle. But who brought in the harvest when the entire family was still shaking in grief, who reaped the plants in autumn that Grandpa had delivered as seeds down into the dirt that spring, f? You never told me, Dad, but I imagine you were up on that Allis-Chalmers, a throne of peeling orange paint, discovering your own steely-eyed gaze as you made seemingly endless passes through the wheat and oats, again revealing the dirt below.

This is the final and greatest thing you have taught me. The land is the permanence that we ourselves cannot be. We work our whole lives with it, dig our hands deep into its immortality, and one day are laid into that great mystery, ourselves.

I have moved on, Mom and Dad, but the dirt of my past will forever be under my fingertips. I will always remember that soil from which I came, and the soil to which I will return. □

Cottonwoods

"When a breeze comes along a cottonwood wakes up."

William Stafford

Across the barnyard the man carries
a pail of dogfood, milk, and kitchen scraps.
The swirling cats lead him
to the barn where the large brown dog
leans into his chain and barks.

Around the man cottonwoods breathe—
diviners of water, shaggy—
shade for tractors resting at noon,
engines cooling and ticking
with the talk of the leaves.

Branches, long patches of bark
fall off, pile up at the base
with tin cans to cover tractors' exhaust pipes,
cigarette pack cellophane, brown bottles
with "Grain Belt Beer" bleaching out.

Prairie farmers' trees, the first
generation of windbreaks. Now
elegant evergreens, maples, even
layers of honeysuckle and Russian olive
surround manicured farmsites.

A cottonwood in the middle of a field
felled so a farmer can plant
another tenth of an acre without swerving,
now just a stump the dozer abandoned.
The roots grasp then give up.

Old cottonwood waking in the square grove,
sparrow hawk swaying in the top branch,
chickens and ducks closed up in the coop,
last year's corn in bins; the man in the barnyard
stops to hear the leaves straining in the wind.

Vincent Wixon



Being with Mr. Burchfield. . .

Described as a naturalist, social critic, symbolist, urban realist, romantic, expressionist, and transcendental visionary, Charles Burchfield (1893-1967) was an extraordinary American painter whose work has inspired several generations of artists. Selected by Nancy Weekly from the Burchfield-Penney Art Center at Buffalo State College, New York, the largest and most comprehensive collection of the artist's work, a recent exhibition on the campus of Valparaiso University constitutes a full overview of Burchfield's oeuvre, including watercolors, prints, oil paintings, and preliminary sketches for both paintings and wallpaper designs. Through the juxtaposition of preliminary drawings with such major works as *Solitude* (begun in 1918) and *The Moth and the Thunderclap* (1961), the exhibition offers an examination of the artist's working process.

Born in Salem, Ohio, Burchfield graduated from the Cleveland School of Art in 1915, studied briefly in New York in 1915-16, and in 1921 moved to Buffalo, where he resided until his death. In the 1940s he and his family were members of a Lutheran congregation near Buffalo, and in 1944 his daughter Mary Alice enrolled at VU, graduating in 1947. Over the years he and his family have given a number of works to the Valparaiso Museum Collection, though the bulk of his work is in the Buffalo center, where Nancy Weekly is the Charles Cary Rumsey Curator and Director of the Curatorial Department.

Burchfield, whose primary inspiration was nature, developed ideas in cyclical rather than linear fashion, returning to earlier concepts and adapting them for newer, more complex uses. American life, the dwindling virginal landscape, the passage of time, and childhood memory are themes that recur throughout his work. In the course of his fifty-two-year career, Burchfield shifted his artistic focus from idyllic landscapes to expressionistic renderings of nature to the rural life of Ohio and western New York; consequently he is known for one or another of his signature styles. This exhibition tries to present a truer reading of the artist by uniting the disparate views of Burchfield as either social realist or expressionist visionary.

—adapted from the catalogue, *Life Cycles: The Charles E. Burchfield Collection*



Charles E. Burchfield

WILD SWEET PEAS, 1961

graphite on paper

13- 5/8 x 19- 1/4 inches

Valparaiso University Museum of Art

Gift of the CEB Foundation, 1976.

BEING WITH MR. BURCHFIELD

Your spare pencil
reaches down the fifty years
you're knowing
this place, this angle
of the underbrush
and snags
("without correction or erasure")
tendrils, slim stem, flower heart,
a pair of leaves
like dragonflies resting,
the mazy scent of wild sweet peas,
just now poised again after
a quick cool breeze blows by.

Mine catches at sounds
to moor your fine movement—
springtime wriststrokes.

Kathleen Mullen



Charles E. Burchfield

JULY (WHEATFIELD and MAPLES)

1935-43

watercolor on paper

31- 11/16 x 49- 15/16 inches

Valparaiso University Museum of Art

Gift of the artist, 1954.

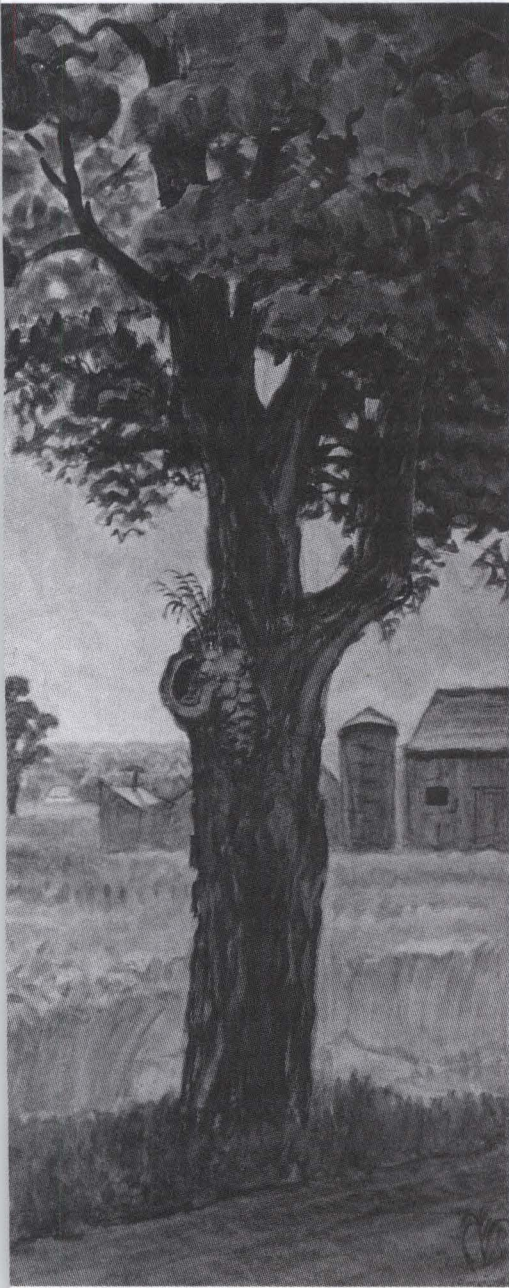
The illustration here shows the
approximate enlargement of the original
painting, done in 1943

"JULY, 1935-1943"

(From a painting by Charles Burchfield)

*"I decided that the idea had possibilities for a much grander scale."
—Charles Burchfield*

*"To make a prairie takes clover and one bee."
—Emily Dickinson*



You can tell, looking at that maple—
studying it, how it was bound
to outgrow that first sheet of paper.
That's the way with some maples;
needed space and a partner, and a road
lined up beside them, headed somewhere.
More paper. Two maples line a road
so that a man standing on the road,
resting in the shade, looking out
between them can feast his eyes—
on a wheatfield, naturally, and here
it comes, golden ripe, almost to falling
over, fanning out like a dream
from the fence line to the barn, a full
barn—too big to get it all onto that paper.
When you frame a sky with maples
like that, with a wheatfield like that,
with a fence line flaring out, and a barn
too big, you have to paint it blue,
and clear, no clouds, no dust.
How could anyone see otherwise
that wagon in the distance, a wagon
drawn by horses, almost to the woods.
For eight years you've been painting
to keep them in that field, through
drought and dust and howling winds,
those men bucking hay to feed their horses.
You fill their wagon to fill their barn;
against empty fields you paint your paper full.

John Ruff

The Moth and the Thunderclap

"At the climax, a furious thunderstorm raged through the immense forest—I thought of a moth taking refuge under a leaf at midnight." —Excerpt from Charles Burchfield's journal.

I remember that fantastic storm in Gates Mills
and how, as it raged, I orchestrated a scene
of spring night fury, with thunder and lightning—
all the mystique of earth/air/fire/water colliding.

To paint it now, I need charcoal at the top right
for heavy heavens about to crush the air.
To the left the sky is in splinters. Below it, I see
a raiment of light, the blackness rolled away.

Life still radiates, though it is threatened.
The thunder's voice comes echoing in waves
of calligraphy from that epiphany. Pale ambers,
greens are right for soft plants, but even those

dulcet watercolors need the counterpoint
of charcoal, like Sibelius' darkling minor chords
in *Swan of Tuonela* foreboding the netherworld.
Only those who have to shudder sing of hope.

Here I place a voiceless moth—*Lepidoptera*
cecropia—mother of all moths, poor cousin
to the butterfly, a double-minded insect with rust
and eyes of faith upon its wings. Amid the fragile

plants it pollinates, this moth should be at home
in the dark and drawn to flashing light, but it is
covering—a threatened species quivering,
covering its nakedness behind the leaves as it

seeks cloister from the terror of the thunderclap!

Bernhard Hillila

Charles E. Burchfield

THE MOTH AND THE
THUNDERCLAP, 1961

watercolor

36 x 48 inches

The Charles Rand Penney
Collection of Works by CEB at
the Burchfield-Penney Art
Center, Buffalo State College



Winter Clown

Speculations on Burchfield's 'Walking Man'

Striding to the Buffalo meeting
of Clowns of the Northeast,
Burchfield's little Dutch harlequin
walks out of the world of Exupery.

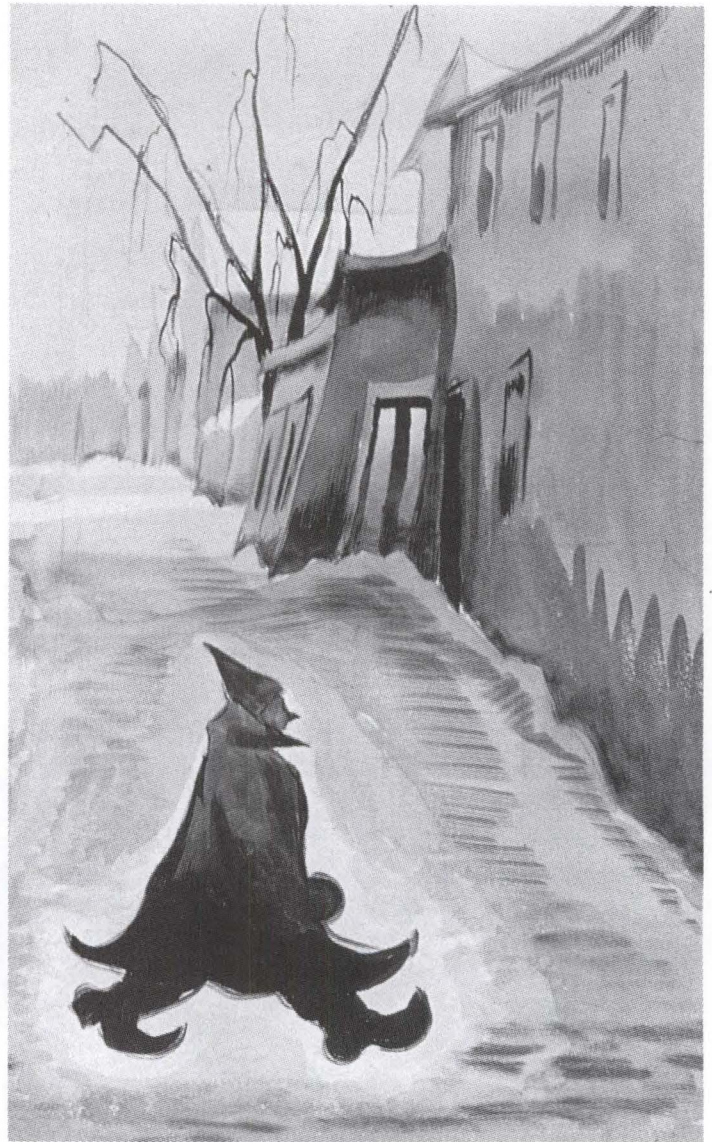
Too sharp to be real, his bloody bristles
with angular points, from the tips
of his too-long clown clogs,
his collar and nose, his pointed cone hat.

I imagine the shadowy bulge at his front
is a bright-colored pompon, to complete
the ensemble. He is mirrored,
head down, in upturned background tree,
whose naked skyward stretch mimics

his movement far better than it could
in summer, when leaves would cover
its triangular network of branches
just as our clown would dress down
from his voluminous coat.

Only in cold, north-wind winter do
human and nature so perfectly match.

Al Pionke



Charles E. Burchfield

UNTITLED (WALKING MAN) 1918
watercolor and pencil on paper
18 x 11- 1/4

The Charles Rand Penney Collection of
Works by CEB at the Burchfield-Penney
Art Center, Buffalo State College
Gift of Tony Sisti, 1979.

Charles E. Burchfield

UPROOTED TREE. C. 1921-43

watercolor on paper

26-7/8 x 29-3/16

Valparaiso University Museum of Art

Gift of the CEB Foundation, Inc.,

in memory of Mary Alice Burchfield Mustain, 1989



THE SACRED

The Psalmist sings of a wonderful world where the Lord God is creator and sustainer of all things. Earth and sea, rock and tree, valley and hill, mountain and field, moon and sun, raven and stork, wild goat, young lion, and badger all bear witness to the Creator's majesty and splendor.

The Psalmist sings of God's sovereignty. Each part of creation is subject to the Creator. The winds serve as God's messengers and the clouds provide the pathway for God's winged chariot. The blazing light of the sun wraps itself around God like a robe. Flame and Fire, which were worshipped as divine by the Canaanites, now are declared to be God's servants. Even the greatly feared sea monster, Leviathan, is pictured as frolicking with God in the once destructive waters of chaos, declaring that order and beauty, abundance and joy are victorious over the powers of death and disorder. So it is that every creature, great and small, looks to God, waits for God, seeks from God and God alone, life and breath and daily food.

The Psalmist sings of a universe in balance and at peace. The waters know their boundaries and stay in their appointed place. The moon faithfully marks the seasons of seed time and harvest. The rain waters the ground and the land is abundantly fruitful. The sun knows well the hour of its setting and keeps the rhythm of waking and sleeping, working and ceasing.

The Psalmist sings of humankind, created and sustained by God, enjoying the benefits of the land. Here

The Reverend Susan R. Briehl *co-directs Holden Village, a Lutheran retreat center off Lake Chelan in north central Washington State. She was for eight years campus pastor at Pacific Lutheran University. This sermon was originally preached at a conference at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota.*

there is no curse in work, no tears in toil or fruitless labor. Here the faces of men and women and children are full and robust, resplendent with health and joy, for there is food enough to nourish and strengthen them and wine to warm and gladden their hearts.

We are invited to join the Psalmist in singing this song and to witness the wonderful work of creation unfolding before our eyes, experiencing its majesty and power, as the words of the psalm name into our presence all that God has made. In this place on this day as we gather to worship we are invited to come under the Sacred Canopy and taste life as life was meant to be: balanced and abundant, secure and blessed, lived within the splendor and under the sovereignty of God.

But there is danger inside the beautiful world the poet has created. To linger here too long might lead us to forget, even to deny, the realities of the world in which we live. We know that rivers do not always keep their appointed boundaries, but rise beyond their banks, sweeping field and farm, home and cattle into their raging flow. We know that the noon day sun can be darkened by a tornado drawing every living thing into its spinning grasp. We know that deserts encroach upon fertile soil, sifting hope into despair, and that some of God's creatures suffer for years without rain, without harvest, without joy.

And we know that while all things living look to God to give them their food in due season, there are many who die from hunger. Many a child is hungry, sunken cheeked, crying in his mother's arms, weeping with his mother whose breasts are dry and whose heart suffers a drought of hope. Can it be that the Psalmist knows nothing of the poverty of peoples and nations, of war and injustice, of calamity and greed and indifference?



CANOPY

Can it be that the Psalmist does not know what we know, that the Sacred Canopy itself has been rent asunder and life has fallen out of balance into the bondage of death? That the whole world is groaning in travail awaiting its redemption? Or even worse could it be that the Psalmist knows the truth and chooses instead to live protected from human pain and creation's distress by weaving a world untouched by sin and suffering? Is the Psalmist asking God quickly to destroy the sinners and the wicked ones, as if to say, if we only could rid the world of "those people" Eden would return and we would live in blessedness, innocence and righteousness all our days?

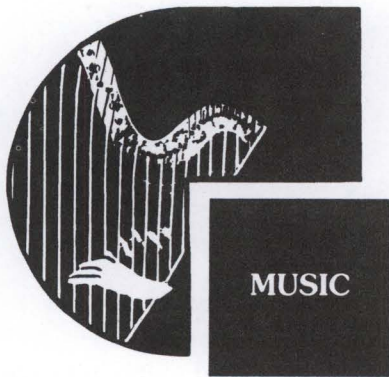
Isn't it true, that we too try to create a perfect little world around ourselves, a garden, a sacred canopy, a safe neighborhood, a carefully chosen circle of friends, where we can close our eyes to the suffering of all that God has made? Try as we might, the broken world breaks in and we must admit that we both perpetuate and participate in creation's suffering. When we tell the truth about ourselves and honestly face the terrors of our time, we cannot run too blithely back toward the Garden under the Sacred Canopy into a world set apart from the realities of a creation broken, in bondage, and groaning to be set free.

And yet, this Psalm sets before us the vision of God's desire for creation and invites us to live toward that vision, leaning with hope into God's promised future. For the One who first stretched out the heavens like a canopy and set the earth on its foundations has not forgotten or abandoned the creation. Indeed God continues to be at work creating, redeeming, and sustaining. Christ Jesus, the creating word made flesh entered the world to spend his life for its sake and to mend with mercy all that sin has tattered and torn.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to live in two realities. Our feet need to be planted firmly in the broken world which is our home, the world God loves. For into this world the Father sent the Son, into this world the reign of God is breaking, and in this world we are called to the work of the kingdom: feeding the hungry, welcoming the outcast, seeking justice, and making peace in Jesus' name. At the same time, we are called to enter the vision of God's promised future, in which God's creating Spirit is renewing the face of the earth. Here we dare to dream the dream of God and participate in the plan and purpose of God: to unite all things in heaven and on earth in Christ Jesus.

The Gospel calls us to live now as if the future had already come. When we gather to worship the Triune God, especially when we participate in the Holy Eucharist, we are invited to come under the Sacred Canopy and to live the future now. We enter God's presence singing to the Lord as if we would sing forever: praising and blessing God. We forgive one another as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven us and greet one another in peace. We bring to the table all that we have and are and hope to be. We bring the harvest of land and vine, the fruit from the labor of our hands. We stand, hands open and empty, looking to God to satisfy our hunger with bread enough for everyone and wine to mend and gladden the broken heart. We drink from one Cup, a sign of our unity in Christ Jesus, but also a sign of our commitment to a common life.

We rest in God's embrace beneath the Sacred Canopy. It is a foretaste of the feast to come, a participation in God's promised future. Then we are sent back into the broken world that waits for us to share the gifts of grace we have received from the one who declares: "Surely, I am coming soon." And the people respond, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." □



An Arts Environment

Maureen Jais-Mick

Environment is an inevitable concern of those who inhabit the cities. We look at the decaying buildings, aging garbage, loitering homeless, and sub-standard schools and can't help but see what's lacking. In Washington, D.C., I play the organ occasionally at Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church at 8th and N Streets NW. The church is in a neighborhood rich in history and culture known as Shaw—D.C.'s version of the Harlem Renaissance during the years of segregation. It contains outstanding build-

Maureen Jais-Mick is a free-lance musician in the Washington, D.C. area whose specialty is multicultural music for liturgy and worship. In addition to her work in desktop publishing, she chairs the Professional Relations Committee of the American Guild of Organists, volunteers as a tutor for public school students in D.C., works with low-income and transitional housing organizations, and recently completed training in alternative dispute resolution.

ings designed by African-American architects for their own folks—gems such as the Whitelaw Hotel and the Lincoln Theater. It also contains vacant ruins waiting to be razed and alleys full of broken glass.

I doubt that the commuters who drive through such areas give much thought to life in them or imagine them as sources of culture. When I mention that I'll be practicing at Immaculate Conception, colleagues usually respond, "Isn't that dangerous? It's a terrible neighborhood." To me, the very use of the word "neighborhood" implies that the area, no matter how apparently undesirable, is somebody's home. Some, if not all, of its residents choose to live there.

It's true that there are hookers, drug dealers, and occasional violence around the church, but art can be tough, too. A local artist created a striking piece of urban art in nearby Blagden Alley—body outlines painted on the road surface as a memorial to the casualties of the drug war. Shaw probably has as much outstanding music as any community in the metro area. At Immaculate Conception the professional choir offers a diverse repertoire. Two blocks away at the United House of Prayer for All People, a nationwide movement founded by the late "Sweet Daddy" Grace, the famous brass choirs lead worship. Around the corner at the Scripture Cathedral one can hear an orchestra in rehearsal when the doors are propped open on warm days. Over at Metropolitan Baptist, the Emmy Award-winning gospel artist Richard Smallwood leads parish music. You can enjoy the fine choir and recently reno-

vated pipe organ of Luther Place Memorial Lutheran Church. Across the street is National City Christian Church, the headquarters of the Disciples of Christ, which offers weekly organ recitals. Nearby is the busy music program of Metropolitan A.M.E., the cathedral church of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. These are only a few of the dozens of houses of worship in Shaw that, through music and other arts, keep the community livable.

When we evangelize in such neighborhoods we tend to cut back on the fun stuff—incense, banners, colorful vestments, music, and liturgical ceremony—as though the people we're trying to reach aren't capable of understanding the subtleties of such "high church" things. But color, sweet smells, and music are welcoming. I recall the frustration of a pastor friend serving a mission congregation in Detroit who couldn't make it clear to the synod that while the parish appreciated the availability of funds for a part-time secretary (which they didn't need) what they really wanted was money to hire a musician. That was a staff member who would have an impact on the neighborhood.

W.E.B. DuBois once observed that "a good idea is one that has to be explained over and over again." I think that's true of the importance of the arts, especially during this Congress. At the same time that there is rising concern about young people and their apparent lack of discipline, ethics, and commitment, our local school systems are cutting back on chorus, band, and orchestra programs. The Concert Choir of D.C.'s Eastern High School,

which tours internationally, also does year round fund-raising to keep the group going and provide opportunities and college scholarships for graduating singers. The Cardozo High School Marching Band, a local treasure in demand nationwide, is currently without a director because the school system opted not to fill the position. (At the same time, JROTC and ROTC funding has increased, which makes pretty clear our goals as a nation.) The arts are considered a luxury—never mind that membership in a choir or band develops life-long friendships and teaches discipline, commitment, and team work. But often, the only viable groups for kids are gangs.

I suggest an arts environment as one way of attacking our urban youth problems. For the price of a couple of aircraft carriers, let's fund vast cultural opportunities for our poorest neighborhoods. Let's make sure every child can be part of a choir or musical ensemble, knows how to wield a paint brush (easier to hold than a weapon), experiences dance, and attends performances by professional artists. "But," our leaders will say, "we're used to balancing our budgets by cutting programs. Such cuts have the weight of precedence and allow us to shake our heads and say wise-sounding things when juvenile crime goes up." I know the Republicans scoff at Midnight Basketball to keep kids off the streets at night. Well, how about Midnight Ballet? Jacques D'Amboise, who brings dance into the grittiest parts of America's cities, would make a grand U.S. Secretary of Ballet. Are our funding priorities really part of a mega-plan to keep people in their (perceived) places? It seems to be accepted that opera is presented in opera houses, symphony orchestras play at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and paintings are housed in museums. Such places can successfully intimidate the poor and less educated.

Somewhere, deep down in our civic psyche we apparently believe that poorer citizens haven't earned the right to such beautiful things. "They wouldn't understand them, anyway," is our arts motto.

Try telling that to Walter Turnbull, the founder and director of the Boys Choir of Harlem. As described in his autobiography, the creation of great choral art in Harlem is a combination of the National Endowment for the Arts, the State Department, the U.S. Department of Education, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Housing and Human Services (HHS). As he explains,

When I started the Boys Choir of Harlem twenty-six years ago, I did not set out to establish an internationally known performance group. I simply wanted to share the joy of music with African-American children. It has the kind of power to lift people above any particular circumstance and inspire the heart. Music is very magical, able to transform children with no more than lint in their pockets and honey in their throats into grand performers on the world stage. Perfection in music demands discipline and instills self-confidence, two virtues easily transferred beyond the arts to everyday life. (ix)

The recently enacted crime bill (I'm tempted to entitle it the "Annual Crime Bill") funds more police. But how about more poets? Culture is power. When the former South African government wanted to maintain apartheid it forbade the singing of freedom songs. When the American Civil Rights workers needed courage, they sang together. When the striking Chicano farm workers marched from the grape fields of Delano, Texas, to the State Capitol, they did it to music and also documented their message in fabulous murals. On street corners in D.C., kids beat out complex polyrhythms on empty five-gallon buckets snagged from construction sites to accompany dancers. They create colorful graffiti on any vulnerable space.

The article *Unsung Hymns* shows that Sarah Collins Fernandis (1863-1951), a poet who was a social worker in Washington, D.C., understood the power of music:

Under the toil and the striving,
Under the sorrow and stings,
Always serene, aye persistent,
Something in every heart sings.

And erst a grand oratorio
Into life's harmony swells,
Erst a song, plaintive and tender,
Up from a slave's bosom wells.

Or in the high or the lowly,
Still God's great, wonderful gift
Music to bind all in kinship,
Music to soothe and uplift.

When did we decide that it was better and more cost effective to incarcerate people than to teach them how to dance, sing, paint, or play an instrument? Is it because we look forward to cutting funds for their prison GED programs later? (This is our strategy in the State of Maryland where we're limiting such programs in order to fund two new sports stadiums for professional teams whose owners make more money in a year than most of the citizens of the State will earn in their entire lifetimes. Our governor has declared that such projects have "psychic and spiritual benefits.")

How can churches fit into the overall arts picture? The arts are a force that churches could use for the building up of their communities. It's important to offer food and clothing for the body, but the heart and soul need equal attention. And when I say "art," I don't mean teaching a few upbeat songs to young people. I mean the discipline and commitment required by the arts—these are what make the participants stronger and gives them a sense of satisfaction. The relationship between the arts and religion is well documented. Much of what is considered outstanding art was created for places of worship and litur-

gical celebrations. Christian churches also claim that "the first shall be last and the last first." Imagine if this were exemplified in the arts in our parishes. It boggles the mind to think of the possible links between the charitable food pantry, the after-school tutoring program, the basement shelter guests, or the seniors lunch—and the arts. If the Levine School of Music, situated in a toney part of Washington, can

decide to address the nationwide decline in string players by setting up programs in low-income housing projects, surely churches can devise equally refreshing approaches to community challenges.

"Lift ev'ry voice and sing." As Martha Stewart, the doyenne of beautiful living environments would say, "It's a good thing." □

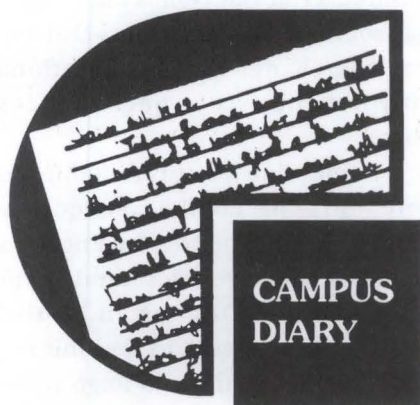
Walter Turnbull, "*Lift Every Voice*": *Expecting the Most and Getting the Best From All of God's Children*. New York: Hyperion, 1995)

"Unsung Hymns By Black and Unknown Bards," Edited by Jon Michael Spencer. A special issue of *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology*, Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 1990, Duke University Press.

The Hospital Gym Class

Nothing but widows, my father says,
Calling the role of his therapy class.
His movements beep, blip white on screen,
The numbers going to green in the space
Between rest and death. He kick-steps
The Big Band Aerobics, bounces to
In The Mood and Caravan. He watches
The leotards of the elderly,
The tank tops of old women through sound bites
From recovery's stage show. "Survivor,"
He says, down twenty pounds, wearing
My sweat suits for the old women with strokes,
The women with heart attacks and bypass.
"Surgically repaired," he adds, and then,
For the first time: "Widower," something
Like admitting he heard the old slurs
Of childhood: Heiny, Hun, and Kraut,
The identification stress test,
Whether you turn when you're called, whether
Your heart responds, roused, yet enduring
The names for the room you've entered.

Gary Fincke



Environmental Education and the Environment

Arvid F. Sponberg

"What's the use of a rigorous research agenda if you don't have a decent planet to put it on?"

—sign on the office door of Kevin Geiman, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, VU

Environmental education requires learning about processes (recycling), categories (bio-degradable) and limits (eco-systems). Last week my fourteen-year-old daughter scolded me and her mother because we have failed to recycle cereal boxes. Though diligent about recycling news-

Professor Sponberg keeps an eye on those neighbors from a second-floor office at VU, where he chairs the Department of English. Avid on the Internet, he sends and receives from the far-flung corners, and teaches general literature courses while publishing on American theatre history.

paper, we mistakenly thought that cereal boxes fell into the non-recyclable category. But Erica, who stars in biology, learned otherwise at school. We rely on her for current environmental information. And has not this been so? With our children leading us, we baby-step into new ways of living.

Considered as general conditions, processes, categories, and limits seem unremarkable and tedious to discuss except that lately my reading and watching have forced me pay them some attention. The idea of limits seems especially contentious these days.

Academics may be slightly more accustomed than non-academics to accepting the idea of limits. Academic departments and disciplinary boundaries, those banes of higher education's reformers, provide important and reassuring borders for intellectual entrepreneurs. In some domains of knowledge, investigators run pretty quickly into limits on their ability to observe and predict. An interesting example is found in *QED*, a collection of lectures about quantum electrodynamics given by Richard Feynman expressly for laypersons. It comes recommended to me by Robert Palumbo, chair of the department of mechanical engineering here at Valparaiso. (Palumbo, by the way, is an expert on solar energy who speaks and writes eloquently about the limits to our dependence on fossil fuels.) Feynman says that the smallest observable entity has a size of about 10[-16] centimeters. He also says that a price of quantum electrodynamics is accepting limits on our ability to predict sub-nuclear events with certainty. We can only predict probabilities. On the galactic scale of phenomena, we find another limit. Bruce Hrivnak, assistant professor of

astronomy at VU, tells me that the furthest object we can resolve with telescopes is ten billion light years or 10[28] centimeters away from Earth. So according to Feynman and Hrivnak, the observable universe exists on a scale between 10[-16] and 10[28] centimeters. These limits don't cause the physicists to whine that their freedom has been infringed. They seem to regard these limits as natural and happily go about their business within them.

Not so in politics and economics, at least as those domains engage us currently. An appetite for absolute—that is, limitless—measures seems to be waxing in our society. No doubt the waning of statist communism has whetted the craving for millennial-esque measures. But other phenomena signal that a yearning to pull down barriers pulses in the land: the existence of a "unabomber"; sabotage of the infrastructure such as the Murrah federal building and the World Trade Center explosions; the metastasis of militias; the House of Representatives' vote favoring repeal of the assault weapons ban; Phil Gramm saying, "I have more shotguns than I need but not as many as I want."

On a less bloody, but no less serious plane, we have heard proposals of flat taxes or the complete elimination of the IRS; observed the passage of the line-item veto—a substantial extension of executive powers; compiled with the cancellation of speed limits on interstate highways; the development of supra-national trading regions such as those established by NAFTA and the European Union; and read of proposed legislation allowing corporations to monitor their own emissions of pollutants.

Even the boundaries between the

human and non-human domains seem more than normally permeable. We hear reports of the decreasing salience of antibiotics; new pathogens appear, such as HIV and the Ebola virus; we fear the link between BSE and CJD and the contemplated annihilation of 4,000,000 British Elsie's. You need not believe in the Gaia hypothesis—that the planet Earth is a living organism—to wonder if the microbial families, defending their diminishing habitats in the blood and guts of endangered hosts, seek the elimination of humans. The extinctions of other species through natural methods have happened before.

Signs of breached limits, categories, and processes mark every aspect of our natural and social environments, except one—education. When some of my neighbors, who yearn for unlimited action in politics and the marketplace, turn their gaze on education, suddenly they fall in love with limits. Consider these examples:

—Support for requiring public school students to wear school uniforms

—Implementation of “assessment” plans, especially in public institutions of higher education

—Moves at various schools to eliminate tenure or to establish post-tenure review, not in the name of limiting academic freedom, of course, but merely to “enhance accountability”

—Campaigns to delete the Department of Education and the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities from the federal budget

—The movement to establish national standards in science, mathematics, history, geography, and language

—Organized efforts to establish English as the official language of the country

There isn't space to comment on all six, but the last two present some peculiar facets that reflect light on our cultural condition.

The hot romance with national standards is a stunner, if you stop to think about it. We live in a country founded on the belief that everyone needs a *personal* savior and so we translate God's word into every conceivable idiolect. We are a people who can't quite make out why the rest of the world runs on the metric system. We can't muster a majority on the designated hitter, instant replay, artificial turf, or the three-point line. We think single women make unfit mothers and so broke up Ma Bell's home and threw her Babies into the Street. We like the idea of two-fers, a baker's dozen, 31 flavors, 57 varieties, and 500 television channels. We already have four educational systems—public, private parochial, private secular, home schooling—and some want vouchers to slicken the way out of the first and into the last three.

Nevertheless, some of my neighbors expect teachers to state precisely what every student should know at each grade about history, science, literature, math and morals. I predict that the infatuation with national standards will pass as the estimates of its cost come in. Some idea of the costs are implied in a recent statement by Ben Nelms, professor of English education at the University of Florida and candidate for the office of Vice President of the National Council of Teachers of English: “The setting of rigorous national standards will be a meaningless exercise where [high school] English teachers teach as many as six classes a day with up to 180 students; where elementary teachers work in crowded classrooms with inadequate assistance and little or no time for

preparation; where colleges and universities marginalize adjunct faculty with grossly inadequate compensation and benefits; where teachers work under threat of censorship and public censure.” Professor Nelms might agree that some of our neighbors will support any change in the educational environment except ones that cost money.

Somewhat less predictable but more worrisome are the consequences of the growing fondness for English as an official language. This trend is truly bizarre. I guess that as an English teacher, I'm supposed to find this new tenderness about th' auld lingo rather hopeful and endearing. But I've been teaching English for thirty years and I know that most of us think no more of our daily dialect than of our daily diet. We'll run anything through our mouths that feels good for the moment.

Off the slouching flanks of this political beast I whiff the stink of racism and xenophobia. Some of my neighbors who cherish the freedom to cross financial borders with impunity panic at the rising numbers of human beings trying to get into the US and join the action. While promoting referenda to discourage immigrants, these neighbors, in a shocking loss of faith in the power of the market to “incent” change, call for laws requiring all to do public business only in English. Some of these neighbors proudly call themselves Christians. Yet they seem oblivious to a significant and related trend: the Protestant variety of Christianity is now spreading most vigorously in Central and South America. The Holy Spirit, apparently, is doing Her best work in Spanish! If we want to keep this country in God's care, we'd better take care what tongues we hold and what tongues we keep out.

Here's what it looks like to me: some of my neighbors say it's their God-given Constitutional right to drive 110 mph if they feel like it; to hug

assault rifles; to own corporations that can monitor their own pollution; to ship money off shore to avoid taxes and optimize shareholders' returns. But these neighbors say that I need to be more accountable for what my students learn and that whatever I teach had better be taught in English. These neighbors complain that they desperately need hard data on how well my students understand the Shakespearean

sonnet. They toss and turn at night because they cannot confidently predict a bright future for American civilization. (O Feynman, thou shouldst be living at this hour!)

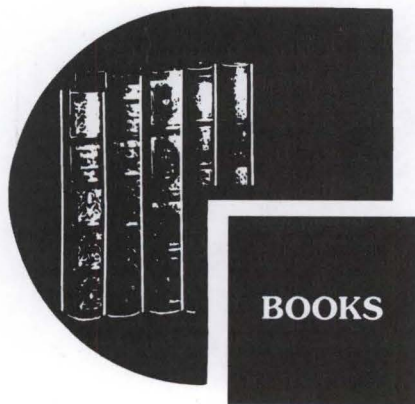
My sleep, too, is troubled. I dream of inventing a balance that demonstrates the excess cultural mass of a sonnet exceeds that of a gun. Until such an instrument is perfected, I will decline advice about education from folks who

think owning an AK-47 is the *ne plus ultra*—excuse me—the *raison d'être*—beg your pardon—*das Ein und Alles*—aw, (bleep), like, man, you know what I mean—of civilization. Let them shoot the logs out of their own eyes before they aim at the mote in mine. □

After the Matinée

At Senior Discount prices, he is waiting,
While she begs a moment for the Ladies' room
Mirror. Secretly, she has wept a little
As the lovers parted at the end, gloved
Hand on gloved hand, in the falling snow,
While he, Stoic, readied his overcoat.
Defiant, before their real life resumes,
She faces her once-beguiling image. Is
Sixty-three really too late, too late to be
Pierced again by the ache of lovers losing
Each other? A whole springtide of passion
Has been unloosed, hers for him, once
In that summer, that fall, the winter
Of falling snows that did not part
The two of them. She smiles, remembering;
No, we are never too old. When she reappears,
He is irritable. Snow has begun. At the car,
He is a muffled scraper of the windshield;
Secretly, within, she cherishes her tears.

Nancy G. Westerfield



Every Manner of Thing

Frederick Ferré. *Hellfire and Lightning Rods: Liberating Science, Technology, and Religion*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993.

The primary premise of this book is that the modern world is coming to an end. The conclusion is that in order to minimize the extent to which the transition to a postmodern world will be catastrophic, we must come to conceive and value within a mythological framework fundamentally different from that of modernity. That the modern world must come to an end is established by an analysis of the underlying assumptions of that world. That it is ending now is taken to be apparent to observation. The primary reasons

for both are ecological. Modernity's belief in unlimited growth and progress, and faith in technology, is bound to fail eventually because it has resulted in the exponential growth in population, pollution, and the use of the earth's resources, while the earth and its resources are finite. That modernity is collapsing now is evident from the apparent ecological crises presently facing us, and from the growing loss of faith in technology.

Ferre convincingly argues that modern society's fatal flaws are rooted in its underlying mythology, whose primary cause is modern science. This mythology is characterized by a flawed "scientism," "science functioning beyond its secular limits as mythic matrix of this obsolescent culture." It is characterized by "technolatri," the worship of technique and wholehearted faith in technology. Objectivity is valued, the subjective disvalued or dismissed. Only what's countable counts. Understanding is only achieved by analysis, reduction—to the extent that the subjective, the unquantifiable, and wholes, are ignored or seen as less than really real.

The consequences of this mythology have been disastrous. Humanistic and felt values, the most obvious subjective realities and perceptions, and ecological wholes are systematically ignored. That currency is so easily quantifiable reinforces "bottom line" decision making, despite the less quantifiable costs. For not acknowledging beauty, our civilization is characterized by ugliness. For seeing only constituents, ecosystems are destroyed and interdependencies are disastrously overlooked. Our failure to acknowledge limits has put us on a collision course with the earth's, and our own, very real limits. Our worship of technique/technology—focus on how rather than what—tolerates technology's negative side effects, and destroys and trivializes the arts. Our incredible faith in technology has allowed us to create potentially disastrous problems

(e.g., nuclear waste) which we trust will be solved by technology, even when there's no clear solution forthcoming.

Ferre convincingly illustrates that modern society is, in fact, deeply religious, and that the modern age could plausibly be considered a great age of faith (though the object of that faith has been an idol which cannot, in the end, save). Even modern science is fraught with ritual and valuation, though, ironically, its underlying mythology tends to impede recognition of values.

Since modernity's fatal flaws are rooted deep within its mythology, our best hope for minimizing the extent to which the transition to a postmodern world will be catastrophic is to adopt a better mythological framework in which to think and value. What is needed is a picture of reality that recognizes the subjective and unquantifiable, affirms valuation, acknowledges limits, values homeostasis (not just growth), and views things holistically. We must relearn the old lesson that we are not gods; we have and face real and near limits. The fundamental imagery we must use to view the world and ourselves is an organicism—understanding things on the model of an organism, a whole with interdependent parts, not entirely reducible to those parts. Ferre does not in the least recommend an abandonment of science and technology—we couldn't and they're needed—but that they be conducted (necessarily differently) within the context of a fundamentally different mythos. Ecology, which recognizes interconnections and wholes, is not reductionistic, and is about the "health" (a value-laden concept) of ecosystems is the best available paradigm for science.

In his search for a mythology adequate to this task, Ferre examines various extant religions, particularly "the return to magic," Judaism, and Christianity. Ferre finds much to sup-

port the needed sort of mythology but finds all wanting, at least in their most prominent forms. He describes and recommends a non-traditional Christian organicism strongly rooted in process theology. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that such a viewpoint would be accepted widely and quickly enough to do much good. A better hope would be in a "multi-mythic," pluralistic, organicism. We could deal most effectively with the current and coming crises, even if people have very different mythologies, so long as those mythologies share the most needed features mentioned above. This is what we must work toward. Still, since the mythologies in terms of which we and others view and value reality are not within our direct control, "our need is for a miracle."

Ferre's book is not a book of knock-down proofs for its theses. Rather, it presents evidence and claims such that this reader, at least, generally found the principle made at least plausible. That such a deep shift in our way of understanding the world is necessary doesn't seem obvious, but that this would be most effective does seem plausible. I found Ferre least convincing regarding several of his less central points. In a discussion of ultimate explanation, for example, Ferre suggests that it must be valuational—essentially involve displaying the goodness of what is. This is a very interesting and perhaps promising idea, and Ferre acknowledges that this is shocking to modern (though not ancient) ears, but he simply doesn't say enough to give one good reason to believe it.

I also found Ferre unconvincing in his claim that "traditional," "mainstream" Christianity provides an inadequate mythological base for the crises at hand. Ferre notes that there is much that's needed in that mythology but that it is lacking on several vital points. It seems to me that the shifts in thinking which are needed among

The Editor asked several faculty for recent book choices—

Ashworth, William. *The Great Lakes*. Wayne State University Press, 1987.

Colborn, Theo, Dianne Dumanoski, John Peterson Myers. *Our Stolen Future: Are we Threatening Our Fertility, Intelligence, and Survival?* Dutton, 1996.

Jenkins, Virginia S. *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession*. Smithsonian, 1994.

Phillips, Kathryn. *Tracking the Vanishing Frogs: An Ecological Mystery*. St. Martin's, 1994.

Wilson, Edward O. *The Diversity of Life*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

Laurie Eberhardt
Department of Biology

Berry, Wendell. *What Are People For?* North Point Press, 1990.

McFague, Sallie. *Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. Fortress Press, 1993.

Johnson, Lawrence E. *A Morally Deep World: An Essay on Moral Significance and Environment Ethics*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Rolston, Holmes, III. *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World*. Temple University Press, 1988.

Thomas Kennedy
Department of Philosophy

Bass, Rick, *The Ninemile Wolves*, Ballantine, 1993

Hasselstrom, Linda. *Land Circle: Writings Collected from the Land*, Fulcrum Press, 1993

Olsen, Scott and Scott Cairns, eds., *The Sacred Place: Witnessing the Holy in the Physical World*. University of Utah Press, 1996 (forthcoming)

Edward Byrne
Department of English

Christians are not as deep as Ferre suggests, and that Ferre did not convincingly demonstrate that his non-traditional process-type Christianity is clearly better. There is also a serious lacuna here, if taken as addressed to Christians. There certainly is a need for a changing of our minds (repentance), but Ferre doesn't, in a non-tangential way, write of actually praying and trusting in a God who desires our salvation. This is not an accidental part of the faith.

This book is largely a pieced-together collection of essays written at different times for different occasions. It shows some of the symptoms of that fact (some redundancy and some material not strictly necessary for the sake of the central theses), but not a lot; it is still an effective and coherent presentation of Ferre's general picture. The book is sometimes less clear than would be ideal, but not hopelessly so. There is much here, particularly in Ferre's analysis of modernity, that is not particularly new or original, but the principal thesis about the depth at which, and how, our thinking and valuing needs changing, is not run-of-the-mill. It's also worth serious consideration, not just for the sake of theoretical understanding, but because such thinking may be necessary to avoid catastrophe.

Jonathan Strand

Lischer, Richard. *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word that Moved America*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Martin Luther King Jr. was not first of all a civil rights activist or a Nobel prize-winning social critic, but a preacher in the African-American tradition. Richard Lischer argues that a homiletical perspective on King and his work are necessary for properly

understanding him. Throughout, but especially toward the end of his life as he articulated a position opposing the Vietnam war, King consciously grounded his authority in his calling as a preacher: "Now there are those who say, 'You are a civil rights leader. What are you doing speaking out? You should stay in your field.' Well, I wish you would go back and tell them for me that before I became a civil rights leader, I was a preacher of the Gospel..." (182).

Like many preachers, King both borrows and radically modifies what he has undertaken to use.

Lischer notes that despite "his plagiarism at Boston and the derivative character of his learning in general, the evidence shows him to have fully engaged the Western intellectual tradition" (7). While King's use of his intellectual sources on occasion may seem to lack depth, Lischer observes that King cultivated the preacher's inclination to read "all knowledge and experience in terms of its fecundity for moving people with language" (64).

Lischer is as forthright, but more spare, in his assessment of King's

alleged moral failure: "Sources as disreputable as Hoover's FBI and as reliable as King's closest confidants have alleged a pattern of sexual 'habits' in King that eventually threatened to compromise his effectiveness...." (169). Lischer points to these habits as a sources of shame and fear in King, and suggests that they contributed to his later depression. King seemed more distressed by the possibility of disclosure than the moral failure itself. King's embracing of personalism, according to Lischer, may have prompted him to see moral matters as secondary, not really touching the authentic person or heart that subsisted at a deeper level.

The book is not a biography, but includes enough biographical detail to orient the reader who is not completely familiar with King and his work. Most enjoyable are the many references to King's sermons that Lischer has extracted from actual tapes of King's preaching. Lischer finds that much of the local flavor has been edited out of King's published sermons leaving them blandly unrepresentative of King's style.

Several small matters may leave the reader puzzled. Lischer seems to be working with a confused or imprecise notion of metonymy: "metonymy is a predictable metaphor" (123). On other features of King's preaching though, Lischer proves to be entirely reliable. Lischer presents similarities between King and the apostle Paul that might leave the reader with the impression that King lived out his life in detailed imitation of Paul. The comparison reminds one of the sort of strained comparisons once drawn between Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy: "Just as Paul was usually greeted on arrival by a small cell of believers already present in the city, so King came by invitation only and was reverently received at the chief Apostle of Freedom" (185).

Lischer's book is, on balance, a

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- ❑ **John Rottman** is a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church and a recent Ph.D. in homiletics at the University of Toronto.
- ❑ **Richard Gildrie** is professor of history at Austin Peay State University.
- ❑ **LeAnn Van Dyk** teaches theology at San Francisco Theological Seminary.
- ❑ **David Jones** is on the faculty of North Carolina Wesleyan College, where he teaches American history.

fine piece of research, well-written, and insightful. One is able to learn much about King, his work, and the African-American preaching tradition from this fine book.

John M. Rottman

Butler, Diana Hochstedt. *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford, 1995.

This book is a historically and theologically sophisticated account of the evangelical movement within the nineteenth-century Episcopal Church centering on the career of one of its most remarkable leaders, Charles McIlvaine, Bishop of Ohio from 1831 to 1873. It is a history of McIlvaine's quest, amidst what he called the "whirlwind" of revivalism, "to forge an orderly, decorous, church-oriented evangelicalism that would provide stability and promote the gospel in a rapidly changing world" (ix).

However initially narrow the topic may seem, the implications are broad indeed. In fact, this work is an important contribution to the growing literature on the nature, consequences and fate of evangelicalism in the United States. Hence, it should be considered with Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1989), and Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994). Seen in this context, the book is a brilliant case study of the conflicts within a denomination occupying a crucial position within the religious spectrum of American society and culture.

The issue which dominated Bishop McIlvaine's career was whether the Episcopal Church should be simultaneously liturgical and evangelical, aristocratic in polity and democratic in appeal, rationalist in thought and pietist in spirit. Positioning themselves

between the more exuberant revivalism of Second Great Awakening and the High Church tradition, McIlvaine and his allies "envisioned the forms and rituals of a liturgical, theologically rich, Protestant church enlivened by the spirit of American evangelicalism" (5). The story is essentially a tragedy: "Thinking that they stood against both extremes, members of the Evangelical party in the Episcopal

Church lost their way" (16). Frustrated by nearly sixty years of intellectual crises and institutional failures, "the evangelical Episcopal party was moving [by the 1870s] in a theological direction which would, by the turn of the century, develop into American fundamentalism" and eventually doom themselves to irrelevance (179). By implication, the Episcopal evangelicals "lost their way" because they could not

Florida Keys

Florida ends engulfed in Gulf
where it strews its last drop of land.
Skeleton keys open to its
last strand of strand.

Water makes the land rejoice,
but water from the land—from lot
and laundry, truck and toilet—breaks
the ocean's heart.

Salty as tears, sour as piss,
the sea has rot upon its breath.
Algae are unraveling
the knot of death.

The echo system of each conch shell
sounds in the sea turtle's nest,
the sponge's thirst, the shark's diminished
plankton-fest.

Ancient coral beds are prey
to rusty freighters, pleasure yachters,
while well-fed land developers
spoil their daughters.

There is no Ark to save the creatures
killed in floods that drown sea waters.

Bernhard Hillila

sustain the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity amidst the turmoil of their time.

In telling this complex tale, the author, who holds a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Duke University and writes a column, "Faith in Our Time," syndicated by the New York Times, has a gift for explaining the issues dividing Episcopalians and relating them to larger social and intellectual contexts. For instance, consider this description of the situation just before the Civil War:

In the 1850s, Evangelical Episcopalians became preoccupied with perfectionist dreams, and they could no longer tolerate compromise of any kind. For them, compromise became identified with sinfulness, error, and evil (137).

Later she explicitly tied that "perfectionism" to the uncompromising politics of the decade which led to the disruption of the Union. Also her description of the Oxford Movement in general and McIlvaine's 1843 criticism of it in particular are masterpieces of clarity and concision. A myriad of issues, including postwar Anglo-Catholicism, theological liberalism, varying forms of millennialism, abolitionism, and the development of the Board Church movement, are treated equally succinctly and competently.

Very rarely do histories of denominations or groups within them transcend partisanship successfully while evincing such sensitivity to the nuances of religious debate and experience. Further, the book is marked by sound scholarship, tight organization, and excellent writing. Even more to the point, it tells a compelling story of passion, failure, and lost opportunities of immediate relevance to all who are concerned about the strengths and weaknesses of evangelicalism in America.

Richard Gildrie

Butin, Philip Walker. *Revelation, Redemption, and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995, 232 pp.

Calvin studies are burgeoning. The body of literature is expanding in a number of directions. For one, careful historical work on Calvin and the Genevan Reformation is growing. An interesting development in this literature is the shift from discontinuity to continuity between the late medieval period and Calvin. For another, a reassessment of Calvin's own theology, its contribution to other centers of Reformed activity, its connection with subsequent so-called Protestant Scholasticism, and its relationship to the continuing stream of the Reformed tradition is unfolding. Much of this scholarship is excellent. Much of it breaks down old paradigms of Calvin scholarship and suggests more accurate and adequate ones.

Philip Butin is one voice in this growing discussion on Calvin. His book *Revelation, Redemption, and Response* is a welcome addition to the corpus of recent Calvin scholarship. It is also a welcome addition to the lively interest in Trinity doctrine in recent years. The juxtaposition of these two themes—Calvin studies and Trinity doctrine—results in a book which will be of interest to a wide range of scholars.

Several features of the book are immediately noteworthy. Butin engages thoroughly with the whole range of Calvin scholarship. This is a carefully researched book; important conclusions are not merely stated, but meticulously cited. The endnotes are thorough and perceptive. The bibliography is very extensive. These features mark *Revelation, Redemption, and Response* as a contribution to Calvin studies that will be taken with seriousness by other Calvin scholars. In addition, the theological argument is

expansive, creative, and integrative. Butin is a good systematic theologian; he demonstrates how the big themes of theology—Christology, Trinity, Redemption, Sanctification, Imago Dei, sacraments, church—are all interconnected and mutually explanatory. This feature of the book will mark it as an important contribution to systematic theology.

In a marvelously clear and succinct introduction, Philip Butin describes the thesis of his book, "The construal of Calvin's 'Christian vision' developed in this book is one in which the divine-human relationship is understood according to a pervasively trinitarian paradigm" (3). Noting that such a Trinitarian approach was championed by Barth earlier in this century, Butin proposes that such an approach is not unique to Barth in the Reformed tradition, but was also characteristic of Calvin. The book, then, is a "comprehensive reassessment of Calvin's thought—which takes the trinitarian character of his understanding of God's redemptive relationship with human beings as fundamental" (6).

In order to demonstrate this thesis of the fundamental trinitarian character of the divine-human relationship in Calvin, Butin organizes the book into three major sections, comprising nine chapters in all. The first major section is primarily historical; the first chapter surveys the history of Calvin interpretation; the second chapter locates the issue in Calvin's own polemical trinitarian writings; the third chapter articulates Calvin's Trinity doctrine and places it in important continuity with Nicea and Chalcedon. The purpose of Calvin's trinitarian understanding, Butin reminds us, is to "explicate, distinguish, and integrate the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the biblical economy of God's redemptive relationship with believers" (39).

The second major section of

Revelation, Redemption, and Response is a constructive exposition to the significance of the trinitarian perspective which Butin identifies. Books I-III of the *Institutes* illustrate that significance suggestively and paradigmatically. Book I, with relative emphasis on God the Father, provides, Butin says, the *basis* of God's relationship with humanity. Book II, with relative emphasis on God the Son, provides the *pattern* of that relationship. And Book III, with relative emphasis on God the Holy Spirit, provides the *dynamic* of the divine-human relationship. Many casual readers of the *Institutes* have noted its general trinitarian structure—roughly equivalent to the Apostle's Creed. But Butin takes that casual insight and convincingly demonstrates its theological import and implications.

The third major section of the book draws out some of those implications in concrete and practical form. The implications of the trinitarian structure of the divine-human relationship in Calvin impact a corresponding doctrine of the church. This is explored in chapter seven. In addition, such a perspective has bearing on sacramental theology; baptism is examined in chapter eight and eucharist in

chapter nine. Finally, additional reflections on the importance of this approach to Calvin studies in particular and systematic theology in general are suggested at the end of the book.

Revelation, Redemption, and Response will be relevant to scholars and pastors with interest in and commitment to the broad Reformed tradition, to Calvin studies, and to systematic theology. In short, it is a valuable resource for a wide range of scholars and readers. No doubt, the growing body of literature in Calvin studies will reference and engage this important book by Philip Butin.

Leanne Van Dyk

Douglas Wixson. *Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898-1900*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994. xvi + 678 pp.

"I have no idea," wrote Dorothy Canfield, "what kind of compromise between manual work and authorship

has produced Jack Conroy." Well might she wonder. Thanks to Douglas Wixson's stunning book we need wonder much less. *Worker-Writer in America* tells at last the story of Jack Conroy and his literary collaborators that he himself wistfully said had not been told. Both the tale and its telling are extraordinary, and Wixson's book is, among many things, a memorial to Conroy, who has not lived to read it.

Wixson tells Conroy's story, itself worth a serious biography, and recreates, both as a meticulous scholar and an admirer (he is Conroy's literary executor and has edited some of his work), the struggle of Conroy and others to create and sustain an alternative literature to that published by the literary establishment, an establishment increasingly absorbed, in their view, by consumerism. In the telling Wixson identifies and explains the meaning of "worker-writer" with precision as well as appreciation.

Wixson shows us an early 20th century working-class culture rich in personal relationships and far from lacking in esthetic possibility and satisfaction. Jack Conroy was encouraged to read at home, and in Monkey Nest, a coal camp near Moberly, Missouri, after-hours entertainment was provid-

The next issue of *The Cresset* will be the Annual Lilly Fellows Program Issue, published on 30 June. Look for articles by Sharon Daloz Parks, Mary C. Boys, columns by Charles Vandersee, Robert Benne, reviews by Thomas Kennedy, Mel Piehl, and other valuable writing. Copies will be sent in bulk to the colleges that ordinarily receive them, but you may always subscribe for your personal subscription at \$8.50 per year, or \$14.50 for two years.

In the coming academic year, *The Cresset* will publish seven issues, four of them focused as follows: on personal struggle, (November); on literary classics, (December) and on religion and film (May). The Lent (February) issue will be particularly devoted to the work of young writers and artists. The Editor and the Advisory Board welcome your inquiries and submissions of material, or your suggestion of names of possible contributors. As usual in the academic world, summer will include time for thoughtful, if not strategic planning and reflection. Your contributions to this process are also welcome.

ed by amateur theatrical presentations and books. Above all, Conroy knew because he could feel it that he belonged to a warm and confirming human community. All his life he tried, chiefly through worker-writer literature, to recover or recreate something like that community.

What makes Conroy important to us socially and historically is not that he, like so many, tried his hand at different kinds of work in different places: Moberly, Toledo, Detroit, Des Moines, and others. It is that as he travelled and worked he became increasingly drawn to writing and became determined to be a writer as a worker. He labored by day, in an automobile plant or a shoe factory, and wrote by night. In this he discovered and was discovered by similar souls in the American midwest in the 1920s and 30s.

Conroy informally encouraged other aspiring worker-writers through correspondence. More formally he edited both the *Rebel Poet*, published in 1931-32, and the more significant *Anvil*, which endured from 1933-35. Wixson shows that, as an editor, he "crossed gender, ethnic, race, and class lines," and in this was ahead of his time. Richard Wright, Erskine Caldwell, and many others saw print under his editorship, including Tillie Olsen and Meridel Le Seuer, whose names will be familiar to students of American social and literary history, and others less known, such as Sonora Bobb, Ed Falkowski, and H.H. Lewis.

Conroy's achievement was to help bring these and others into a network, a community of middle-western idealists (for that is what they essentially were), most of whom were literally workers, who hoped they could redirect both literature and life in the United States. Wixson's achievement is to have recovered this community,—one wants almost to call it a fellowship—and to make clear both the extraordinary pressures against which

they struggled and the energy of their faith and work.

We can never know how it might have been otherwise, but Wixson argues persuasively that precisely by remaining a worker, Conroy's creative energy was directed to writing. What Dorothy Canfield could not understand Wixson explains by writing, "The hyphenation joining worker and writer engenders ambivalences within which creativity takes place." The worker-writer "craved recognition," but that very recognition "would introduce new ambivalences, the loss of hyphenated status, separation from the worker's world." And just here Wixson finds the key that eluded Dorothy Canfield. "In such choices and constraints lay the creative tensions that energized their writing."

Wixson describes how their work fueled their art:

In the proletariat night when other workers enjoyed the sleep of those whose jobs did not require them to think . . . Conroy and other exceptional worker-writers were reconstructing a world of work in their writing, drawing upon the materials of the day's experiences, the fugitive exchanges between workers, the small and grand strokes of workers' existences, searching for and recovering the 'folk' in transformed work settings.

Conroy ceased to be a worker-writer after the 1930s, becoming, Wixson says, a writer trying to support himself and his family through various grants and jobs. The dream of recreating a culture of home and community bound together by ties of affection and shared work and purpose steadily receded. Part of Wixson's achievement is to increase our regret, not simply for the loss of such a writer, but for the diminution of the movement and its dreams.

David Jones

Notes on Poets—

Tim Gustafson teaches English at Concordia College, Bronxville.

Vincent Wixson, of Ashland, Oregon, has published poems in various magazines and in his book *Seed* (1993); currently he is working with William Stafford's poems and papers.

Kathleen Mullen teaches in the Department of English at VU, where she is the director of Wordfest, an annual series of literary events.

John Ruff directs the composition staff at VU and is poetry editor of *The Cresset*. The Editor insisted on including his poem from the Burchfield collection in this issue.

Bernhard Hillila, emeritus professor of education at VU, reads and publishes poetry widely. His latest collection, *Cutting Edge* was published recently by Chimney Hill Press.

Al Pionke is a '96 graduate of VU, winner of a Mellon Fellowship and of the Academy of American Poets prize.

Gary Fincke teaches English and directs the creative writing program at Susquehanna University in Selingsgrove, PA. His short story collection, *Emergency Calls*, will be published in the fall by University of Missouri Press.

Nancy G. Westerfield, of Kearney, Nebraska, has publications forthcoming in *The Christian Century* and *Commonweal*. She was Nebraska's first NEA Fellow.

Edward Byrne, a member of the Department of English at VU, has recently published *Words Spoken, Words Unspoken*, which was nominated for the 1996 Midland Authors' Prize.

The Artist's Advice in Early Spring *

The artist must come to nature not with a readymade formula, but in humble reverence, to learn.

—Charles Burchfield

At first, I thought I'd paint a perfect curve
of colors cupping an all-white
sky, or I might add a bright loop
of silver that drooped over those
thick winter drifts. How easy it is

for an artist merely to imagine the ways
nature's changes may occur.
Instead though, I saw how a gold
glow of dandelions now had begun
to show through this slow recession

of snow until only one grove of trees
seemed to resist, an odd
refuge holding on to the cold and dark.
Their stark limbs stood still, stiff
with ice, and all were wearing white

collars rising up the wet-black bark
of their trunks. A few clouds
blossomed in the clearing sky, each
touched underneath by the slightest
light of that spring sun slanting

from somewhere low over the horizon.
Ever since my childhood, I have
believed the walk leading to the gates
of Paradise must be perpetually lined
with the fragile flowers of spring.

Edward Byrne

**this poem refers to the painting reproduced on the back cover*

SECOND
CLASS
POSTAGE
PAID

