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THE RIGHT TO BE WRONG

MISSION

JOURNAL

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"TO EXPLORE THOROUGHLY THE SCRIPTURES AND THEIR MEANING . . . TO UNDERSTAND AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE THE WORLD IN WHICH THE CHURCH LIVES AND HAS HER MISSION . . . TO PROVIDE A VEHICLE FOR COMMUNICATING THE MEANING OF GOD'S WORD TO OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD."

—EDITORIAL POLICY STATEMENT, JULY, 1967

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The Arkansas Traveler

FROM THE EDITOR

“You Church of Christ folks stick together pretty good, don’t you,” the Ozarks Mountain county clerk drawled.

After a moment’s hesitation, I responded, “Well, I suppose maybe we do.” But I knew there were times when we do and times when we don’t, and I wondered what he had in mind.

“Well,” he said, “we’ve got a big Church of Christ here in town. Why don’t you just go talk to them. Maybe they can help you out.”

It was a Friday afternoon and a beautiful spring day in the Ozark Mountains. I was to perform a wedding ceremony in Little Rock the next day, but I wasn’t properly licensed in the state of Arkansas. All it took to get licensed, the county clerk in Little Rock had told me over the phone, was two dollars, a letter from the elders of my home congregation certifying my ministry, and my name on the dotted line. It could be done at any courthouse in Arkansas, and it would be valid henceforth in any community in the state.

So I procured a letter from the elders addressed to “County Clerk, Pulaski County Court House, Little Rock, Arkansas,” rounded up two dollars, and we set off for Little Rock the day before the wedding.

But we were running late that day, and it became increasingly apparent as the day wore on that we wouldn’t make it to Little Rock before the court house closed. So I decided to register instead at a county seat on the highway between Springfield and Little Rock, right in the heart of Ozark Mountain country.

We rolled into the little county seat in the early afternoon. I bounced up the court house steps and into the county clerk’s office. “I want to register for marryin’ folks,” I said, taking on the local dialect. “Here’s my letter and two dollars.”

The county clerk looked at the letter for a long time. Then he looked right at *me* for a long

time. Then finally he said, “We can’t accept that letter, son. It’s no good here.”

“What do you mean, it’s no good here? What’s wrong with it?” I suddenly had forgotten about the local dialect. It hadn’t done any good anyway.

“This here letter’s addressed to Pulaski County,” the clerk said, “and this ain’t Pulaski County.”

“But I’ve got a wedding to perform tomorrow,” I retorted, “and besides, I was told I could register in any county in the state.”

So the county clerk and I went to the office of the prosecuting attorney for his judgment, but found that he was out to lunch. (I had the feeling that even if we had found him in his office, he might still have been out to lunch.)

Now on his own, the county clerk took a hard line. “I’m sorry, son, but that’s the way it is.”

“But this letter certifies me as a minister. Isn’t that really what you need?” I pleaded.

“I’m sorry, son, but the answer is ‘no,’ and that’s final.”

I argued and persisted and badgered and cajoled, but it was no use.

Finally, the county clerk looked at me out of the corner of his eye and said something about Church of Christ folks stickin’ together. “Why don’t you get a letter from the church here?” he asked. I had the feeling he was baiting me. Sometimes “Church of Christ folks stick together” and sometimes they don’t, and I had the distinct feeling he knew about these realities as well as I. I swallowed hard.

I didn’t know a soul in this little town, but it was worth a try. After all, a marriage hung in the balance. And how could they proceed without a bonafide, licensed, and altogether fittin’ preacher?

I turned to the clerk's secretary. "Could I borrow your phone and a phone book?" I asked.

But once I held the phone book in my hands, I realized I was now facing my biggest problem of the day: *which* Church of Christ would I call? What if I called the wrong one? Or the wrong kind? Suppose I reached one that didn't believe in sticking with anybody but itself? The more I thought about that possibility, the more jittery I became.

I finally settled on the downtown congregation, breathed a short prayer, and called. I explained to the secretary that I was a member of a congregation of the Churches of Christ in Springfield, and in urgent tones I explained my dilemma.

As it turned out, the secretary was wonderful. "Sure, we'll be glad to help you," she said.

By the time I got to the church building, she had already typed a letter of certification on the congregation's letterhead, and had telephoned one of the elders who, she said, would be more than happy to sign it. She told me the elder ran a gas station out on the highway, and that we would need to drive there to get his signature. We went quickly, hoping to get there before he changed his mind.

As I got out of the car, I saw an older man under the grease rack. "Brother Jones?" I asked, apprehensively. "Brother Hughes," he said in a knowing way. "Where's your letter? I want to sign this and get you on down the road."

Then it was back to the court house. If the county clerk was surprised, he didn't show it. He just took the letter and my two dollars and signed me up. As it turned out, he had been right. We do stick together. Sometimes. And this had been one of those times.

On Shedding Fig Leaves

"Confessing sins in a way that does not reach into the core of one's being is futile. The real issues of life — hurt, anxiety, love, hate, fear — are left unaddressed. People's fig leaves remain, separating them from communion with each other and with God."

By NORMAN MURPHY

The Genesis account of sin's origin (Genesis 3:1-13) shows how difficult it is for us to stand unprotected in the naked light of God's righteousness. Like Adam and Eve who used fig

leaves, we often deny our guilt and seek to cover ourselves. As a consequence we spiral deeper into the pits of despair, helpless and seemingly powerless.

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If honesty prevailed, we would admit that we often are as spiritually impotent as the confessed

unbeliever. Following the example of Adam and Eve, we muster our meager energies to make fig leaves which separate us from each other and God. Only by coming to grips with our fig leaves can we begin to experience the power of the resurrection.

The biblical account of sin's beginning in the garden vividly portrays the origin of the fig leaves. Self justification is at the heart of the matter. Adam failed to assume responsibility for his own actions, lamely pointing to Eve—as the woman *God* made for him—as the grounds for his disobedience. Eve, unlike Harry Truman,

“When we must choose whether or not to accept the responsibility for our actions, we innocently shrug our shoulders, plead with puppy dog eyes, ‘Who, me?’ and immediately point our finger in the direction of someone else.”

passed the buck. Backed into a corner, she spouted the line that has made Flip Wilson famous—“The Devil made me do it!” How many of us appropriate that line on a daily basis, in intent if not in precise language? Eve indeed is the mother of us all!

Varieties of Fig Leaves

It is ironic when heirs of the Restoration Movement blame the devil for their sins. Historically, we have had no truck with any form of Calvinistic doctrine. The idea that God chose specific people for salvation and others for damnation was unthinkable. The fact is, however, that many of us find it quite difficult to accept the responsibility for our actions when undesirable consequences follow.

Many moderns, Christians included, often unconsciously have accepted an insidious version of deterministic theology. The modern doctrine, however, is grounded in the secular “theology” of the social and behavioral sciences. Freud lays the onus of unacceptable behavior on a tender psyche malshaped in the early years by interactions with hapless parents. Disagreeing, Karl Marx contends that economic

factors are key determinants of individual behavior. Many sociologists and anthropologists assert that behavior is primarily shaped by society at large.

Regardless of the differences, the bottom line is much the same for each. Man is the quintessential victim, a pawn moved by forces beyond his control.

When the moment of truth comes in this environment and we must choose whether or not to accept the responsibility for our actions, we lose all theoretical concerns about the doctrine of determinism—save it for Bible class, please! We innocently shrug our shoulders, plead with puppy dog eyes, “Who me?” and immediately point our finger in the direction of someone else.

The husband justifies his unfaithfulness because his wife has nightly headaches.

The teenager blames his parents for misfortunes, from skin blemishes to lack of success in affairs of the heart.

The parents blame the schools and their children's friends when their children are arrested on a drug charge.

The guilt of each is translated to the guilt of none. Yet the problem remains. Where is the power for reconciliation and renewal?

Another way of denying guilt, also a common practice among us, is reducing the Gospel message to a series of “oughts”.

You ought to take a chocolate cake to Sally Shoestring.

You ought to be a nice boy.

You ought to attend church services three times weekly.

This moralistic approach to the Christian faith results in the generation of a list of rules. Merely by placing a check mark by each rule successfully kept, guilt is avoided. That approach to religion, Paul reminds us, is

ultimately futile. No person is capable of keeping all the rules (Rom. 6:23).

This version of the Gospel is utterly impotent, primarily because the focus is on man and his efforts to attain an impossible goal. Paul speaks of the Gospel as the power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). A moralistic approach to the Christian faith does not match up to that claim. Despite its initial attractiveness, a moralistic gospel, in the end, offers no hope.

People have yet another trick for dealing with guilt. Few Christians are so presumptuous as to deny their sinfulness. Often, however, that sinfulness is acknowledged at a level that is psychologically non-threatening.

Prayers of general confession in a public worship service are certainly safe. All people are included. There is no necessary personal involvement. And confessing general sinfulness is not as threatening as admitting specific sins. Even if specific sins are confessed they often reflect a moralistic approach to the depth of man's sinfulness.

In the Christian faith sin is more than a particular act. It is a power (Rom. 3:9; 7:18-20). The act itself is merely the manifestation of a much deeper problem.

“In the Christian faith sin is more than a particular act. It is a power. The act itself is merely the manifestation of a much deeper problem.”

Lying, for example, is generally a way of justifying ourselves or hiding a feeling of inadequacy. Getting angry is a way of disguising our hurt and pride.

Thus confessing sins in a way that does not reach into the core of one's being is futile. The real issues of life—hurt, anxiety, love, hate, fear—are left unaddressed. A partial confession is really no confession at all. There is no basis for hope, no source of power. People's fig leaves remain, separating them from communion with each other and with God.

Conclusion

The solution is quite obvious—shed the fig leaves. The saying, though, is infinitely easier than the doing. To surrender the fig leaves that cover us is the ultimate risk, because it involves taking off the protective armor, built over the years. That decision, according to Jesus, goes straight to the essence of the Kingdom: “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt. 10:39).

Admitting who we are is a frightening act to consider. But we will not do it at the church building on Sunday. It will occur in the nitty gritty of everyday life. This next week you will have the opportunity to deal with guilt when

- you do not spend adequate time with your children and one of them tells you so;
- you have a long argument with your spouse about the schedule for the coming weekend;
- one of your parents dies and there were unresolved issues between you or acts of kindness you failed to do for them;
- you spend some financial resources unwisely;
- you did not apologize to your son for punishing him wrongfully;
- you avoid the eyes of a person with whom you have had a strained relationship;
- you avoid dealing with the issues just mentioned because of the fear and anxiety they produce in you.

It is in these ordinary events that the cross comes alive. In taking risks to deal with our guilt, we experience a personal crucifixion. As we expose ourselves to the hazards of repairing broken relationships, often caused and sustained by guilt, we make ourselves targets for those who do not want reconciliation. But we can be sure that in risking our life, we will find it. The hope of the resurrection is surely more substantial than the fig leaves of Eden!

The Right to be Wrong

“Christians are charged to grow in grace, to cultivate the mind of Christ, to drop old destructive habits and take up new and more responsible ones. For sure! But this is a world removed from setting mistake-proof standards for our lives.”

By R. WAYNE WILLIS

Aaron was an all-American athlete in high school. In college he graduated at the top of his class. Then he earned two Master's degrees followed by a Ph.D. Some of the top universities in the country sought him as a professor.

Now in the sixth year of his teaching career, Aaron has changed jobs six times. His life as a university professor has been frustrating and disappointing. His uneasiness as an educator can be illustrated from two incidents in his classroom.

On one occasion a graduate student asked him a question for which he knew he did not have the definitive answer. His reaction was to get red in the face and feel embarrassed to the point of humiliation. He thought to himself, “If I am the teacher, then I *should* know. I'm being exposed as a fake and a phony, an incompetent teacher.”

Then there were those occasional glimpses of a student daydreaming or dozing during one of his lectures. Aaron felt inadequate and defeated as he surmised, “If I can't make the presentation worth their staying awake, I don't deserve to be the teacher of the class. There's something wrong with my ability to teach if I can't hold their attention.” So Aaron developed the habit

of moving on every year to another school in order to work with new students who had not yet experienced his fallibility.

Aaron demanded just as much from himself outside the classroom. Though a première tennis player, virtually every shot he missed was followed by a verbal assault on himself: “You dummy—keep your eye on the ball,” and other more vivid self-deprecations.

Although Aaron's striving for perfection may be an extreme case, many otherwise sane and successful people make themselves miserable in ways just as irrational and unnecessary. With the passage of time it is so easy to lose our objectivity, our perspective and sense of proportion about things, and fail to realize how ridiculously hard on ourselves we are.

Consider the homemaker who has cultivated the habit—a fine, worthwhile habit *per se*—of making the beds every morning. But she gets herself nervous and considers herself an unfit wife and mother those inevitable days when circumstances get in the way of her getting the beds made.

Or there's the husband who expects bionic performance from his wife. He expects her to be completely loving, exactly and always attuned to him sexually, a wonderful mother, a devoted

R. Wayne Willis is Pediatrics Chaplain at Norton-Children's Hospitals, Louisville, Kentucky.

daughter-in-law to his mother, and a well-adjusted person in her own right, and he gets angry and upset at himself and questions his judgment in staying with her those days when she is not.

Then there is the parent who expects his kids to be well-mannered and well-behaved, especially in public. He thinks himself to be a poor parent—"I failed somewhere"—when his kid sprawls squalling on the floor at the super-market or strips and jogs naked around the block.

Or what about the child who loses the contest and bawls his eyes out (even though he came in second in a field of twenty-six). Or the child who mopes for hours because he struck out with the bases loaded, despite Mom's cheers of "Get a home run!" and "The umpire's crazy!" and other encouraging words.

We've probably all known the intellectuals who are so addicted to books, to learning new things and improving themselves and fulfilling all their potential that to lay down the book and play with the kids for thirty minutes would be too much frivolity and nonsense. They have more productive ways to invest their precious time, "never-a-wasted-moment" their motto.

Or there's the shopper who spends hours looking for the "right" gift, and goes home empty-handed and upset because it was too hard to choose between several nice choices.

"Few verses have been ripped out of context and abused more than Jesus' words, 'You must be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.' Taken by itself and taken seriously, this verse would make compulsive neurotics of us all."

Not to mention the student who failed to make an 'A' and sinks into a depression, or the guy who slinks into the meeting, looking and feeling ashamed, because he is a few minutes late for almost the first time in his life, or the housewife who feels like a louse when she burns the roast.

How did we ever come to adopt such self-defeating habits, to castigate ourselves and make ourselves feel rotten and no good when we make mistakes? There are many factors, to be sure.

One is the fact that most of us learned very early in life to be *performers*, to do as we were told. We felt pressure to wave bye-bye and say "please" and "thank-you," "no ma'am" and

"The greatest need many of us have is to learn to relate to ourselves with grace and gentleness, to be less harsh with ourselves and give ourselves a light sentence when we fail to meet the high standards we set."

"yes sir" in order to be considered good boys and girls. We were conditioned to be too outer-directed, to feel bad when we failed to meet the expectations of the big people around us.

Also, we grew up in a highly competitive society that stressed achievement: "You can be anything you like if you try hard enough." If we discover ourselves to be in any way less than we want to be, it's got to be all our own fault for not putting out more effort.

Many of us who grew up going to Sunday School had the words of Jesus etched on our hearts: "You must be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." Probably few verses have been ripped out of context and abused more than this one. The verse taken by itself and taken seriously would make compulsive neurotics of us all.

This passage is not a demand for mistake-proof living. The emphasis of the passage is on God's impartial love. Jesus is claiming that God shows no respect of persons. He is equally good and fair to all people, regardless of who they are or what they have ever done. He sends his rain and sun on the just and unjust alike. The word translated "perfect" literally means "complete," "all-inclusive," "total," "mature." This passage's import is an attack on all racism, sexism, and nationalism, on any and every view of humanity that sees one segment as more deserving of love than the rest. Jesus is saying, "You be broad and complete in your

love for humanity, and in this way replicate God's impartial love."

Nothing in this passage remotely resembles a call for sinless living. All such striving for perfection flies in the face of the basic Christian teachings on sin and grace, faith and freedom:

Sin: "There is none righteous, no not one. . . we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10,23).

Grace: Though we can never achieve a perfectly upright standing before God, God in His grace accepts us in spite of our unattractive condition.

Freedom: The righteousness of Christ has delivered us from a compulsive, legalistic striving for personal righteousness and from any need to convey an image of innocence.

Faith: Christians have substituted for legalistic striving "faith"—the ability to relax, to resign as general manager of the universe and trust God to do for us what we cannot achieve for ourselves.

Christians are charged to grow in grace, to cultivate the mind of Christ, to drop old destructive habits and take up new and more responsible ones. For sure! But this is a world removed from setting mistake-proof standards for our lives.

Perfectionism of course is not all bad. Not by a long shot. I hope my druggist is a perfectionist when he fills my prescription. When someone in my family needs surgery, I want the most perfectionistic surgeon available. A valedictorian, an astronaut, practically anyone who is successful in life had to be concerned with details, highly disciplined, even "hard on himself" to get there.

So what's so bad about being a perfectionist? Not a thing, provided: 1. One enjoys what he is doing (instead of feeling driven to do it). 2. One doesn't burn a hole in his stomach or become hyper-tensive, a nervous Nellie that others would just as soon avoid. 3. One doesn't tell himself he is a heel, an inferior human being

when he does stumble and fall (which he inevitably will do). 4. One doesn't apply that same perfectionistic standard to the whole of his life. When one selects several areas in which to excel, let him at the same time believe the truth that he is not God and should not expect to do *everything* well and does not *have* to do everything he *can* do.

If I remember correctly, when I was growing up and heard ministers speak of grace (and they rarely did in the Restoration Movement's churches of my youth) it was always in reference to God's grace toward people. In the last twenty years Catholic and mainline Protestant churches have placed great emphasis on the need for Christians to relate to other people, particularly

"If one has the habit of being mean to himself when he 'blows it,' he might try granting himself a blanket pardon at the start of every day. For each of us has an inalienable human right to be wrong."

the poor and blacks, with grace. My contention is that the greatest need many of us have in the 1980's is to learn to relate to *ourselves* with grace and gentleness, to be less harsh with ourselves and give ourselves a light sentence when we fail to meet the high standards we set.

I am an authority on this subject, with over thirty years of experience making mistakes and feeling down-on-myself afterwards. When I lose in tennis, or make a bad word-choice when I am speaking publicly, instead of my mind registering it as a "precious learning experience," nothing more or less, I am still inclined to indulge in some feelings of embarrassment. But I'm improving.

Recently I spoke at a medical conference. After the conference, I was aware that I was depressed. In looking for the reason, I discovered that I was punishing myself for not having answered to the best of my ability two questions from the audience that followed my lecture. Pleased with 95% of what I had said, I chose to focus on the 5% I could have improved, and got myself depressed.

Recently I was vainly re-reading for the dozenth time an article of mine that had been published in a nursing journal. Lo and behold for the first time I noticed . . . a grammatical error! There, indelibly, for all posterity world without end to see was my ignorance and slaughter of the King's English. But about ten seconds after seeing my mistake and beginning to put myself down, I caught on to what I was doing. I immediately said to myself, "Big deal. To err is human. I have the God-given right to be wrong now and then." Disappointed? Sure I was. But it was not worth making myself unduly sad or upset.

The gospel comes to the perfectionist the day he makes the insight that the only real failure in life is the one from which he learns nothing. Edison failed a thousand times before he came up with the light bulb. Great composers invariably have more scores in the waste basket than on hit parade. A good batting average is .300. Football teams usually have to run several plays that fail in the process of finding one that works.

The opposite of the perfectionists—the procrastinators, the lazy, those who do shoddy work—likely have the same basic mental problem. Scared of competing and losing, they refuse to enter the fray. By never allowing themselves to set high standards and strive to achieve them, they avoid ever having to face failure. You'll never fall out of the bed if you sleep on the floor.

If one has the habit of being mean to himself when he "blows it," of staying on his own back and coddling regrets and brooding over mistakes, he might try every now and then giving himself grace instead of condemnation. He might grant himself a blanket pardon at the start of every day. Better yet, he might give himself a blanket pardon at night before he goes to sleep—he'll sleep better! Each one of us should allow himself the luxury of a little sloppiness in his life. We can learn to laugh at and learn from our mistakes. What we must guard against is taking ourselves too seriously. For each of us has an inalienable human right to be wrong.

Quilt'n Grandma's Quilt

(Reflections on Raising Children)

By **KAREN MOSMAN**

Quilt'n Grandma's nine-square blocks and rais'n children
are a lot alike — especially the first time.

Now I had a lot of notions about how a quilt should be. . .
careful selection of appropriate fabrics and harmonizing colors
precision cut pieces and straight seamed blocks
square setting each block together.
A lot of notions about design, balance, symmetry
perfect crafting.

Karen Mosman is a homemaker in Austin, Texas.

I had a lot of notions about how a child should be. . .
careful teaching of talents and personality
precision discipline and training
timely blocking-out routines and relationships.
A lot of notions about manners, nutrition, whole person development
quality parenting.

But Grandma's nine-square blocks and God's children
come as gifts already set together

in disregard of my notions
Random fabrics, colors, and talents — I'd never combine!
Unequal pieces and mismatched traits!

Confident of the notions; pleased with the progress
I plunge ahead to set the blocks and train up the child . . .
forgiving Grandma's lack of skill and the fallen state of nature.

Never doubting the notions — not the first time.
I set the blocks square as possible — never mind the violation
to block or trait. Pick up a theme of colors.
Did the best I could . . .
given the notions of quilts and children

Till the quilting — the making of layers into a whole.

Flaws surface slowly
Shorted pieces, stunted talents
Exaggerated seams, fears
Stress at the junctures, insecurities

And the notions come up for review.

Is square really important if the seam is weak or the talent cut-off?
Isn't there a beauty the way unchosen colors blend?
How will the whole cope with the stress?

But there's no going back; ripping delicate seams is too damaging.
So you quilt to reinforce and hope the strength of the whole prevails;
marvel at the in-spite-of-you beauty;
love it as it is;
plan to do the next one differently;
and reflect.

Grandma's fine quilts, Grandma's finished creations
were not so flawed nor
beautiful by accident.

Is there a skill beyond quilting by the notions?
one that's sensitive to each tiny square's value
one beyond precision and predesigning and perfection
one that accounts more value to "is" than to "ought"
A quilting that loves each piece into its whole creation?

Worship and Artistic Integrity

“The Creator hears it! That is reason enough to eliminate a song from or add a song to the repertory of a congregation. Precisely because the music or the poem is in the presence of the Almighty it cannot be shabby, it cannot be childish, it cannot be inept or flippant.”

By JACK BOYD

SCENE I: The song leader announces a gospel song noted for its syncopated rhythms and extended bass section solo. The congregation, which consists primarily of college graduates and professional people, mutters about the low level of the music and words.

SCENE II: The song leader announces a traditional historic hymn which is full of King James English and pastoral imagery. The congregation of young people and unlettered members mutters about the slow, dull, high falutin' words and music.

Part of this impasse is the problem of matching the style of the musical and poetical part of our services with the intellectual needs and achievements of the congregation.

But one other element must be punched into our equation: *the attention and presence of Jehovah*. This is the factor which is most often ignored when the music of the congregation is discussed.

We worry about the young people.

We take into consideration the aged.

We even discuss the visitors and their worship needs.

But the sensibilities of the Lord are ignored.

A friend once questioned a piece of music I had led. “I don't see how God could like that,”

Dr. Jack Boyd is professor of musicology and church music at Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas, and an elder at the Minter Lane Church of Christ in that city.

he said. When I asked him how he could say such a thing, he answered slowly and deliberately, “God is not tone deaf!”

To which we must add: God is not illiterate; God is not in need of rhythmic stimulation; God does not need cuteness; God does not need “Good Ol' Boy” songs.

An appreciation of the beautiful is a gift of God, along with laughter, taste, sex, love and other intellectual and emotional delights. As with all gifts from God we must not mishandle beauty or we have insulted and downgraded Jehovah to the status of a slightly dotty uncle who gives nice gifts but promptly forgets what he has given.

“As with all gifts from God we must not mishandle beauty or we have insulted and downgraded Jehovah to the status of a slightly dotty uncle who gives nice gifts but promptly forgets what he has given.”

As we view the singing portion of the worship service there is a golden thread which should be woven throughout the fabric and which must be continually in view: *the presence of Jehovah*. What is presented in the presence of God and before assembled Christians must be considered for its integrity and intelligence *before* it is offered. The fact that it might be concerned with the edification of other Christians does not

mean it can be allowed to be stupidly organized or full of inanities. The fact that somebody likes the song has absolutely no bearing on its worth when presented at the throne of God.

The Creator hears it! That is reason enough to eliminate a song from or add a song to the repertory of a congregation. Precisely because the music or the poem is in the presence of the Almighty it cannot be shabby, it cannot be childish, it cannot be inept or flippant.

Unfortunately, a sizeable number of worshippers seems to be moved only by flash and tinsel. Possibly this is the result of our present social situation which emphasizes the loud and the bright and the gaudy. We might call this the Gong Show mentality or the Glitter Rock Society. Under this type of thoughtless philosophy the man means nothing; we look only at the clothing. Gerardus van der Leeuw said it perfectly:

There are . . . connoisseurs for whom art is exhausted in the purely formal game of colors and sounds, of lines and forms. When God proclaims His law from Sinai with thunder and lightning, they have eyes only for the glow and depth of the landscape.¹

For many years we have used the argument that "It's the best we can do, and we're sure God accepts it."

Why should He? As a parent, would you accept third grade level arithmetic from your high school child when that child, with work and thought, could do high school level math problems? Husbands put up with basic cooking from new brides, but there is the expectation that the cookery will improve. Children have the right to assume that parents will improve at parenting over the years.

Then why should we assume that the Father of Us All will accept a static level of ability simply because "It's the best we can do." Or because "We like it that way." Or because "They sang it at my Daddy's funeral." Or because . . . or because . . . or because . . .

On the other hand, artistic intent and content cannot be the final determinative. As the painter Runge observed, it is necessary to go beyond art, because it will be unknown in the hereafter. To present a song or poem or picture solely because it is *artistic* is to call attention to the work of a single man or woman rather than the basis and source for all artistic drive.

This is neither a contradiction nor an unanswerable problem. The artistic creation, the music or the poem, is the conduit. Contact with the Lord is the goal. We should not worship the pipeline.

A congregation which has never been trained must be taught to understand the differences between words which are childish and words which show the sweat and time of creative thought. Poems must be polished; they do not (contrary to romantic movies) come forth full grown and perfect. Words must be tried and rejected; phrases must be compared with neighboring phrases to see if they make sense; syntax must be corrected; alliteration must fit the overall theme; comparisons must be apt; trite idioms must be replaced.

"If I prefer shallowness, is it because my own worship sensibilities are childish and undeveloped? Could it be that my eyes are on my own wishes rather than on God's?"

Music requires the same taste and hard, time-consuming work. Melodies must be tried and adjusted; harmonies must be attempted and discarded. Finally, after hours of work, the right combination of melody and harmony and literary thought come together in that supreme art which appears to be artless, in that work which seems to flow without effort.

The answer? Not that of accepting the present mediocrity. A congregation is a trainable unit, and the training can be a joy both to the leader and to the led. As with taste and style in any area, the most obvious method of expanding understanding is to expose the learners to more of the best things or ideas or concepts which

constitute knowledge in that area. If you wish to know about impressionistic paintings, go to the Chicago Art Institute with its enormous collection. If you wish to know about string quartets, get as many recordings of as many composers by the best performers as you can afford.

If you wish the congregation to know and understand the music of worship, let them hear *and learn* many different works and styles of what is *commonly accepted as fine literature*, accepted, that is, by those whose scholarship and years of practical training qualify them as experts. That will not mean the congregation will:

- get what each individual wants
- hear what they've always heard
- understand immediately
- like the leader.

As the singers learn a wider variety of songs they will extend their vocabularies of praise so that not only their singing but their individual, private prayers will improve. Expanded vocabularies allow for expanded concepts and ideas.

As their vocabularies improve they will have less patience with mediocrity. They will complain when a shallow song service leaves them cold and hungry. Dull sermons following intense and intelligent devotional periods are shown to be what they truly are. Repetitious and memorized prayers stand out like mud on a tuxedo.

As their understanding increases and their insight develops the worshippers will ask for wider experience in the entire religious encounter. But this can only come from a trained congregation. And from a trained and consecrated eldership. And from a dedicated and hardworking and godly song leader.

Precisely what do we refer to when we speak of people having a *rich* worship experience? We mean that God becomes real and comes alive to them; that their hearts are strangely warmed within them; that their highest thoughts are aroused, their

consciences pricked, their noblest social impulses stirred; that their sins are consciously forgiven A rich worship experience is living, thrilling, personal communion with God.²

Again, this can only come from a knowledgeable congregation. The members must demand the finest conduit to Jehovah. The singers must be willing to be led to an understanding of what the Creator has made available in the way of polished poetry and well-crafted music. "There are certain beautiful orders of rhythm, of melody and of harmony which seem utterly to fit the mind set upon Christian worship. It may even be that the exactly fitting music can *induce* the mind to worship."³

This *never* means particularly difficult music or sounds which are beyond the comprehension of the worshipper. It *never* means obscure words or attention-calling phraseology. It means accuracy.

Unless I can see that my offering of words and music is the end product of hours of thought and experimentation; unless I see the summation of hard work and evaluation by an artisan whose eyes are on God, I may be offering the casual jotting of shallow minds, and this before the throne of my Creator and Protector! If I prefer such shallowness, is it because my own worship sensibilities are childish and undeveloped? Could it be that my eyes are on my own wishes rather than on God's?

Training, not tradition, is what a congregation needs.

Analysis, not emotion, will improve the gift of worship.

How can we possibly have the temerity to offer less than the best?

¹Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. xii.

²Ilion T. Jones, *A Historical Approach to Evangelical Worship* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 262.

³Walford Davies and Harvey Grace, *Music and Worship* (New York: H.W. Gray Co., 1934), p. 39.

The Difference in God — and the Difference It Makes!

By LEVERNE METZ

God made man in His image, but God is not in the image of man. The image that is man is but a facet in the multi-splendored image that is God. We need to maintain a constant state of awareness of the difference this makes..

We can never attempt to explain what God is except by analogues. Positive declarations always fall short of the truth. So, when we run out of superlatives we are forced to fall back on negatives in singing our praises of God. We then begin to explain what God is not.

What are some of these negatives which we know and use?

God's time is not our time!
God's wisdom is not our wisdom!
God's love is not our love!
God's forgiveness is not our forgiveness!

We could go on and on, but the essential point is made— God is different from man and the difference is one not of degree but one that is absolute. That is, His time, His love, His wisdom, and His forgiveness are not different from man's just because they are greater, or extend farther, but because they can never be equaled by adding to, or by extending farther man's qualities.

When we look at the Bible we find that God's "love endures forever." That is, He is love (forever and complete). He is compassion (compassion without limit). He is grace (a fount that can never be emptied). How completely different from any attribute of man or for that

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matter any thing or any effect in this entire universe.

In all these characteristics we find a common denominator — they are absolute, complete and non-ending. It is because of God's infinity that these things are true.

If God differed from man only in degree, it would not matter how much more love He had than man. His love would still be finite. Thus, no matter how great His love or how great His grace, when divided among a billion men there would be smaller portions than when divided among a thousand. We know this is not true. But could it be that our failure to understand this difference in God leads us to fear that God's love is limited and exhaustible, and thus tempts us to elevate ourselves among the narrowly defined elect?

But, God is different. He is other than we are and this difference makes all His promises possible. The limitations which apply to us and to our universe do not apply to him. Indeed, if one divides an infinite quantity by any number no matter how large, an infinite quantity still remains. And if one subtracts the greatest number one can imagine from an infinite quantity, an infinite amount also still remains.

Thus, we must constantly strive to understand the absoluteness of God's difference and the absolute difference His difference makes.

For herein lies the Mystery, the Truth and the Promise.

Growing as a Christian and as a Professional

“Bringing a Christian perspective to bear on one’s relationships with his or her colleagues would seem to be in the best interests of everybody. For what are the solutions to the major problems of assuring minority rights, or women’s rights, or staff rights, except an application of the biblical injunction to do unto others as you would have them do unto you?”

By EDWARD G. HOLLEY

When friends of mine asked me to address a small group called “The Fellowship of Evangelical Librarians” at the American Library Association in Dallas in June, 1979, I was intrigued. For the Fellowship is a small group of Christians who are concerned about how they can support each other and testify to the larger world of librarianship about how their faith helps them deal with their daily problems.

The topic suggested by my friends was, “How does one bring the principles of faith to apply to the practice of librarianship?” My basic approach is reflected in the sermon of that old

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Puritan divine, Cotton Mather, who said the godly man has two callings: his general calling and his personal calling. The first, said Mather, is “to serve the Lord Jesus Christ” and the second, “a certain *Particular Employment* by which his usefulness in his neighborhood is distinguished.”

“A Christian, at his two callings,” Mather added, “is a man in a boat, rowing for heaven, the house which our Heavenly Father hath intended for us. If he mind but one of his callings, be it which it will, he pulls the oar, but on one side of the boat, and it will make but a poor dispatch to the shore of eternal blessedness.” To be diligent in one’s earthly calling was, for Mather, then, a moral duty, a precept of that fundamental law basic to the theories of Calvinism and later of the democratic faith.¹

The Christian Community

What help have I had in this struggle? Most important, I suppose, has been the help of family, of close personal friends, and of the Christian community. There may be Christians who are able to make it in splendid isolation from the rest of the world. That is not my business to judge. But I suspect for most of us the Christian community, as found in a regular and systematic gathering of what Elton Trueblood calls "the company of the committed," is an essential ingredient.

Like Trueblood, I am well aware of the failures of the Christian church and know how dreary life in the local congregations can often be. Despite their high ideals, most local congregations are afflicted with problems all too characteristic of the society as a whole. Why? Because they are composed of people, redeemed people to be sure, but people, with all the faults, all the pride, all the self-righteousness, and all the narrowness of any in-group. Rare indeed is the congregation where one or the other of these characteristics is not a daily matter of concern for the leaders and the people who make it up.

In his little book, *The Incendiary Fellowship*, Trueblood discusses both the importance and the inadequacy of the church. "The hardest problem of Christianity is the problem of the Church. We cannot live without it, and we cannot live with it. In practice the local congregation is nearly always a disappointment."²

Yet Trueblood later says that he rarely passes a small church, knowing how inadequately it serves its members, without feeling a sense of reverence and uttering a short prayer of thanksgiving. He says, "In my youth I was impressed by seeing devout Roman Catholics tip their hats, as the street cars passed the doors of their church buildings. I am tempted to do the same whenever I pass a place in which the love of Christ has been consciously nourished and where I know simple men have prayed."³

There's a happy phrase in one of Harry Emerson Fosdick's books which points out that

the church is the only organization in the world that deliberately advertises itself as a company of sinners. Or as the dean of my undergraduate college once noted, "The church is not a museum for the exhibition of perfect saints but a school for the training of imperfect sinners." Perhaps because of such recognition, and the fact that we need not despair because we are saved by the grace of God, we can share both our weaknesses and our strengths in the Christian community.

The Prophetic Message

About ten years ago I first discovered, *really* discovered, the Old Testament prophets. At that time, a friend of mine and I taught one Sunday school class or another on the prophetic literature for about three years running. How often did we exclaim again and again at the rewards of studying this part of the biblical record, how meaningfully it spoke to the society of our day, how true to life the situations about which we read. And what magnificent poetry! Years later the words recorded in Isaiah remain one of my watchwords when I am tired, and irritable, and weary of my daily tasks:

Even youths shall faint and be weary,
And young men shall fall exhausted;
But they who wait for the Lord
shall renew their strength,
They shall mount up with wings
like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Is. 40:30-31

This same friend is a calligrapher, and as a Christmas present he had framed for my office two of our favorite quotations from the so-called minor prophets, Amos and Micah. (minor only in the sense their books are short—certainly not because of their message!):

Let justice roll down like waters
And righteousness as an ever flowing stream.
Amos 5:24

You know well enough, Man,
What is good!

For what does the Lord
require from you,
But to be just,
to love mercy,
And to walk humbly
with your God?
Mic. 6:8

These many years later, the framed quotations are the object of considerable interest by those who visit my office. They also remind me that an attempt to be a helpful dean should encompass such qualities of justice, and humility, and mercy—and that a belief in such principles is a part of my faith which should be translated into practice in dealing with our students, faculty, staff, and other university administrators.

Perhaps here is also the place to share with you my view of library administration in the context of my Christian principles. I have often thought that participative management is more theology than science. For what we attempt in management these days is to permit individuals to have a hand in setting their own work environment, to participate in major decisions

“The will of God, always expressed imperfectly in our daily activities, is nonetheless crucial to the way we approach both our tasks and our colleagues. And though we will sometimes fail, and though our results cannot always be assured, we have faith that, whatever happens, the grace of Christ will save us from our own mistakes — and those of others.”

affecting their work, and to reach their full potential as human beings. That seems to be very much in line with basic Christian principles.

A reference librarian I encountered on a fellowship visit in 1971 responded to my question about library management in unexpectedly harsh tones:

Nothing is going to change the ways
libraries are managed until head librarians

cease having contempt for their staffs. You can have any kind of organization you want, you can draw nice charts, but until head librarians respect their staffs, it won't make any difference.⁴

But bringing a Christian perspective to bear on one's relationships with his or her colleagues would seem to be in the best interests of everybody. For what are the solutions to the major problems of assuring minority rights, or women's rights, or staff rights, except an application of the biblical injunction to do unto others as you would have them do unto you?

Conclusion

Finally, I suggest that Christians stick to their principles even when the pressures to do otherwise may be exceedingly strong. Our society, and librarianship in general, is afflicted with a view that every battle is Armageddon. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are a few fundamental principles worth fighting for, but one must target his or her efforts to be sure that they are crucial. For a few principles I would resign my deanship tomorrow, but they are not principles I came to lightly or considered casually. They are the result of study, and prayer, and deep conviction.

In the Christian's two callings, to use Mather's phrase, we need to be able to use both oars together. Or, to quote from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians, we need to remember that "God is at work in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). That will of God, always expressed imperfectly in our daily activities, is nonetheless crucial to the way we approach both our tasks and our colleagues. And though we will sometimes fail, and though our results cannot always be assured, we have faith that, whatever happens, the grace of Christ will save us from our own mistakes—and those of others.

¹Ralph Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought* (New York: Ronald Press, 1940), pp. 147-148.

²Elton Trueblood, *The Incendiary Fellowship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 77.

³*Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴*Wilson Library Bulletin*, 48:45 (September, 1973).

The People Person

By BEN BOOTHE

I am a people person. I, of all people, hate impersonal messages.

It is a joy to go somewhere and have the secretary or waiter say, "Hello, Mr. Boothe." Those things reaffirm my belief that, as the Gothard song says, "You are something special, God made you one of a kind."

Sometimes my wife sings that song around the house, and I seem to hear a tone of rejoicing on the phrase, "You are the *only* one of your kind." That also bothers me a little. I don't know why, but it does.

So you can see that it was with some trepidation that we finally broke down and bought a telephone answering device. I have always hated those things. They have stripped me of dignity for years with the boring, stuttering, repetitive messages.

"Hello . . . this is Sam Jones." (Have you ever wondered what "hello" means?) "This is a recording." (As if we couldn't tell.) "I am unable to answer the phone at this time." (That is obvious; let's get on with the tone.) "If you have a message, you may leave it." (Come on, the tone, man!) "At the tone, speak clearly and slowly, and I will return your call."

They never returned the call.

Then there came a period when I found myself spending much leisure family time at night taking telephone calls. So, with great

protest from the pocketbook deity, we spent \$168.00 for the Phone Mate and set out to record the non-cliche-bound telephone answer.

The first message said something like this. "Guess who isn't here?" But that would never do. First, I would be there. Second, it might encourage some thug to come by to rob the house and hurt my body.

So, on to better things. Perhaps a bold statement: "Hello. If you are with the United Way, I gave at the office. If you are with the church, we are having a devotional. If you are a bill collector, it's in the mail. A salesman? We already bought one. If you are with the Internal Revenue Service, *this is the Smith residence.*"

Then there was the John Wayne imitation. "Hi, pilgrim. This is the *Duke*. Ben is not takin' calls, hear? Tell ya what . . . leave a word for him at the tone. I'll ask him to give you a ring." Well, I didn't need a ring. And I didn't want to give anyone else one either.

So as a lark, we created one message to totally confuse and disorient the night caller, the twelve o'clock wonder, and the obscene caller. "Hello. This is a secret admirer. So glad you called. I've been wanting to tell you something. It is an uncontrollable urge. May I blow in your ear? Phsssssssst . . . Tonight we will talk about P.O.I. That of course is I.O.P. spelled backward, and means invasion of privacy. At the tone leave your address, and we will come and *visit* you."

We finally hooked the thing up. I had dreamed of this. Nights without the phone

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ringing. Quiet time to read, study, write, and watch the kids without interruption. Just a little red light to tell us someone had called.

The first night was filled with suspense. Excitement in the air! We couldn't wait to watch that little light come on. But no one called. Not a soul. Not one salesman. All night! We finally broke down the next morning and asked friends to call us.

It was the second night which taught the most profound truth about myself. We had calls that night. Lots of them. The little red light went on many a time. But curiosity got the best of me. I couldn't control myself! The moment they gave their message I had to stop everything to listen in . . . and call them back. The salesmen, my customers, even the deadbeats.

For you see, I am a people person.

BOOKS

By **Bobbie Lee Holley**

Flannery O'Connor: Writing for the Glory of God

By **ROBIN FOREMAN**

C.S. Lewis once distinguished the Christian author from the pagan author, saying that, while the pagan worships his art in the absolute, the Christian writer views his work as an

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instrument of God. "The Christian," he said, "knows from the outset that the salvation of a single soul is more important than the production . . . of all the epics and tragedies in the world" ("Christian Literature," in *Christian Reflections*, p. 10).

Flannery O'Connor was such a Christian writer. Her characters are often running away from God, trying to escape a love that will not let them go; other complacently religious characters are shaken to the core by the sudden revelation of their guilt; others are actively seeking God; and some who consider social science a higher good than faith in God are jolted by those who have a genuine sense of sin.

The Letters of Flannery O'Connor: The Habit of Being, edited by Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979, \$15.00, 618 pp.), reveals, among other things, a woman with a strong faith in God and a conviction that she was writing for his glory.

Having been born in 1925 in Savannah, Georgia, she moved eleven years later to Milledgeville, Georgia, where she spent most of the rest of her life until her death in 1964. At the age of twenty-five, she learned that she had lupus erythematosus, a progressive disease which affects various body systems and usually cannot be treated successfully. As a result, her mobility was curtailed and much of her contact with the world outside Milledgeville was by letter.

Referring to her education, she wrote a friend that she had attended "a progressive high school where one did not read if one did not wish to; I did not wish to . . ." (p. 98). After studying at the Georgia State College for Women, she went to the School for Writers at the State University of Iowa. It was here that she "began to read everything at once" (p. 98) and where she began to write in earnest. After receiving her master's degree, she spent some time with writers in New York and Connecticut before returning home to Milledgeville.

The letters in *The Habit of Being* range from routine business letters to O'Connor's publishers and agents to explanations of her stories and her beliefs—and often, how the two intermingle. In a letter written in 1955 to her friend, "A," she said:

I write the way I do because (not though) I am a Catholic . . . However, I am a

Catholic peculiarly possessed of the modern consciousness, that thing Jung describes as unhistorical, solitary, and guilty. To possess this *within* the Church is to bear a burden, the necessary burden for the conscious Catholic. It's to feel the contemporary situation at the ultimate level. I think that the Church is the only thing that is going to make the terrible world we are coming to endurable; the only thing that makes the Church endurable is that it is somehow the body of Christ and that on this we are fed. It seems to be a fact that you have to suffer as much from the Church as for it but if you believe in the divinity of Christ, you have to cherish the world at the same time that you struggle to endure it. This may explain the lack of bitterness in my stories (p. 90).

Her stories are often ugly, with grotesque, poverty-stricken characters who come to violent ends. She was sometimes criticized by reviewers for this aspect of her work, and she angrily defended it in the same letter to "A."

The stories are hard but they are hard because there is nothing harder or less sentimental than Christian realism. I believe there are many rough beasts slouching toward Bethlehem to be born and that I have reported the progress of a few of them, and when I see these stories described as horror stories I am always amused because the reviewer always has hold of the wrong horror (p. 90).

It is easy to see that the real horror in O'Connor's eyes was not death, but the denial of God. Her characters are often trying to escape God and their decisions, in the end, are the climaxes of her stories.

In *Wise Blood* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952) one of the most grotesque of all her works, Hazel Motes is trying to get away from God, although he can't quite abandon God completely. He even goes so far as to establish the blasphemous "Church Without Christ." But, as O'Connor says in a letter to John Hawkes in 1959, "Haze is saved by virtue of

having wise blood; it's too wise for him ultimately to deny Christ" (p. 350). To the natural Christian—that is, one without an established sect—she says “wise blood” is an expression meaning grace.

In her other novel, *The Violent Bear it Away* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960), young Tarwater, the nephew of a Southern prophet, wants to become a prophet too; but it is revealed to him that his mission is to baptize an idiot child. Because Tarwater had had visions of a somewhat more glorious vocation for the Lord, he rebels. Again, throughout this novel there is something—the nagging, almost cruel-seeming pursuit of a character by something unnameable, but which must be God—that eventually brings him back as a submissive servant.

O'Connor expressed concern about the trend, particularly in non-fundamentalist Protestant sects, toward making of religion a vague, “feel-good” psychology.

One of the effects of modern liberal Protestantism has been gradually to turn religion into poetry and therapy, to make truth vaguer and vaguer and more and more relative, to banish intellectual distinctions, to depend on feeling instead of thought, and gradually to come to believe that God has no power, that he cannot communicate with us, cannot reveal himself to us, indeed has not done so, and that religion is our own sweet invention (p. 479).

Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants, she felt, were preserving Christianity's essence; they were its “salt.” To a professor friend she wrote:

The fact is . . . that the fundamentalist Protestants, as far as doctrine goes, are closer to their traditional enemy, the Church of Rome, than they are to the advanced elements in Protestantism. You know where I stand, what I believe because I am a practicing Catholic, but I can't know what you believe unless I ask you (p. 341).

The substitution of psychology or philosophy for simple faith in God is demonstrated in two of O'Connor's short stories: “The Lame Shall Enter First” and “The Enduring Chill,” both from the collection, *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1956).

In the first story, Sheppard, a widower who has more faith in Freud than in the Lord, takes in Rufus, a boy with whom he has been working at a reformatory. The purpose he believes, is to help the boy realize his potential. However, Sheppard's hypocrisy becomes obvious early in the story when he disregards his own son so that he can “help” Rufus.

It turns out that Rufus is a fire-and-brimstone Christian, who believes that he is damned because of the evil he has done. He scorns Sheppard's attempts to convince him that his crimes were “not his fault”; and Sheppard becomes increasingly frustrated. “I'm going to save you,” he tells Rufus.

“Save yourself,” Rufus hissed. “Nobody can save me but Jesus” (*Everything That Rises Must Converge*, p. 180).

Asbury, the main character in “The Enduring Chill,” is more attracted to open discussion of ideas. An unsuccessful Southern writer who has lived in New York City, he prides himself on his progressive philosophies.

Afflicted with a mysterious illness, Asbury becomes convinced that he is going to die. Yearning for an intellectual conversation before his death, and remembering a cool, intellectual Jesuit priest he had known in New York, he tells his mother to have the local priest come to see him. His mother, a Protestant, is horrified that her son would talk to a priest; but she obeys his wish and Father Finn comes.

“I'm Father Finn — from Purgatory,” he said in a hearty voice. He had a large red face, a stiff brush of gray hair and was blind in one eye, but the good eye, blue and clear, was focused sharply on Asbury.

There was a grease spot on his vest. "So you want to talk to a priest?" he said. "Very wise. None of us knows the hour Our Blessed Lord may call us."

. . . "What do you think of Joyce?" Asbury said

"Joyce? Joyce who?" asked the priest.

"James Joyce," Asbury said and laughed.

The priest brushed his huge hand in the air as if he were bothered by gnats. "I haven't met him," he said. "Now. Do you say your morning and night prayers?"

Asbury appeared confused. "Joyce was a great writer," he murmured

"You don't, eh?" said the priest. "Well you will never learn to be good unless you pray regularly. You cannot love Jesus unless you speak to him" (*Ibid.*, p. 105).

The conversation continues in this vein for some time, with Asbury becoming more confused and frustrated. The priest finally leaves, promising to pray for Asbury, and telling Asbury's mother on his way out, "He's a good lad at heart but very ignorant."

Then, Asbury is humbled even further when it turns out that he is not dying at all, but only suffering from a cattle disease. It is a further irony that he contracted the disease while rebelling against his mother; to show his superiority to her, he drank raw milk in defiance of her warning not to.

O'Connor wrote of her work to "A" in 1955:

I believe . . . that there is only one Reality and that that is the end of it, but the term "Christian Realism" has become necessary for me, perhaps in a purely academic way, because I find myself in a world where everyone has his compartment, puts you in yours, shuts the door and departs. One of the awful things about writing when you

are a Christian is that for you the ultimate reality is the Incarnation, the present reality is the Incarnation, and nobody believes in the Incarnation; that is, nobody in your audience. My audience are the people who think God is dead. At least these are the people I am conscious of writing for (p. 92).

Both her letters and the fictional works attracted attention from many lapsed Christians who wrote asking her about Christianity and Catholicism. Her answers were simple, enlightening, and uncondescending. When she and "A" first began writing to one another, "A," then in a questioning period in her life, asked O'Connor about her beliefs. She replied, "When I ask myself how I know I believe, I have no satisfactory answer at all, no assurance at all, no feeling at all. I can only say with Peter, Lord I believe, help my unbelief. And all I can say about my love of God, is, Lord help me in my lack of it" (p. 92).

Five years later, when "A" was apparently upset about having received some scathing criticism of one of her own stories, O'Connor wrote to her:

You do not write the best you can for the sake of art, but for the sake of returning your talent increased to the invisible God to use or not use as he sees fit. Resignation to the will of God does not mean that you stop resisting evil or obstacles, it means that you leave the outcome out of your personal considerations. It is the most concern coupled with the least concern (p. 419).

This collection of letters, with its helpful but unobtrusive editorial remarks, gives some fascinating insights into the character of the Christian artist, and particularly into the heart and mind of Flannery O'Connor, Christian writer.

Note: Other works by Flannery O'Connor are *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955); *The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1971); and *Mystery and Manners*, edited by Robert and Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1969).

MISSION

JOURNAL

2071 Adolphus, Springfield, Missouri 65807

THANKS!

There are so many of you who have used the card in the middle of the journal to share *Mission Journal* with your friends, and we simply want to say, "thanks."

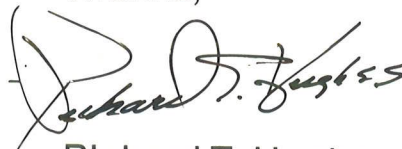
This month, *Mission Journal* is thirteen years old. The generation that began the journal has faithfully supported it. But now there is another generation on the scene — college students and young adults, many of whom are not aware of what the journal can mean in their lives.

And so, if you have never sent us the enclosed card with names and addresses of your friends, do it now.

And even if you have sent us a card in the last several months, do it again.

You count on *Mission Journal*. Can we once again count on you?

Thanks,



Richard T. Hughes
Editor

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