

THE ANGUISH OF PREACHING



Joseph Sittler

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by Joseph A. Sittler

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LUTHERAN SCHOOL
of THEOLOGY *at* CHICAGO

FOREWORD

The original directives for the Dr. and Mrs. Jeremiah Zimmerman Lectureship specify that the lecturer address himself to some aspect of “effective preaching.” The latitude with which this counsel has been interpreted over the years is itself a testimony to the point the following chapters attempt to make: that the act of preaching is so ecologically imbedded in the total reflection and witness of the community that the sermon as a particular act cannot be separated out for very useful discussion.

There is, to be sure, an act and a product called the sermon. As such it is a fusion of exegesis and choices involving aspect, accent, specific intention. And the sermon is also a prose piece which imposes demands upon the literate writer. About each of these activities of the mind that goes into the sermon many helpful and acute things can be said.

But they have been said, over and over again. Earlier lecturers in this series have spoken of the difficulty, the joy, the required craftsmanship in the art of preaching. So sensible, strong, clear, and true is much of that material that to the sum of it I have not felt it necessary to add anything at all. The effort that seemed to me possibly useful was to reflect upon several immediate facts and issues troubling the preacher right now, and out of such reflection to set down what I hope may be both steadying to the battered seminarian in these frenetic days and suggestive to him of how rich and various are the intersections of scholarship, the arts, the shifts in language which are formative of the moment in which he stands up to preach.

To choose to speak in that way is to acknowledge that one shall very likely make no contribution to theological scholarship. That fact must be swallowed, for what it means to preach out of the swirling change in basic patterns of thought and resolution that characterize our time is, I am convinced, something no one knows very much about. The role of the sermon in the transmission of tradition cannot be certainly specified; all one can do is face facts, access the vitality of this or that possibility, and probe for a way to preach that shall be as appropriate as he can make it to his moment, his place, his people, his own maturing toward conviction and clarity.

The section that deals with the form of the church building is offered as the fourth chapter of this book because what we are seeing and learning about life in our time in architectural efforts is concrete data for the explication of the preaching task. The architect is not a preacher; but he, too, struggles to find forms effective for the announcement of a tradition — momentum; and the components of his effort have their counterpart in the conceptual and verbal struggle of the preacher.

It is a happy duty to record here my thanks to the President and Faculty of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, for the occasion to prepare these lectures and to recall with pleasure the courtesy with which they were received.

Joseph Sittler
Chicago, September, 1966

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ONE: THE ROLE OF THE SEMINARY IN THE FORMATION OF THE PREACHER

Between the date a lecturer receives an invitation and the day he delivers the goods is a time of generalized misery! He picks things up, turns them about, lays them aside. Darlings become dullards upon second thought. A brave and ever so sensible sequence of themes turns inward upon itself, begetting complications that were not anticipated. And while one may be quite clear about what concerns he wishes to bring to statement, the order, scope, and detail of these are transformed in the act of writing.

Quite specifically, it became clear to me that a ground-clearing first lecture — or now, first chapter — would have to go before the three themes I had determined to speak about. For what the last three chapters address will commend itself to the reader as either urgent or interesting only if already occupied ground in the student and clerical mind is clear of assumptions which, if allowed to stand unexamined, prevent the entertainment of fresh possibilities.

The title of this first chapter has seemed sufficiently commodious to contain and sufficiently concrete to designate the topics I bring to your attention.

Let us begin with an effort to recapitulate out loud the reflections which ensued upon the invitation to undertake the Zimmerman Lectureship. These reflections were not occasioned by the existence of the lectureship; the definition and substance of the act of preaching is, indeed, a proper, a crucial, and a steady concern of the church. The reflections were occasioned rather by the fact that the request was made of a man whose career has bounced about among many areas of act and thought which while perhaps all germane to the act of preaching have not centered upon it in such a way as to invest him with clear authority.

The only reasonable conclusion I could come to was a double one. First, the interpenetration of every theological discipline by facts and reflections generated in every other discipline has belatedly suggested to us all that the sermon may be, *par excellence*, the intersection point of this process, and that it thus has the possibility of becoming the proper magisterial occasion in the evangelical churches. Second, the bouncing I have alluded to, while not conducive to the achievement of authority in any single area, has served to keep alive a kind of probing discontent which, lamented by severely academic persons, has for better or worse kept me aware of the tangled problems of preaching which occur in an actual encounter with the Bible, confession, current theology, and the manifold realities of culture which inform and flow out of this appalling age.

Permit me to specify what I mean by that perhaps too general statement. Since my departure from the parish ministry twenty-two years ago my most frequent pulpit has been in the chapels of colleges and universities. That fact in itself constitutes no sufficient warrant for proposals about preaching; but the recognition of the university pulpit as, in a special way, the exposed flank of Christian proclamation may constitute such a warrant. For in such a place two general universes of discourse, one waning and the other gaining in precision and power, really confront one another across a widening sea of incomprehension.

It is not necessary, I think, to expound this point at great length. The preface to a little book of university sermons published in the autumn of 1964 makes an effort to do that, and the sermons in that book are themselves an instance both of the promise and the peril of that engagement.¹ It will suffice to say that if I speak in part from experiences gained in such places I shall not be irrelevant to the concerns of either student or parish pastor. For the university world of discourse, more fully than any other, is a micro-cosm of the world that is coming to be. Unarticulated but lively discontents become there spoken statements; lurking questions that float about troubling but unshaped in the common life are there either blurted out by the students or, in a more restrained manner, midwived into existence by the professor. All aspects of our culture are now pushing questions that have the magnitude of absolute alternatives. To such questions Christian theology has, in the past, been an honored rejoinder — to questions about the most general meaning of man's existence in solitude and in society, to questions about the intention and direction of historical process, to questions requiring an effort to descry total significance in human lives that are more and more deeply enmeshed in powerful social and economic interactions.

Questions of such magnitude require answers as comprehensive as the facts are complex. Events are tightening to a knot that politics and economics and other kinds of enquiry are ever more precisely describing but from which they are turning with ever more bafflement or disinclination when pressed for any word tainted by moral discrimination. And this aversion is the more mocking inasmuch as the level of the knot and the inclusion within its coils of all aspects of the common life is manifest to anyone who cares to look.

In this chapter I want to make a reportorial statement, and follow it with several admittedly debatable propositions. These are intended to clear away certain procedures which we have conventionally supposed to be adequate to deal with what is reported.

This report has two parts: a report from within the theological enterprise itself — based upon thirteen years on the faculty of a denominational seminary, and nine years on the faculty in a university divinity school; and a report from outside the formality of a theological school as a worshipper in a parish. From the first perspective and experience it must be said that there seems to be no correlation at all between excellence of formalized theological studies and lively preaching of the word of God. From that statement I do not intend to go to the generally applauded but utterly illegitimate suggestion that in the absence of such correlation we should slacken our resolution to make formal theological studies more precise, ample, critical. The point is made rather to insure that we do not look to wrong places for help, and to discourage the lovely confidence of the lazy that if their brains were less burdened they might be more permeable to the mysteries of the Holy Ghost's visitations.

The intention is to set up a problem for discussion in later chapters, namely, what considerations offer the promise that the substance of our traditional disciplines — Bible, systematic theology, history of doctrine, church history, etc. — may be so studied that the energies contained in them may be released for effective and formative force in the sermon. To that question — which is an old and tough one — I want to give detailed attention. Several preliminary observations are called for.

First, the theological student enjoys a steady residence for at least three years within the documents, personages, and institutions of the most persistent, formative, and various intellectual streams in Western culture. Why then so big a gap between this period of saturation with the mighty, and the slight

or inept administration of its riches in the sermon? The expectation reasonably is that such residence and intellectual culture should emerge in sermons that are substantial, diagnostically sharp, cogent in the proposal of salvific powers, and resounding in the mind of the bearer so as to inform it, correct it, animate it by the exposition of creative alternatives toward fresh understanding and new resolutions of the will. To say that such effects never occur would be both untrue and ungrateful toward the power of God and the labors of faithful men. It would, however, be equally untrue to affirm that such good results happen generally, or very often. More typical is the sermon that remains trapped in its own starting point, meaningful only within that segment of history that provided its text or pericope, and effective in the illumination of only that situation which was its accidental occasion. Biblical reportage of mighty events remains a sort of verbal iconography, a celebration of godly vitality that remains unpunctured for explosion into presence.

Second, what the church expects of the theological school works to prevent the school from becoming what the church needs. The gap between the magnificence of the Christian substance and the palid and pulpy content of the parish sermon can only be narrowed if we radically redefine the relation of church and school, grant to the school what belongs to her by charter, and hold her accountable in terms appropriate to her function.

Reluctance to do that is not due to any unfriendly feeling toward the school. A claim might even be made that the feeling is more friendly than critical and demanding, that the school's sobriety of purpose is crushed by the ardor of the church's embrace! Sheer affection has its own peculiar logic: prolonged subsidization of mediocrity can actually beget the same kind of largesse as a family extends to a charming and incompetent uncle.

The profounder reason for the prevailing low level of transference of theological culture to sermonic force lies in the dynamics of an organizational ethos. The preacher shares the human disposition to perform at a level required by men's expectations and demands. The prevailing mood in the contemporary congregation does not make those expectations high or those demands strict. Everything in our culture works to put the congregational self-image into analogy with other institutions — manufacturing, commercial, promotional. Congregations think of themselves in terms transferred from these enterprises; and they seek pastoral leadership and judge the faithfulness, procedures, and effectiveness of it in terms appropriate to that understanding.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the general church should reflect on a national scale the expectation of the pastor which is locally so firmly set. That a gospel-understanding should be thoughtfully worked out in sermons that probe popular understanding — to expose, correct, and judge it — is a specification of the task of preaching that would be generally bewildering to the governing cadre of the ordinary parish.

We are now ready for the proposition of this first essay. The logic of it can be elaborated in a series of statements. The church, in the most visible mode of her existence in the world, is institution, and institution and investigation have always sustained an understandable but lamentable suspicion of one another. The church as institution is always tempted to view the school as the formal bearer of its portfolio of doctrinal and procedural stock and to assign it the function to train purveyors of the same. From this expectation it arises that so many students enter our schools with no clear promise or intention to engage in vigorous re-enactment and fresh command of theological culture, but rather with the inten-

tion of being provided with retailing competence as dispensers of a solidified and frequently uncriticized churchly wholesale product.

The momentum of this tradition is enormous, the recognition among us that it must be changed is lively. But the way toward change is hard. For emergent demands are never as exciting to the common life of the church as accumulated achievements are. During a long period of our national life, while the churches were entering the frontier, helping to subdue, settle, and civilize it, the record of the churches was established with honor and is remembered with gratitude. The task then was one of faithful transmission of a tradition, the solid foundation of orderly structures for an expanding institutional life. But resounding success in that effort works now to inhibit change. The burden of proof rests heavily upon any who would suggest that frontier obediences are not adequate to present circumstances, or that the moment requires something more and other than theological study aimed at sheer transmission.

Preaching is an act of the church in which the substance of her faith is ever freshly declared and reinterpreted to the lives of men who live within the instant and changing actuality of history. And therefore, any stylization or theoretical absolutization of the correct relation between seminary instruction and the task of preaching must be resisted. And therefore, the expectation must not be cherished that, save for modest and obvious instruction about voice, pace, organization, and such matters, preaching as a lively art of the church can be taught at all. And therefore, seminary provisions for instruction in preaching, when these exist as separate curriculum items, should be re-examined.

Every step of that proposal runs counter to our usual habits of mind. For we assume that if something is not done as effectively as we wish, the deficiency can be corrected by more concentrated attention. But in the instance of preaching that assumption is totally erroneous. For preaching is an intellectual and creative function of faith-substance in motion within a concrete circumstance; and if it is not so understood, our efforts to improve it by special discipline serve only to solidify our error. Indeed, the surface improvements thereby attained may actually divert the mind from the truth. For it is sadly true that a very little may be said so well as to create the momentary illusion that something is really going on.

Preaching is not merely something a preacher does; it is a function of the preacher's whole existence concentrated at the point of declaration and interpretation. The act of preaching is organic to the placement of the man himself as believer, doubter, sinner, aspirer; organic to the rich magnitude of the historical life of the catholic church in such a way as both to illuminate the particularity of this time, this place, this people — and to gather that particularity up into the prodigious pattern of the past.

Let us now look more closely at what the triply organic truth about preaching might mean. Preaching is organic to time. That means very simply that when I stand up to preach the substance that both impels and informs me does not commonly have either its origin or its boundary within my seminary years. The formation of faith into thought, and will, and habit, and language, and all the innumerable and half-remembered influences of an entire life, cannot be identified with the procedure of formal study. For back of, and unnoticed, and long ago, and with the insistence of powers aware and unaware, I am numbered among a people to whom the presence of the Holy is a pervasive fact. A theological school does not exist for the manufacture of saints but for the equipping of them for a special task of ministry. The force and truth of what I have said is regularly attested to me by experience with the preaching I hear both in a theological school and by recent graduates of many of such schools. That experience has both encouraging and discouraging sides. The student in his preaching commonly remains determined

by the model or models he knew before he came to the seminary. That this is so is a powerful testimony to that general formation of the faith with and through the agency of the Christian community to which we have alluded; it is also a powerful reminder of how slow in action is the force and how lagging the liberations into personal freedom are the celebrated contemporary materials of seminary reflection in the various disciplines. The student thinks form-critically — and preaches as if Mark and John were collaborators with different vocabularies. He thinks and experiences as a creature pummeled by historical change — he is tempted to preach as if his experienced historical change were not a bubbling presence formative of the very texts he is expounding and of the church that produced them.

That preaching which is organic to time must somehow be exercised so that the powers that emerge from its appreciation do not stifle the creativity that waits to be evoked by our own existence in *this* time. The formation of my Christian mind by the pre-seminary fact and meaning of my baptism is not to be eroded by the radical existentialism of Professor Bultmann, but neither is my baptism's meaning to be wrapped up in an understanding unchallenged by those facts of contemporary self-understanding which account for Bultmann and for part of the culture-mind of which I am a member and to which I must address the gospel of God.

This understanding of preaching as organic to time has a direct bearing upon the teaching of history in the theological school. For what is history's gift to the life of reflection but the reality of the organic writ large, the marvellous exposure of discontinuity both transforming and transmitting continuity?

Preaching is organic to the entire actuality of the preacher. That statement is meant only to insist that what persists as organic in the church's time has been and continues to be formative of this man in this time in every aspect of his life. To be a preacher is, to be sure, the public assumption of a task, the acceptance of an ordination to an office, the exercise of what the psychologists call a "role," the practice of what the world knows as a profession. But everything meant by the term organic pleads that these secondary specifications of the meaning of the man be absolutely submerged under the primary fact: that our confession of faith is organic to a community in time; that it has a force and a career in our particularity as this man; and that its particularity, enhanced, enriched, given focus, brought to awareness, becomes alive in the immaculate and unreproducible drama of each man's life, is a particular grace and engenders a particular witness.

To know oneself in his faith as organic to time, and to actualize this continuity within one's organic self, and to emerge organic but unhomogenized — that is the problem! And who is sufficient for these things? Or what structuring of studies can secure these things? Or who, having stated the problem in that way, supposes himself competent to give counsel about such things?

Having, then, in this first chapter written myself into a box, I am now in the droll situation both of having used my first of four chapters to suggest the illegitimacy of the enterprise for the advancement of which the lectureship upon which this book is based was inaugurated, and of having introduced the suspicion that no usefulness is to be expected from the remaining three!

The prospect is not as mordant as that. I think it possible, and I shall make the effort so to reflect upon the present situation as focused about three theological issues as to illustrate in specific terms the possibility of preaching in organic relation to the theological vitality that presently characterizes the tormented thought of the church's theologians, historians, and biblical scholars.

The three issues have emerged from three disciplines: biblical theology — and I want to discuss the task of New Testament interpretation in preaching; systematic theology — and I propose to discuss the anguish of Christology; moral theology — and I wish then to raise certain questions about the possibility that preaching may work to dissolve the strange state of things in American Protestantism whereby the vision of the church's obedience is at odds with the popular piety in our congregations.

TWO: THE PROBLEMS OF NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION AND THE TASK OF THE PREACHER

This second essay will be an effort to extend to a concrete problem the proposition stated in the first: that preaching is not an isolated act within the complex of duties that constitute the role of the pastor but rather arises out of the preacher's involvement with the entire existence of the Christian community in history. That community came into existence speaking, confessing, praising, reporting. The New Testament is a product of this activity. That community continues; it continues doing those same things. The preacher is an appointed voice of that community, an annunciatory spokesman of the events that created it. He speaks, to be sure, within and conditioned by the unrepeatable events of his generation; but these occasions are set in the longer story of this witnessing people through the centuries.

Disciplines correlative to preaching can be taught, but preaching as an act of witness cannot be taught. Biblical introduction, training in languages, methods of exegesis, cultural and other historical data that illuminate the texts of the Scriptures — these matters can be refined and transmitted in teaching. But preaching itself, the creative symbiosis within which intersects numberless facts, experiences, insights, felt duties of pastoral obligation toward a specific congregation, the interior existence of the preacher himself, this particular man as he seeks for right utterance of an incommunicable and non-shareable quality of being and thought — this cannot be taught. It is, nevertheless, commanded — and not only by custom of the church.

In matters of the Christian faith everything bears upon everything. Separate disciplines are artificial although necessary designations of areas of special study. Because they require a competence that is exacting and long a-getting, such operational separations will have to be maintained. But let not the particularity of the operations blind us to the fusion of the data. For if we are so blinded we shall surely continue along the way already alluded to: a way characterized by the man whose multiple hands — exegetical, doctrinal, ethical — operate as if unaware of what other hands were clutching at and grappling with.

The progression of the present chapter is as follows: first, some reflection upon how to stand and listen and enrich thought in the midst of a veritable critical tornado which involves the very materials of proclamation, the biblical record itself; then second, such theological and humanistic counsel as I have found possible in the context of the present storm, in the hope that a taut serenity learned in one phase of incessant theological change may be tutorial to our minds and spirits in other phases that are sure to follow.

In his *Essay on Man* Ernst Cassirer speaks of the long effort in the course of Western culture whereby men have sought for an Ariadne's thread to bind all perspectives of world-reflection and world-engagement together.² One of the gifts that comes to us as we gain in knowledge of the history of Christian doctrine is a kind of smiling sophistication, rich in fascination but unscarred by cynicism, as we learn to regard the mighty themes rocking down the centuries. Beaten and buffeted, now recessive and now in freshly aggressive forms, these themes pass through, quietly take on or brusquely slough off the accretions, the modes of thought, and the frantic but passing preoccupations of the passing decades.

Luther, for an instance, was not a disengaged angel from heaven. He was a man, and a German man, in the sixteenth century. He was also a monk in a specifiable strand of late medieval theology and mode of devotion. He was also a German man for whom the Papacy was not only, as he came to affirm, an institution that had put a stopper in the effervescent jug of the creative and life-giving grace of God, but also a political institution that lugged melancholy amounts of sweat-earned German gold off to Italy for the glorification of enterprises whose declared devotional intention but slightly masked less elevated purposes.

As we seek perspective in our tumultuous time let us remember not only the earthly complexity that enters into all judgments, but also the rising tides of massive cultural movements that have made problematical all efforts to state and transmit historical facts and interpretations to the new mentality so deeply changed in its very *hearing-possibility* by such movements.

The particular issue which I have designated as a “veritable critical tornado” is the task of finding an adequate hermeneutical stance whereby to do fullest justice to the intention of the New Testament itself. But we move into a consideration of that issue most usefully if we ask a preliminary question.

Many years ago a famous philosopher of history admonished his readers that just interpretation of facts could only be achieved — and added that even that achievement is always an approximate one — if the question of what events *mean* was preceded by a kind of elemental wonder that they occurred *at all when they occurred!* Obedience to that admonition suggests to us that our best entrance into the hermeneutical question is through the doorway where we stand to ask why, in the midst of so many biblical-historical-theological problems pulsing for fresh attention, there has occurred in this decade an intense and virtually unanimous concentration upon the hermeneutical problem.

Any effort to answer that problem in detail would require nothing less than a history of thought from Galileo to the mid-twentieth century; but a single general statement would be as follows: when, along the entire front of the life of the West, internal pressure builds up, generated by deepening dubiety about the appropriateness of received forms of thought, the structure and process of things, and the adequacy of old forms to address the fresh needs of men — *then a richer, more complex, and more ample interpretive perspective is demanded*. The only term large enough to designate that demand is *hermeneutic*, and the demand and the responding effort characterizes intellectual effort in all realms of experience in our time. The effort appeared earliest and achieved methodological refinement in historical and literary inquiries, but the nature of the effort is the same no matter what the name or the data. In natural science, social science, and philosophy we stand at a point where freshly forged conceptual tools are called for. And it must be added that if the theological sciences seek to avoid this demand, they can do so — at a price. The price is resignation from history, a “stop the world, I want to get off” withering isolation from all living speech of significance.

In the history of biblical interpretation there has been played out on a particular stage the same action which has been enacted on the big stage of Western culture. The action might be called “button-button — who’s got the button.” Recall for a moment the candidates for the office of ultimate interpreter in the centuries since medieval times — and see the button of total effort in world-understanding pass from hand to hand. From Dante, with his massive and concretely peopled spirals from a Beatrician heaven to a polluted, Medician Florence — given precision in judgment by a God-bestowed “love that means the Sun in Heaven and all the other stars,” to Bacon who charged his time to “...relinquish the puerile

speculations of the philosophers” in order to “dwell steadfastly among things,” and, so dwelling, hopefully to descry the origin and governing intention and process of all that is. And Goethe, who, as the vision of total pattern lured him on, sang —

In the Endless, self repeating
Flows for evermore the Same,
Myriad arches, springing, meeting,
Hold at rest the mighty frame.
Streams from all things love of living,
Grandest star and humblest clod.
All the straining, all the striving
Is eternal peace in God.³

Here sheer life-force bursts forth and eternally unfolds from nature; and then, exhausted in its multiple forms, sinks down in the peace of an eternal return.

That Goethe’s God has little to do with the God of the Bible is nothing to the point here. Closer to us, and to our own place, an American man, Henry Adams, urged on by the impressive apparatus of German nineteenth century historiography, quested for the button of an historical hermeneutics all through the nine volumes of his *History of the United States from 1801 to 1817* (the administration of Jefferson and Madison), and at the end, in despair at the impossibility of the task, went back to the thirteenth century where what he looked for in vain in his own time he could celebrate in its victory in another. At that juncture he wrote *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, his great story of the Virgin of Chartres and of her power to unify life in all of its aspects and passions.

The current holders of the button are the physical scientists. And while, to be sure, the popular mind entertains the hope that the ambulatory button will stop here and that a final methodology contains infinite power for the bestowal of clear and certain knowledge, the most able custodians of the button give slight comfort to such hopes. We shall cite but two illustrations:

In the April 22, 1965 issue of the *New York Review of Books* there appeared a long review article on books by three physicists: Niels Bohr, Erwin Schrodinger, Carl von Weizsäcker. The last paragraph of the review, written by an announced agnostic, has a fascinating turn. At the conclusion of his discussion of the third of these men and his option for Christianity as a “way of life having radical political consequences” the reviewer writes as follows: “What distinguishes Christianity, so interpreted, from a non-theistic humanism is very hard to say. Perhaps, to Weizsäcker, even the attempt to say this would be a needless concession to out-dated forms of theology. The Christian has a standpoint from which he views the development of man’s intellectual and moral life in his own way; and how the resulting spectacle differs from a humanist view (he would reply) is more easily seen than stated. This conclusion is too elusive to be wholly satisfying; attempting to grasp it, I feel like a man who, after a period of fervid atheism, read philosophy at Oxford and found that he no longer understood that which he had formerly *disbelieved*. Weizsäcker certainly presents the historical evolution of scientific ideas in a proposition which is illuminating, quite apart from all theological issues. But is there, then, *nothing* in Christianity for us to doubt?”⁴

What fascinates in that last phrase is the ironical disclosure that the agnostic lives by doubt, that his doubt is a kind of negative tribute to the necessity for that which shall not be doubted, and his feeling

that he has been betrayed when a faith he continues to doubt self-eviscerates itself of everything that ever made it worth either believing or doubting!

As I come now to the second illustration, let us keep in mind the thesis I am arguing: that as we look (as we shall presently) at the hermeneutical problem in theology we are not dealing with an isolated intramural hassle among idiosyncratic German theologians. The problem is both symptomatic of and continuous with the crucial intellectual task of our time. At the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara there was recently a conversation about Utopias and their significance. At one point Mr. Michael Harrington said, "One important aspect of Utopia is to understand its limits . . . Some socialist writer — it may have been Trotsky — said that the function of socialism is to raise men from the level of a fate to that of a tragedy . . . That is to say, Utopia is not going to solve everything by any means. As a matter of fact I have thought for a long time about Marx's prediction that in a society where men are no longer murdered or starved by nature, but where nature is under man's control, there would be no need of God because God is essentially man's projection of his own fears and hopes — a curious image. In contrast to that, I wonder whether, at precisely the moment all economic problems disappear, that there could not be a great *growth* in religion rather than a decline. It is a possibility, because we would have a society in which men would die not from . . . idiocies about the economy. They would die from death. And at that point the historical shell around the fact of death would be broken. For the first time society would face up to death itself."⁵

What intrigues one about that statement is identical with the fascination of the first one: the protest of men of the world that no message that is constituted only of human possibilities can have redemptive force — a *no* to salvation-claim that does not demand a radical break, a clear decision, a *no* to the claim that the mere continuity of some good is identical with the humanly necessary. Such salvation-promises are not adequate to the facts of man's confession about himself — and at this moment not even interesting to the very modern minds that so recently cherished them.

These reflections serve to lead us on to an effort to specify the current issue in biblical hermeneutics. The entire section of this chapter that has introduced this step is a kind of appeal to keep our heads, to maintain so just a perspective of the cultural influences that shape the careers of doctrines that we become not blinded partisans in a battle, or so move into the practice of ministry that our preaching be less ample than the many-dimensional modes of the word of God.

"What kind of language best represents and communicates the event of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, and does most justice to the affirmation common to the New Testament that God has disclosed Himself in a human life?"⁶ That is the current question.

The effort to make a reply to that question is the meaning of the hermeneutical battle. Two possibilities, both firmly attested and demonstrated within the New Testament itself, are being cogently argued. That there are these two, and no more, is a result of the fact that the definition and practice of *apostleship* in the New Testament is a double one. The one is *kerygmatic*, the other *narrative*.

Apostleship as functioning in kerygmatic declaration commonly appeals to St. Paul and to the handling of historical material in the Fourth Gospel. Paul based his apostleship upon his having seen the risen Christ. His preaching is kerygmatic; the substance of it is not Christ after the flesh but an act of God who raised up the slain man, disclosed in him the glory of the Father, and grants a new being to everyone who, participating in that man's life, re-enacts within himself this death and resurrection.

The power of this centering upon the kerygma is that it disengages the power, presence, and possibility of the salvation wrought and available in Jesus from the confusion, uncertainties, and historical relativities that are structural to the New Testament if it is interpreted solely as a narrative of history. This kerygmatic proclamation of Jesus as eschatological salvation-event makes all past present, it translates all that cannot be established into a word of God that discloses, judges, challenges and liberates anew by forgiveness — forward to an opening new obedience. Faith is thus restored to its true function — the acceptance of God's acceptance of me as the ground of a new being in authentic existence.

The other way rests upon that New Testament material and mode which sees apostleship function as narrative-preaching and commonly appeals to the Synoptic Gospels and to the Acts of the Apostles. Apostleship is in those documents a term applied to those who have been witnesses to the historical Jesus and witnesses to his resurrection. This position maintains that any attempt to grasp the New Testament's reality must deal with Jesus' whole story and dare not shake itself loose from incessant torment with the mercurial stuff of history.

The power of this approach is in its insistence upon the historical as the central category for any effort to bear witness to the central biblical scandal — that God has disclosed himself in a human life. Earthliness, the corporeal, the drama of human historical successiveness, the pathos of temporality and duration — all of this argues for the necessity as well as the force of the redemption-reality as narrative.

But now, to the third step: What does this issue, and all the many violent sides of it, mean for the preacher? I have three suggestions:

Let the preacher keep his feet. He will be helped to do this if he really has such an understanding of the history of Christian doctrine as I was reflecting at the beginning. If he does have that he will not be plunged into despair by extreme claims from either side, but will have learned that extremity is the normal process of theological clarification. He will know that this debate is not likely to be settled in such a way that narrative nexus is demolished by kerygmatic proclamation, or that the first will obliterate the second. He will know, with confidence gained by reflection upon other struggles, that what seems to be a deadlock will turn out to have provided clarifying light upon the New Testament and to have restored vivifying fresh relations to all elements of the biblical literature.

Let the preacher open his head. By that I mean that the preacher must use the fact of his struggle for a proper principle of interpretation as an occasion to ask questions that transcend it, as indeed, such questions have caused it. The real battle, I would venture to suggest, is not whether kerygma or narrative taken separately furnish adequate perspectives from which to understand the New Testament: the real function of the debate is to point to the *consequences* of making a decision exclusively for one as against the other. For if one settles for a de-historicized pronouncement, he has made a decision that will ultimately trickle down to the bottom of all his thought; he shall have made the Christian reality dependent upon some philosophical alliance, or upon some institutional solidity and persistence, or upon some given piety in world view upon which he really reckons to certify his message. If, on the other hand, he settles for a narrative recital, he has made a decision that will ultimately, for want of a clear proposal having total significance for total understanding, trickle off into a recitation of far-off events unrescued into presence by any present godly power of judgment and mercy whereby men today are called to decision and to commanding and uncomfortably specific commitments.

Let the preacher make a counterpoint out of an opposition. Counterpoint is a musical term: it means a

melody added to a given melody as accompaniment; the art of composite melody, i.e., of melody not simple but moving attended by one or more related but independent melodies. The metaphor is perfect for the point I want to make. For the force of the reality of the Christian faith does not hang upon a single hook. In this regard it differs absolutely from a philosophical doctrine. The Christian reality *because it is historical* is not malleable to a single proposition, even if the single proposition be a true one. In the context of the present issue between narrative and kerygmatic language, let me steal some critical sentences from the essay alluded to earlier.

The kerygma does require faith if the salvation which it offers is to be entered into, but narrative also requires decision, response, and involvement if the possibilities which it offers are to be appropriated. There is simply no self-evident reason, moreover, why the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus has more power to evoke faith than a narrative containing, say, his eating with publicans and sinners; his conflicts with regard to the law; his disregard of ritual; parables like the Prodigal Son, the Laborers in the Vineyard, and the Talents; and some of the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, for some people the latter may be more evocative of faith. . . .

Is then the kerygma superfluous? Why did it arise? It cannot be because kerygma alone can make the salvation event present and evoke faith. The reason for the kerygma's rise is not that narrative cannot do anything that kerygma cannot do but that narrative cannot do everything. If the narrative approach were the only possible one, or if it were used alone, the event could never be re-presented in its completeness, for full representation would depend upon the recovery of all the details and that would be impossible . . . The great service of the kerygma is that it grasps the meaning of the whole event in its fulness and presents it in a part — the death and resurrection of Jesus . . . The meaning of the whole then is made apprehensible apart from a recovery of all the parts . . . The narrative contains the "yes" of concreteness but the "no" of incompleteness, while the kerygma contains the "yes" of completeness but the "no" of abstraction.⁷

Let us make another effort from a different angle to see the present hermeneutical problem in perspective. The Western philosophical tradition has achieved enormous sophistication. A leading theme from the beginnings has in our generation tightened to an excruciating point. It is the epistemological problem: how do we know? And does not the clarification of the ways of knowing absolutely define the kind of objects, process, truth that can be known and set the limits of such knowledge? The exchange between Professors Keating and Hefner in a recent *Dialog* is an instance of this effort to clarify ways of knowing.⁸

It was inevitable that the energies of this quest for a certain way of knowing should ultimately attack the problem of history, ask what can be known in history, by what ways. Is there a difference between the world-as-nature and the world-as-history? And can this difference be so clearly specified as to suggest that ways of knowing appropriate to the one are inappropriate to the other?

Indeed, this suspicion of a difference is already nascent in the Greeks' descriptions of their own past and is made clear in the historical writing of Herodotus and Thucydides. The persistent energy of this effort has produced what might be called prime models for envisioning the life of man as historical fact: a cyclical and repetitive model, an organic model after the mode of plant and animal life — birth, youth, full maturity, senility, decay, death, a model of some eternal dialectic visible in the vast play of thesis, antithesis, synthesis (and this process sometimes invested with ultimate significance of a divine order); or

a moral model in which history is understood as the working out and disclosure on a massive scale of the powers of virtue and strength. *Weltgeschichte ist Weltgericht*. One has only to study Augustine's *City of God* to see how early and how powerfully evangelical facts and images expanded into intellectual models whereby to articulate a theology of world history.

At this moment in the life of the West this entire development, newly equipped and methodologically refined by a century and a half of what is called "scientific historiography" intersects a second long effort, itself matured by a century and a half of biblical and primitive Christian historical study, namely, the recovery with new clarity and fullness of the early years of the New Testament community.

The documents, freshly interpreted in the light of a vastly enriched and hugely complicated context, became ever more strange and fascinating. Seemingly naive record is disclosed to be a rather well-developed theological document. The Gospels are disclosed as fusing documentation and witness with a fluid, complex, community of faith. They are primarily witnesses to faith and by faith and for the evocation of faith — and all operate with patterns that are sunk backward into the Israel that preceded them; and all, with varying degrees, are contextual with the world that surrounded them.

The problem of New Testament interpretation today is the product of the intersection of these two intellectual traditions, both possessed of an energy freshly alive because of the sardonic historical meaninglessness that haunts our time. With a kind of frantic determination both seek to pierce into the secret of historical meaning.

It is natural that the serious preacher who cannot wait until the titans have slugged out basic lines of interpretation should, like some in the first century, cry out — "I am of Ebeling; I am of Bultmann; I am of Käsemann!" But is it not possible that the very violence of the conflict should suggest a way to stand in it? That the very dust of battle should suggest an intellectual posture appropriate and viable? For the conflict itself attests how many-dimensioned, how fused into polychromatic richness is the massive phenomenology of the Christian community. And that fact gives birth to a question: is it likely that a way that is either solely record or solely kerygmatic shall be certified with such precision as shall solve this problem?

A further question. Is it not possible that the nutcracker of twentieth century historical method is only modestly effective for the exposure of first century fact? Is empathy, actual feeling for fact, patterns of relation between fact and fact, so smoothly transferrable from age to age?

Indeed, there is something humorous about the solemn intensity with which we suppose that the twentieth century sense of the pathos of history, equipped with theological (and largely Teutonic) confidence can pull a single magic lever and open a jangling jackpot of certainty! And particularly when we remember that the position we want to be supported may be a product of our century and *its* human and historical questions that were raised not at all, or in other terms, by the documents. All of this suggests the following: the Christian fact is a symbiotic fact; witnesses to Christian reality are fused and symbiotic witnesses; and a method of interpretation must be informed by a symbiosis appropriate to that circumstance. The ways of knowing must be as supple and contrapuntal and various as history is — not as clear and clean and simple as philosophy hungers for.

Preaching is in trouble everywhere. But let me, for the consolation of us all, point to the virtue in that necessity, speak of the promise inherent in that predicament. The trouble is at the right place and at the

right level. The form of the church is under fire. Good! It was fatly moving faster and faster to a bland bourgeois irrelevance. The role of the preacher is problematic. Good! That problematic has been hidden too long under a lying layer of popular acceptance devoid of any substance of authority. The intention of Jesus, and the language form of its New Testament witness is confused. Good! For the vigor of the debate is evidence that our former preachment of that intention was not adequate to the predicaments of men, and present efforts may find a better preachment not characterized by the soggy obviousness that had come to expression in recent American religiousness. When students ask, "What is God doing in the world?" they are troubled because they do not certainly know. But the question puts the possible Presence in the right place and marks a manly advance from the uncritical and untroubled assumption that God was but an inexhaustible resource for the supply of a temperamentally religious coterie, or a kind of holy balance in an ecclesiastical checking account.

Of course preaching is in trouble. Whence did we ever manufacture the assumption that it was ever to be in anything but trouble?

THREE: THE ANGUISH OF CHRISTOLOGY

This lecture begins by calling attention to a familiar verse of Scripture. The intention is not to undertake an exegesis of the verse but rather so to focus attention upon a powerful word in it that the strange title of this lecture and the kind of enquiry undertaken in it may be more clear.

In the twelfth chapter of the Gospel According to Luke our Lord is reported as saying, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I *straitened* til it be accomplished!” (12:50). The Oxford English Dictionary has two full pages on the verb to *straiten*. The principal meaning of the term, when it is used to describe a human feeling, is to be aware of great and relentless pressure.

The Greek phrase is *kai pōs sunechomai*. With what resonating precision the Elizabethan translation caught that in the King James rendering, *straitened*! Luther translates the phrase, “. . . and *wie ist mir so bange*.” In later versions the language progressively flattens out. From the “how I am constrained” of the *Revised Standard Version* which weakens but does not destroy the anguish of the cry, sensibility to occasion and language falls flat on its face in the *New English Bible*. There the rendering is “how I am hampered” — which is an instance of accuracy so concerned to be accurate as to be inaccurate. In that rendering more is changed than a word; the very sense is shifted. *Hampered* suggests a restricting force from outside, *straitened* is internal.

This anguish was in Jesus by virtue of his divine mission. It constitutes also a hard and unloosened knot in the spirit of any man who would listen to him, think and feel and imagine himself into understanding of Jesus. Participation in Jesus transfers what was an anguish for him into a bequest from him. That he was straitened haunts forever; and the same tautness characterizes the history of christological reflection.

Let us try to elaborate from two perspectives what such straitened participation means for the preacher. The preachers’ straitening is of a different level - for his vocation is not that of Jesus. But on the level proper to the servant of the straitened word of God the anguish is as real. Let us reflect upon this matter from two perspectives. From the perspective of our own inner transactions with his abiding presence in the record, in the memory and tradition of the community that remembers him, in the intricate architecture of our *worship*, and in the round of the liturgical year. And second, from the perspective of our professionally commanded theological reflection upon the inexhaustible vitality of Christology as this relates to a specific issue that I shall specify in a moment.

First, then, the perspective from within. Recall the word and life of Søren Kierkegaard who often said that “the wound must be kept open in order that the Eternal may heal it; the cure depends on the wound being kept open.” I know in my own experience that that is so. One is never a successful preacher; one is never a successful teacher — if the matter of his work be Christ. How one hopes, works to come to terms with the anguish that runs forever deeply under the incomplete and faltering efforts that one makes! And how incessant and beguiling the temptation to *settle* for a manly “I have done what I can — let me now have pity on myself and be joyful”! But just when one thinks himself on the way to a “professional” aplomb as preacher or teacher the figure of Jesus, expanded, made present and urgent by the entire Christology that ceaselessly flows out from him — that figure turns, as he did to pathetic Peter in the courtyard. And under that look everything is crumpled save the presence and the question and the

anguish. Jesus is like a coiled spring in the mind; its holding-clips may give at any moment.

The anguish remains; and whether in fear that it will always remain, or in an understandable but evil hope that it may not, let us not suppose that it will ever change. A rigorous philosophical analysis of our day drives Bultmann's demythologization straight through to the end where nothing verifiable is left except Christ. Another, operating with language analysis, establishes that because no statements at all can be made about God, God is indeed dead, and then ends his argument with a curious chapter about the "contagion of Jesus"! Indeed, the wound is kept open — and how we are straitened!

There is a received Christology in the church catholic. It is ancient, magnificent, various. That is the Christology of tradition. But there is another meaning to Christology. Not tradition but pressure; not the given but the terrifying and hard pressure to be as grave about Christ who is alive now as our fathers were grave about the Christ who was alive for them, and the agent of their very aliveness. What he has meant is indeed tutorial to what he means, but is never sufficient for the sheer pressure of present meaning in one's own heart and mind, and for one's own time and place and instant vocation.

That that is so is a blessing and a wound, a promise and an anguish. The given Christology is the New Testament itself: rich, many sided, not a harmony at all, spinning off from a fiercely burning center into multiple orbits of meaning. We are told both that he is who he is because he does what he does; we are also told that he does what he does because he is who he is. There is in the New Testament a Christology of essence become function and a Christology of godly function interpreted as essence. And the entire Christology of nineteen centuries is the long story of this anguish as faith has hammered out recalcitrant concepts in a memorable effort to contain life within language. "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance . . ." And not only in authoritative creedal forms but in a thousand thousand wrestlings, rich in images, heavy with fecund symbols, in alliance with this philosophy and with that, the struggle goes on.

A part of the malaise, the endemic flatness that from all quarters is reported to infect seminary students is certainly related to this anguish. For so much of our work has to do with the mastery of the historical evidence for and the reality of the anguish of unsilencable christological pressure — and because we know that if we give ourselves over to it we shall never again be safe, never secure, never able again to put a professional suavity back upon that haunting face, we settle for *history*, what the church teaches, what has abundantly accredited force, that is confessionally acceptable. Both ways make one literally sick. To give oneself over to the problematic is a sickness that the glory might be manifest. But to dismiss, or bury, or flee from the problem is a sickness unto death.

So there is the given Christology, and here we are wishing to be fuller participators in the Christ who is alive, but alive in a world that is *not* Palestine, or Constantinople, or Nicea, or Augsburg. In the midst of rushing historical life we see, and are the children of, and make our contribution to ways of work that become ways of life that become ways of thought that are new in the world. And things seen and experienced beget freshly aware ways of seeing that become new modes of feeling and wondering and delighting and expecting that are new in the world.

Between these two worlds, the one that has enfolded men's thoughts and confession about Christ for hundreds of years, the other enfolding both a newness that is discontinuous with all that is past, and a continuity with it in the promise of God and the presence of the alive Christ — between these we must find a way, a witness, a word.

The acceptance in faith and joy of precisely this tautness is the way of the Christian. It is the particular vocation, ordination, interior life, and steady place of the preacher. He stands between the what has been and a presence whose present doing is a fact. But a fact unsecured by history. The preacher in a special posture stands between the “It is finished” and the tremendous word of the Apostle, “The whole creation waits with eager longing.” Every Christian is indeed called to fill up what remains of the sufferings of Christ; it is the christological anguish of the preacher that he must *speak* of it! — speak it from behind, forward into the actuality of the day and situation that now is. To be a preacher is not only to know eschatology as a report and an agenda item in systematic theology; he is, in the anguish of his task, the *eschatological man*. The work of his mind is the intellectual form of his obedience.

The preacher by the burden of his office can have no authentic selfhood if he repudiates this way, or by acceptable forms of betrayal, seeks another. Other ways there are, to be sure, and the prestige and piety of them may mask for a lifetime the fact of the betrayal. The institution and the world want adjustment, not anguish. And one may even understand his theological education as tutelage toward acquiescence in non-anguish.

Martin Luther once wrote, “I did not learn my theology all at once, but I had to search deeper for it, where my temptations took me.”⁹ From our knowledge of Luther we may fill out somewhat the meaning of that cryptic statement. He searched deep, and the searching-place was pointed out to him by his temptations.

There is a clear temptation that confronts us. I should like to describe it. The very pride we have in the *objective givenness* of our theological inheritance invites us to a misunderstanding. For it is a misunderstanding to suppose that a theological tradition provides escape from struggle. The source of grace is objective; the realm and reality of grace is absolutely personal and intrinsically social — it is intensely the realm of our own experienced selves as persons among persons and in the world.

Our intellegibility to the world, as we address it in the name and according to the substance of the faith, is empowered by deep probing with the instruments of the really experienced, the really felt. Luther writes further — “A man becomes a theologian by living, by dying and by being damned, not by understanding, reading, and speculating.”¹⁰ We may evidence the massive Weimar Edition to keep us from disparaging the role of reading, thinking, and speculating as part of the theological quest! But here we stress what Luther stressed — the driving into the center of Christ and the gospel with all the anguish, pathos, and imperious personal questioning that each of us knows as he sees older meanings and inheritances die, beholds the personal damnations that occur when the formally correct is unattended by that personally re-enacted passion which comes from probing prodded by temptation.

How painful for a teacher and how sad for a church to see what we so often see! — young men engaged in theological study who live in that encounter with the absolutely crucial without anguish! Well endowed, they come to the institution which occasioned this lectureship or places like it, with accredited academic preparation, impeccable ecclesiastical dossiers stamped with baptism, confirmation, in tranquil possession of the elements of a formal confession of faith — yet never repossessing for themselves, never re-enacting life dying in doubt and being raised in fresh faith, never fighting back at the tremendous affirmations and perilous securities of actual faith.

But — and I speak as a fool but an experienced one — you may, in a sardonic sense, count upon the Christ who is alive. He means — and no repetition of past meanings is equivalent to present require-

ments; he intends — and no celebration of the purity and force of his historically experienced intentions is equivalent to what he now intends. Nor does ardor in reporting the past provide a substitute for depth and clarity in specifying Christly intentions for the world now. By the *anguish of Christology*, then, I mean the heart always restless and the mind always asking what the disclosure and concretion of the holy in the event of Jesus Christ means for the life of the world. And in accordance with the promise to illustrate this probing in one specific area we proceed to that task.

Recall the Luther citation in which he affirmed that he learned by searching where his temptations took him. The places and occasions of learning in things heavenly are seldom selected by us. Our will, our desires, our inclinations according to our self-assessments — these are seldom, as we look back, the occasions in which we have learned the most important things. We are pushed, or drawn, or dumped into growth.

An American poet, the late Theodore Roethke, puts it this way —

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.
We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.
This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by walking where I have to go.¹¹

Where, theologically, do we have to go? I want now to describe what I think that direction to be, and then point out a fault in the great christological tradition of the West that must be corrected if we are to go there.

We have to go where contemporary man is. Because man's self-awareness is deeply influenced by his placement in time and space we had better be very accurate about where he is, know very surely the matrix of work, duty, daily operation, personal energy expended in those tasks in which he *thinks* his reality. A colleague of mine once said, "Man's mind follows the fortunes of his body with an absolute seriousness." That is demonstrably true. And where is his body? What does representative contemporary man do with most of his hours and days, where does he do it, and as part of what procedure is he important — at work, a significant person?

This man is primarily *homo operator*! He is up to the neck involved in fantastically complicated, incessant transactions with some aspect of the life and productivity of nature. He is extracting, refining, fabricating, transforming, transporting, assembling, selling, redesigning, thinking about how to do something which has not been done before with the ever more abundantly available forces and products of a rationalized and managed nature.

You might well ask what is novel about that? Has man not always been so involved with the given structure and fecundity of nature? He has, indeed, but not at all as he is presently engaged. For in our time, in a completely new sense, he stands apart from, above, in a new and central position *over against* this reality. It is not too much to say that contemporary man's actual selfhood has been radically transformed by virtue of his theoretical comprehension and practical operations upon the naturally sustaining and environing world. He can literally do with it what he chooses to do!

This has not, until now, been true. It is not completely true as yet. But the spirit of our time is given in the fact that we live in a *not yet* of scientific methods ever more refined and pointed toward mastery, and no longer in a time of acquiescence in the given structures, rhythms, promises of things.

Man's sense of identity is not to be sought apart from steady reflection upon these actual engagements. We may choose to continue to define man in more general categories: essential man, reflective man, man as *imago Dei*; and these broader categories are necessary for ampler truth about him. But it is a penultimate truth I am after: how to keep theology pedagogically flexible to present fact, and faithful preaching appropriate to actual self-understanding. What man does is to operate as I have described. He is a digger of ore or of new equations, a fabricator and dealer with the stuff and possibility that pours out of research, experiment, sheer curiosity.

If we acknowledge the level of truth that is in this conclusion, we are ready for the second question. How does a man, so operationally constituted in his self-understanding, and in the hopes, projections, needs for supporting sanctions which are appropriate to that — how does he hear the traditional gospel of the grace of God? It is said to him that grace is the power and benevolent will of God active and always available for his restoration to true life, fullness, peace. That is how his question about grace is answered — and the answer is true.

But the self addressed by such proposals of grace, while recognizable as an aspect of the self of the hearer, can only receive such a powerful and a meaningful proposal if he pulls himself loose from, disengages his daily, immediate self-awareness out of that very transactional closeness to the world in which he lives and moves and has his most interesting being. Deep down, far back, and in the absolute nakedness of his privacy a man may be reached by such a proposal of grace. But his life in operational immediacy, meshed as it is with industrial and corporate and public reality is life unaddressed by a word of grace so restricted.

Such a word may be pastorally and homiletically uninteresting not because it is untrue (which it is not) but because its scope and promise is less large than the web of fact and relation within which man actually lives and is acknowledged as a person in the world. Man does not walk in a garden alone; he walks in a world with others.

I am convinced that contemporary lassitude under conventional preaching of the gospel of grace is commonly neither ignored nor repudiated because its power and claims are assessed as untrue. The word of grace is ignored because it is unreal and uninteresting, because it does not intersect actual man with promise, power, and possibility and with a bigness appropriate to the public, materially-related, operationally-actualized character of his living days.

It has recently been remarked that whereas we have a gospel for the alienated, the hurt, the depressed, the defeated, we have not a gospel for the well, the effective, the joyous, busy, engaged men of this world.

And while, to be sure, a gospel that has no word to desolation is no gospel at all, it is more and more widely true that a gospel whose scope does not address man in his joyous, creative, constructive and effectual operations is unchallenging because uninteresting.

If, then, I have described with whatever lucidity and generality an actual situation, what defect or undeveloped aspects of our christological inheritance are germane to this issue?

What follows and concludes this chapter is but my own proposal for reflection. There is no assumption that other proposals would not be equally proper and promising.

It is precisely what I have called the anguish of Christology that has caused me to wonder if the celebrated center of our Reformation tradition has not developed into a confinement. We have received from the Reformers a powerful christocentric theological structure. That christocentrism achieved the place and power it did in fact achieve because nothing short of it would have been able to recover the gospel, renew the church, and do right obedience to the religious needs of the sixteenth century. But the price was enormous — and we in a different situation, must reassess the Reformers' formulation according to the same biblical norms they honored if a polemical necessity of one time is to provide adequate guidance for another. For when the Christian faith is absolutely centrated upon Christ, the second person of the Trinity, we are open, and have to some extent succumbed, to the following:

1. A conceptual reduction. By that I mean an understanding of Christ that claims fuller adequacy for the disclosure of the reality of God than Christ himself claimed. "Jesus only" is a phrase that conveys a theological error, for it postulates a christocentrism that Jesus himself repudiated.
2. An almost complete severance of the realm of redemption from the realm of creation.
3. A consequent formal inability to interpret the grace of God in Christ precisely within the operational theatre of man's existence which so deeply forms him, which is so vividly the place of selfhood, and in which, with the neighbor, he is called upon to be light, salt, and exemplar of faith.

As, now, I attempt very briefly to give each of these points a somewhat fuller explication, I must acknowledge how much I owe to years of engagement with Faith and Order studies. During these years my mind has undergone a double movement: on the one hand an ever clearer and more grateful affirmation of the profundity and richness of the tradition of Lutheranism in the catholic Christianity of the West, and an ever widening appreciation of the blessed fact that no theological tradition is identical with evangelical catholic truth. Even the great words of our Reformers — *Grace alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone* — so powerful in their ordering work for mind and devotion, may become a protestant form of triumphalism, and in their unfolding career do damage both to the facts of historical faith and to the vast organic counterpoint of the biblical record. Reflect with me upon the three temptations.

First, conceptual reduction of Christology. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is an effort to secure faith against that temptation. There is one God. We know him as God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sanctifier. And in knowing according to three foci of fact and encounter we but the more deeply know the cry of John Calvin, "Our business is with God!" The God encountered in the form of the Servant *is the Lord of the creation*; and it is no other than the Lord of creation who is the enabling and illuminating presence in the Spirit.

The moment the Old Testament was included into the Christian canon, substance was given to the claim of Jesus that "...he who hath seen me hath seen the Father" — and "he who believes in me, believes not in

me, but in him who sent me.” And recall how many are the biblical statements and images that ground Christ back into the eternal life of the Father and interpret him forward into the presence of the life-giving holy power in the Spirit: the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, the image of the Lamb slain from the foundations of the world, the Easter fact “raised by the glory of the Father,” the remarkable statements in Colossians, Ephesians, and the letter to the Hebrews which, to a mind formed too exclusively by Romans and Galatians, introduce a christological anguish by the sober magnificence of an orbit of meaning that cannot be contained in a too single principle of the justification of sinners.

Second, almost complete severance of the realm of redemption from the realm of creation. It is not possible now, even if I had the competence, to detail the forces, theological, devotional, social which have tempted us to this severance. But a few may be suggested: the moralizing of dogma — and the consequent shrinking of its meaning to a circle smaller than characterizes the biblical speech; the centuries in the life of the Western church when, in order to purify a demonized and paganized world, it had to withdraw, repudiate, violently negate the vitalities and values of the creation *in order* to exorcize an idolatry of the world so that the world might again become a garment of praise; the peculiar course of the Christian community in the United States, where, by action of the founding fathers, Christian meaning and utility was regarded as a moral glue to hold a republic together. Such an understanding is still that of the generality of our people, and regularly the theme of political figures in their homiletical posture.

The result, however, is certain and it is theologically perilous. For it moralized Christian thought and seals within private piety and an individualistic understanding of obedience the world-restoring intention of the gospel of God. It encourages an understanding of church as a gathered coterie of the redeemed who now celebrate the benefits of their redemption, and thus it detaches the acknowledging company from positive stance and action within the world, exhausts the demands of faith in a view of the body of Christ that is congregational, a view of love that is eleemosynary or selected-personal, a view of nature which, neutralized by the absence of God the Creator, can now be turned over without peril to busy scientific and entrepreneurial hands. Sanctification is a program without proper scope if it is urged apart from a doctrine of the creation.

Third, when Christology is detached from a doctrine of creation we are left without motive, clarity, or guide whereby to designate the world of the creation as a realm of grace, the right use of it a holy demand, and our operation in it and with it, now technically astounding, as a fresh opportunity for world-making to “the praise of his glory.” The primal joy of creation to which the morning stars responded with abounding joy must be translated over into atomic and astrophysics, now that the power and creative potency of the very stars themselves are available to the creature.

I have a modest estimate of the direct utility of a volume such as this. Because its limitation in size is so severe it should be used more to lure and trouble the mind than mainly to inform it. And if this discussion of the *anguish of Christology* is now livelier in allure than complete in substance I shall have succeeded in what I intended. And because there are always some for whom a vision realized in evocative language is clearer than a notion wrought out in propositions, I end with a sonnet from a man whose anguished reflection about Christ sprung him out to the furthest limits of speculation. Gerard Manley Hopkins came finally to regard all this factic world as the residency of Christ. He is not found there; but when by his work on earth we are found, his eyes become ours and this place of his finding becomes a

Christic mystery, a veritable cosmic diaphany. The poem is *Spring*.¹²

Nothing is so beautiful as spring —
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rise and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden. — Have, get, before it cloy,
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

FOUR: FAITH AND FORM

The first three chapters were fundamental, not procedural. The effort has been to help toward the formation of the preacher and not to try to tell him how to preach.

The present chapter can only be admitted as relevant on the basis of such an understanding of the purpose of essays about preaching. Before the sermon — the man himself! — how he is to stand, listen, take in, and refashion the substance of all theological studies; how he may stand, and stand up to preach now that a critical tornado involving interpretation of the language of scripture is upon him; how he must re-enact the anguish of Christ as a preacher of Christ.

The title, *Faith and Form*, is proposed as a way to get at an explication of a problem of the preacher in his role as leader of a decision-making congregation. Decisions are made in a double context: into the decision is poured all that is known out of the past faith and form and action of the church catholic; and these resources for decision have got to be organized into a decision in a world now a-forming, shaping outcomes for decades ahead. And everything in that present world is undergoing such a violent shattering and re-formation that the old historical flow of past into present is more like the turbulence of a cataract than the stately movement of a river. Interpretation of the gospel, the form of the church at home and in mission in other places, the liturgical heritage of centuries, the role of the pastor, the idea, function, and form of the church building — about these and other matters decisions are being made. Whether one is or is not conscious of such decisions being made is not to the point; resolution to make no decision makes one only more helpless before the powers that make decisions.

In what follows an effort is made to discuss the relation of faith and form in the context of a quite concrete activity of the church. The form of the church as building is chosen as the way to give specificity to the discussion. This choice is made on two grounds: the first is simply that the current effort to fashion fresh forms in architecture is sharply illustrative of that “turbulence” in historical transmission to which we have alluded; the second reason is that the art of architecture is that contemporary forming activity in which one confronts most clearly and publicly the symbolization of the way contemporary men see, desire, propose the future, salvage and reconstitute the past.

A temple is a necessity for a faith whose object is affirmed to have disclosed himself in history. For all historical vitalities are inwardly pushed toward formal announcement, and the fact that Judaism and Christianity refuse to identify the God of the faith with the accomplishments of this God with his people in history does not excuse these faithful communities from forming a sign and place in which to celebrate the ineffable glory. But every such sign — form is at the same time a tragedy: for the source, object, and giver of faith is God — and the forms that set it forth are from men. The living must have form to set it forth, to invite its substance toward apprehension, achieve clarity, transmit power.

But all forms that confess, focus, and clarify are tempted to enclose, restrict, reduce. Forms appropriate to substance do indeed illumine intention, focus force, sharpen point. But all forms are culture-fashioned and tend toward tyranny. All forms gain their eloquence and impact, their designative direction or referential opulence from the form of thought, the alternatives for apprehension, the available edges of sensibility that characterize certain periods. That from which they gain their power at one moment in

history and which strikes us as happy and sharp, is happy and sharp precisely because it has sacrificed other aspects to the integral celebration of the vitality most apposite to the moment's need. Chartres is a great Christian church not because it says everything that can be said about the Christian faith but because it concentrates ruthlessly upon saying the one thing that that age wanted to say, and says it in a form that the technology of the tenth and eleventh centuries made available for the first time.

The temple is both necessity and tragedy because thought and fact and feeling exist, have a term of regnancy and must burst out into expression. A term of years, indeed! But only a term of years!

Mr. Basil Willey has pointed out that what is felt as fact in one period is not felt as fact in another.¹³ The deep perhaps undiscoverable chemistry of historical attention by which these changes occur has not been disclosed. New things do not simply occur; what occurs is rather fresh perspectives upon abiding things. Facts and relations freshly seen, the old peered at with an inexplicable fascination, surprising encounters with the familiar — these things occur. And men make forms to fashion forth their faith, or delight, or surprise, or devise novel arrangements for ordering the common or the reflective life.

But such formations are not forever. The inexhaustible vigor of life grows old again in its once young forms. Sensibility, exquisite and moving with a once sure touch, stiffens into weary repetition; fresh delight becomes tired convention; the immediacy of an accurate statement in one period becomes an unreflective habit in another. Chartres within three hundred years became Beauvais, a mere tricky playing with a form — and the roof fell in upon a still-born nave. Habits become meaningless by the waning of reflection.

In such reflections we are not freshly reminded of what we all know — although our lives are commonly lived as though we could forget its truth. Our own situation as regards faith and form is inwardly different from and more acute than in previous periods. That is why we employ a vocabulary of crisis to describe it. Why do we talk of the crisis in theology instead of the development of theology? Why entitle an article “The Travail of Biblical Language” rather than the structure, meaning, or even problem of biblical language? And why does the term crisis appear so regularly and justifiably in discussions of the Christian faith, the Christian church, or in discussions of architecture appropriate to that church?

There is a single and specifiable crisis that is reflected in all of these crises: the world of ordered law, formally available to men's intelligence has dissolved into a world which is no world at all. It is conceived to be ordered, if at all, by patterns or laws no longer clearly and certainly proposed to men's minds.

Lest that seem too general a statement, and in order that it may be given concrete force let us together ask three questions which enfold within their terms the intellectual and spiritual particularity and problematic of this century:

What is a thing?

How can a thing be expressed?

How can grammar be maintained (linguistic grammar, musical grammar, architectural grammar) — now that sentences, which presuppose order, themselves acknowledge no order?

What is a thing?

What for an instance is a stone? My generation was brought up to believe in what Alfred North Whitehead described as the

... independent individuality of each bit of matter. Each stone is conceived as fully describable apart from any reference to any other portion of matter. It might be alone in the Universe, the sole occupant of uniform space. But it would still be that stone which it is. Also the stone could be adequately described without any reference to past or future. It is to be conceived fully and adequately as wholly constituted within the present moment.

But Mr. Whitehead continues:

Modern physics has abandoned the doctrine of Simple Location. The physical things which we term stars, planets, lumps of matter, molecules, electrons, protons, quanta of energy, are each to be conceived as modifications of conditions within space-time, extending throughout its whole range. There is a focal region, which in common speech is where the thing is. But its influence streams away from it with finite velocity throughout the utmost recesses of space and time. Of course, it is natural, and for certain purposes entirely proper, to speak of the focal region, thus modified as the thing itself situated there. But difficulties arise if we press this way of thought too far. For physics, the thing itself is what it does, and what it does is this divergent stream of influence. Again the focal region cannot be separated from the external stream. It obstinately refuses to be conceived as an instantaneous fact. It is a state of agitation, only differing from the so-called external stream by its superior dominance within the focal region. Also we are puzzled how to express exactly the existence of these physical things at any definite moment of time. For at every instantaneous point-event, within or without the focal region, the modification to be ascribed to this thing is antecedent to, or successive to, the corresponding modification introduced by that thing at another point-event. Thus, if we endeavor to conceive a complete instance of the existence of the physical thing in question, we cannot confine ourselves to one part of space or to one moment of time.¹⁴

Now it may be possible, indeed I think it likely, that some of you will wonder what this has to do with faith and form. I reply that the possibility of form follows the understanding of reality with an absolute seriousness. And if our trouble in finding form for the real has been enormously increased by the revolution in our apprehension of the world — then our trouble is not merely operational or moral, it is *vital* and *absolute*.

It is hard enough in this life to fashion a right form for the clearly felt and known; it is quite another problem to fashion a form for things which can only honestly be reported as “superior dominants within a stream of influence!” I shall not soon forget; and now that I grow older in my Newtonian ways, I doubt that I shall ever recover from the shock I received at dinner table at my house one night last winter. When I spoke of atoms as “enclosed” in the reactor in the submarine Nautilus, my three university-aged sons reacted with splendid scorn! “You talk,” they said, “as if atoms were a pile of hot marbles that could be dumped into a box! No man ever saw an atom, let alone dumped them into a box. An atom is a term to express a relationship existing between foci of energy.”

My rout at that moment has been succeeded by a strange and pervasive excitement. For in a peculiar way, the realities of the faith — God, the grace of God, reconciliation, the church, the sacraments — are just *quite possibly* more accurately set forth according to this relational way of speaking about reality and things than they were set forth in my youth. But that is matter for reflection at another time and at other hands than mine.

To sum up the first point, then, as it relates to our general inquiry. We are concerned with form. But every form is an exhibition of a convenient order. And when the nature of the order in and among things, indeed the nature of the reality of things themselves, is now searching for a vocabulary adequate to the revolutionary complexity of fact, then the problems of form understandably cause the hands of the architect to grope for the new out of the shattered old.

The second question: how can a thing, thus conceived, be expressed? Let me suggest the scope of that question by comparing two musical experiences. Handel was an eighteenth century man. The greater part of his productive life was in England. His social context was the English ruling class. His suite, written for the delectation of the King and his court as they were rowed up and down the Thames, was called the *Water Music*. It has grace, formal elegance, a charm unbroken by the raising of any troublesome questions or by the shaking of any sleeping proletarian dogs. The measures of the eighteenth century dance were a transcript of the measured, confident, ordered world of political and social life in upper class England, Austria, France, colonial America. This music would have been as appropriate to Williamsburg as it was to Whitehall. Things could be formed for things were known, and confidence in their relative steadiness was solid. This music is the outer and audible noise of an inward and secure world of one class at one place for a certain period.

The style of the period could indeed only become a style by drawing forward and celebrating selected aspects of the inexhaustible particulars of the culture. Not all of life, but only its favored class in a position of power, danced to these measures. Nell Gwyn made a dubious reputation by entertaining its monarch and court; Samuel Johnson stoutly maintained that heaven had sanctioned its formal order — and lived a moral life far above the norm; Jane Austen, at the end of the period, wrote novels in which its manners are both enshrined — and punctured.

As against Handel, his music, his age — consider Max Roach who plays drums, Duke Ellington who composes, Thelonius Monk who uses the keyboard of a piano as a kind of scalpel to probe into the possibilities of form for contemporary sensibility. What, precisely, is the difference between these two musical experiences, the *Water Music* of George Fredrick Handel, and the piano of Thelonius Monk? The difference is gigantic; and it illustrates the problem of form in our age.

Handel's music is the product of a magnificent sensibility shaping to musical form the clear realities of his world; Monk's music is a product of a fine sensibility searching for a form appropriate to the declaration that all art forms are bankrupt because reality is in transit! Handel could interpret reality with a craftsman's serenity because he shared a general agreement that there was a basic reality waiting for revelation and celebration; Monk has no choice but to construct and impose upon life however strange and arbitrary his work may sound, his *own* reality — which is for him the only one there is. In this sense modern music is the product of a radical tentativeness become audible. The available acoustical possibility of sound and rhythm are used, not to declare one man's variations on an agreed consensus about the world, but to work out in sound and rhythm one man's behavior in a world without form.

The third point. Grammar, as commonly understood, is a logical way of ordering words in a sentence so that they function to make an intelligible whole. All creation, all form-making, has a grammar. Color and design and texture are the elements of a painter's grammar; number is the mathematician's grammar; timbre and rhythm and key are the musician's grammar. Architecture has a grammar whereby it folds space in accordance with function and intention by the use of material stuff.

How shall any human endeavor find a grammar for thought, work, affirmation now that we know that a good deal of life is inexpressible? This problem is not the old one of bringing grammar ever more close to the matter of the vision. The problem is old — and men have dealt with it. T. S. Eliot calls the poetic art an “ever new raid on the inarticulate.” And his raids, while surely short of his vision, are not crippled by the problem that dogs his successors at this moment. The problem is the unique problem of the second half of this century: the discovery that there is no necessary correspondence between the grammar of our beholding minds and the nature of things.

Here is a wonderful irony! For four hundred years the Western world has really believed that empirical investigation could unfold and disclose and bring into intelligible statement the nature of things. This faith is dead — not in the thought of the common life which still idolizes this procedure and hope as if it were sound, but dead in the judgment of its most advanced practitioners. Such men no longer talk of knowledge as if that term promised statements or formulas corresponding to the nature of things. What they intend is rather the refinement of procedural models for investigation. For such models they claim nothing philosophical or objectively verifiable at all. From a paper by the late Professor Bridgman I quote the following extensive paragraph.

Finally, I come to what it seems to me may well be from the long range point of view the most revolutionary of the insights to be derived from our recent experiences in physics, more revolutionary than the insights afforded by the discoveries of Galileo and Newton, or of Darwin. This is the insight that it is impossible to transcend the human reference point.

The new insight comes from a realization that the structure of nature may eventually be such that our processes of thought do not correspond to it sufficiently to permit us to think about it at all. We have already had an intimation of this in the behavior of very small things in the quantum domain . . . there can be no difference of opinion with regard to the dilemma that now confronts us in the direction of the very small. We are now approaching a bound beyond which we are forever estopped from pushing our inquiries, not by the construction of the world, but by the construction of ourselves. The world fades out and eludes us because it becomes meaningless. We cannot say that there exists a world beyond any knowledge possible to us because of the nature of knowledge. The very concept of existence becomes meaningless. It is literally true that the only way of reacting to this is to shut up. We are confronted with something truly ineffable. We have reached the limit of the vision . . . that we live in a sympathetic world, in that it is comprehensible by our minds.¹⁵

From a scientific report about the situation in science to the prose of Gertrude Stein may seem a queer and arbitrary jump. Miss Stein, in the paragraph I shall quote in a moment, is talking about grammar: and the way she talks about it and what she says about it reveals that problems of form are all of a piece. Whether one works with neutrons or nouns or minerals has exactly nothing to do with the matter.

In 1962 Mr. Walker Gibson edited a book titled, *The Limits of Language*. The book is a collection of short essays by William James, James Conant, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and others. All the essays deal in one way or another with the problem that “. . . the world that the ‘thinking man’ must face up to is a world loaded with complexities and ambiguities, with admissions of a final unintelligibility of life, with enormous responsibility of the individual person in a godless universe.”¹⁶

The writer asks what this state of man in this kind of a world has done to language, as one of man’s most

venerable “forming” activities, and illustrates exactly what has happened by citing an essay about parts of speech and punctuation by Miss Gertrude Stein. He reminds us, too, that Miss Stein was an early disciple of Whitehead, and among the very earliest to appreciate and buy Picasso paintings. A few paragraphs from Miss Stein’s essay are as follows:

What does a comma do.

I have refused them so often and left them out so much and did without them so continually that I have come finally to be indifferent to them. I do not now care whether you put them in or not but for a long time I felt very definitely about them and would have nothing to do with them.

As I say commas are servile and they have no life of their own, and their use is not a use, it is a way of replacing one’s own interest and I do decidedly like to like my own interest in what I am doing. A comma by helping you along holding your coat for you and putting on your shoes keeps you from living your life as actively as you should lead it and to me for many years and I still do feel that way about it only now I do not pay as much attention to them, the use of them was positively degrading. Let me tell you what I feel and what I mean and what I felt and what I meant.

When I was writing those long sentences of *The Making of Americans*, verbs active present verbs with long dependent adverbial clauses became a passion with me. I have told you that I recognize verbs and adverbs aided by prepositions and conjunctions with pronouns as possessing the whole of the active life of writing.

Complications make eventually for simplicity and therefore I have always liked dependent adverbial clauses. I have liked dependent adverbial clauses because of their variety of dependence and independence. You can see how loving the intensity of complication of these things that commas would be degrading. Why if you want the pleasure of concentrating on the final simplicity of excessive complication would you want any artificial aid to bring about that simplicity. Do you see now why I feel about the comma as I did and as I do.

Think about anything you really like to do and you will see what I mean.¹⁷

The most interesting, indeed, summary, statement in that astounding quotation is this, “. . . the pleasure of concentrating in the final simplicity of excessive complication.” The comma is rejected because it is “an artificial aid to bring about that simplicity.” The creative act for the modern artist is an act of bestowal; it is an action in which he confers a form or a pattern or a formal relation upon what he sees and handles. Michelangelo could speak of sculpture as “releasing” a truth from a block of marble; the contemporary artist is more likely to understand his work as the imposition upon matter — which is in itself unknowable and not related necessarily to anything certainly known — of a pattern that seems to him pleasing, and possibly significant.

As we confront the problem of faith and form we must be blasted out of our common assumption that we can solve the problem by technique, fresh materials, or drown out chaos by raising our voices, find some happy trick with the look of modernity about it — and so find a form for our faith in the world we have looked in upon.

If all of this seems utterly depressing, confusing, holding no promise — then we are some steps along our way. From the simply cheerful we have nothing to expect and the usual thought of the churches on this

matter — which is simply to dramatize the no longer clear by the use of contemporary cosmetics — but supplies encouragement toward a dead end.

But is it not possible that the acknowledgment of an end is the precondition to the arising of the new? That a known debacle may be the occasion for decision? That the mind's recognition of the limits of its correspondence to reality may constitute the moment for a fresh apprehension of reality? That the exhaustion of religious vitalities has historically been and may again be the moment for the gospel? That faith may create a clearer, harder, more integral form for itself when it has only itself and its object to draw upon?

In order that this proposition may be demonstrated to be based on more than naked hopefulness or sheer optimism, I shall ask you to reflect with me about these things: an imperative, a painter, and a poet.

Now, then, the imperative that grounds faith in God by virtue of which faith forms life in material ways.

Israel was commanded not to make a material image of her God; she was not commanded against making forms for her faith in God. Indeed the very God who revealed himself and his will to Israel accomplished that revelation in Israel's history and accompanied that revelation by the claim that everything — heaven, the earth, the spirit of man, man's work among created things — was God's. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." Not only his, but because created by him, good.

The Christian doctrine of the creation acknowledges this; the Christian doctrine of redemption by its affirmation of the incarnation declares that God who created man in the garden of history and nature does not will to redeem him in any other garden — or in some angelic removal from all gardens. And the doctrine of the Holy Spirit declares that God, as Sanctifier, sticks by his earthy decision as Creator and Redeemer. When the presence and gift of the Holy Spirit "filled all the house where they were sitting" the same Spirit made clear that God does not empower a holy balloon-ascension out of nature and history, but rather that he empowers a new heaven and a new earth to be constituted for men for whom "all things have become new."

This earth and nature-affirming decision of God is central to the nature and work and dignity of the artist — whether he acknowledges it or not. For the artist is a world-celebrator even when he is not a God-acknowledger. "Little children, love not the world" is a perilous word to be spoken to men who live half-asleep, dull, unaware, unmoved, and bestial within the wonder and vitality of the world. The apostolic injunction is not meant for earth-despisers; it is meant as a warning against idolatry — and it makes sense only on the supposition that the lure and delight and wonder of the creation shall have caught the eye, aroused the sense, excited the mind, caused the heart to bloom into such images as characterize, for instance, the 104th Psalm.

The artist is a world-celebrator. In stone and glass and fired clay and metal, in paint and wood and tone and movement, in every conceivable material and activity from arranging flowers to bending wires — he lays a loving and a violent, a forming and a tormented hand upon the given or fabricated stuff of this world. And he touches all things to glorify them, to celebrate, that is, the life and the possibility that lies curled or inert or pulsating within the heart of every living or non-living thing.

Is it not possible that the indifference or even hostility felt by many artists toward the church arises because they feel that the fire of their love and work is chilled by the church's touch? A gift and a vitality

that they respond to with love and labor is demeaned or scorned or, more often, betrayed by the very community that confesses the Creator and the goodness of the creation. When this love becomes idolatry it must be judged as all idolatry is judged. But he cannot judge who never affirms; he cannot speak of God the Creator who abuses or uses without glory the gift of the creation.

Our second center for reflection is the new approach to forms that has arisen in our century. Let us be concrete, as concrete as the person and the work of Pablo Picasso. Here is a man of fantastic endowment, of disciplined craftsmanship, a man who wants to find a truth by probing the possibilities of things. But everything about our time has struck and penetrated and disorganized older ways of seeing and stating. *What a thing is* is no longer obvious or simple; the conventions of form that guided Renaissance painters are no longer available for Picasso's transactions with things, any more than Newton's physics is adequate for the physical scientist. The artistic grammar of Giotto cannot serve the statements that Picasso has to make. It is for that reason that this painter dissolves an old order and reorders it. He tears apart an accustomed appearance and represents a strange appearance. He disengages the structural components of the anatomy of figures and things and reorders them in fresh designs. Why does he do this? What is the man about?

It is dishonest to discuss modern art with the brash clichés that characterize so much discussion of the matter. It is both dishonest and professionally perilous for the theological student to do that. Dishonest because these men have said very clearly what they are about; and if one cannot read the sentences formed by their work, one should do them the honor to listen to the sentences they have written in words. And dismissal of their works and words is perilous for the theological student because here — with a concentration and an image — eloquence is the fiery center and confession of exactly that world which we so regularly declare we want to communicate with.

A desire to fashion a new order, to bring to being a new cosmology from a shattered one, a passionate lunge into the possibilities of form to find a contemporary one whereby a man could be honest with himself and his fact-world — these were the motivations of the early cubists. From Frank Elgar's little book on Picasso I quote the following paragraph.

Never in the history of painting had such humble, familiar, prosaic things been subjected systematically to such daring experimental treatment with such authoritative intelligence . . . What (Picasso) was striving after was the total and simultaneous representation, on the two-dimensional surface of the canvass of solid three-dimensional bodies — in other words to give the effect of volume on a flat ground, without, however, having recourse to optical deception, foreshortening, modeling, chiaroscuro, or any of the other tricks used with such wearing monotony since the Renaissance . . . In order to appreciate better the structural aspects of form — he broke it up — thus displaying several aspects of the same model. Imagine an object (a guitar) which the various planes could be unfolded so, as to reveal at the one time its surface, its upper side, its inside, and its under side. Such an object is no longer an object as perceived by the eye, no longer an ephemeral and contingent fragment of external nature, but the absolute, the essential object as it really exists in our minds, the object in its indestructible wholeness and lastingness.¹⁸

This effort of the artist is but his response to his world in terms of his medium; it is his effort to actualize in his work the meaning of Whitehead's statement, "a thing is what a thing does." Such an effort has its

literary counter-part in the work of James Joyce and many others. These artists in language had to fracture grammar, suggest consecutive awareness of multiple levels of consciousness in new forms of the sentence, reorder into patterns closer to the flux and interceptions of experience the actual life of man.

This art is called abstract. By that is meant only the effort to see things with our eye the way both natural science and personality science say they are: their isness is their relatedness. An atom is a term for forces in relation; a person is a self in relation to selves. In an abstract picture the idea of the thing is identical with its formal relations.

While, to be sure a Christian theology and a Christian attentive to aesthetics would have grave questions to raise about the adequacy of such a world-understanding, such questions are not germane to the present effort. We are concerned to understand why some men design and paint and write as they do, and learn from the effort what is tutorial to our own vocation in this age. Whether Picasso is an exemplary theologian is not, that is to say, the point. And now to the poet.

Gerard Manley Hopkins was a profoundly Christian man. So suffused was his entire being with the reality of God's grace, concretized in Christ as fact of even "this bent world" that he invented a poetic form to bear witness to it. Mr. Stephen Spender affirms that "Hopkins ferments" in all modern poets.

Hopkins' theological insistence is that the whole creation is a realm of Grace.¹⁹

I say that we are wound
With mercy round and round.

This grace is made explicit, it is released, it lures, it is called into the open by Christ — who is the personal concentration of the grace of God. And when grace as Christ, God for us and for the whole world, is known and lived by, all things became permeable to a new vision and demand a holy evaluation. The life of life is revealed; and it is the life of God the Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier.

But Hopkins, a Jesuit and an artist, did not make his confession and adoration before grace in propositions. He wrote poetry — and he invented a vocabulary, fashioned a strange, haunting, jagged rhythm to state his confession. All his life was a seeking for a way to set forth in outer reflection the inner nature of things, a quest for a language whereby a sense of the grace of the creation might be evoked for the reader — that grace and truth which came incomparably in Jesus Christ.

As a name for that individually distinctive form which constitutes the rich and revealing oneness of the natural object, he coined a new word. When the eye falls upon a large view we have a *landscape*; when, to use his own phrase, the eye sinks into the surprise and particularity and interior gift-quality of things we behold them as *inscape*. In such a beholding (not looking, but beholding! — "*behold* the lilies of the field") one becomes aware of that energy of being by which all things are upheld, of that natural but ultimately supernatural stress which determines an inscape. For that quality in things disclosed to and calling forth wonder and praise in the beholder — he coined the word *instress*.²⁰ In a letter to a friend Hopkins once wrote, "I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it and it could be called out everywhere again."²¹

In Hopkins' poems we have an instance of a man for whom the received conventional world was being dissolved under the disclosures of modern science, historiography, all other analytical and critical disciplines. And just as Picasso took apart and unfolded reality so that he might reorder it to do fuller

justice to itself and to the sensibility of the artist, so Hopkins mobilized a bewitchingly abstract combination of images and rhythms to order a world to the inscape of grace.

From the poems I have chosen two. The first is called *The Soldier*. As you read it remember the classic catholic confession of the church about God: that God chose to accomplish and work through the bloody business of man's restoration to blessedness by himself recapitulating the full and common actuality of our lives; *therefore* the world, the theatre of that ghastly and glorious work is never after — just the world! It is God's place; it has known his real presence!

Yes. Why do we all, seeing of a soldier, bless him? bless
Our redcoats, our tars? Both these being, the greater part,
But frail clay, nay but foul clay. Here it is: the heart,
Since, proud, it calls the calling manly, gives a guess
That, hopes that, makesbelieve, the men must be no less;
It fancies, feigns, deems, dears the artist after his art;
And fain will find as sterling all as all is smart,
And scarlet wear the spirit of war there express.

Mark Christ our King. He knows war, served this soldiering through;
He of all can reeve a rope best. There he bides in bliss
Now, and seeing somewhere some man do all that man can do,
For love he leans forth, needs his neck must fall on, kiss,
And cry 'O Christ-done deed! So God-made-flesh does too:
Were I come o'er again' cries Christ 'it should be this.'²²

The second poem I have chosen is a difficult one; but I make no apologies of the sort that might be proper to "the man on the street." The theological analyses of the ways of grace is not the professional concern of the man on the street, and the reader has presumably come in off the street to study. The lines must be read fast — for the substance, pace, sound of the words fuse into an organic impact. The theme is man's mutability, the panic of his passingness, his living toward death and ashes. Into this massive debacle of person and value and love comes the Resurrection — a kind of godly crash.

The concluding lines are as follows — and an instantaneous penetration of every image is not necessary to feel the power of the piece —

Million-fueled, nature's bonfire burns on.
But quench her bonniest, dearest to her, her clearest-served spark
Man, how fast his firedint, his mark on mind, is gone!
Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark
Drowned. O pity and indignation! Manshape, that shone
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots black out; nor mark
Is any of him at all so stark
But vastness blurs and time beats level. Enough! the
Resurrection,
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping, joyless days,
dejection.
Across my foundering deck shone

A beacon, an eternal beam. Flesh fade, and mortal trash
 Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire, leave but ash:
 In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
 I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
 This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood,
 immortal diamond,
 Is immortal diamond.²³

The final task to which I have set myself in this chapter is to suggest a correlation between such movements as those we have considered in art and certain powerful movements in contemporary theology. Just as the movement toward the abstract in art is an effort to confront the shattered world-understanding by an ordering activity whereby a new reality is imposed by the vital affirmation of the artist, so a powerful movement in contemporary theology represents an effort to explicate the meaning of God and man and the world out of the historical particularity of the terms, episodes, patterns of the biblical story.

Theology is presently cut off from old alliances — philosophical, moral, existential — and this hurling of her back upon her own resources is the movement of the recovery of her role and integrity. Her resources were never identical with a world view on the one side or a value system extended from the believing self on the other. Her resource is rather the organic historical fact-world of a community affirming itself to be a community by the word of God — the word as Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. This is but one way of saying that the claim of Christian faith to be an historical religion must determine its theological method. The principle of verification for an historical faith can never be imported from realms that are trans-historical — either ontological or existential. Christian affirmation grounded in a doctrine of a God whose isness is his doesness in historical liberations, grounded in a Christ in whom faith is identical with trust, and in a Holy Spirit as the real presence that calls, forms, and sustains the community — these affirmations have, to be sure, a scope and fulness that fills the space worked out by ontological and existential questions but are not derived from them. That is why Karl Barth can say “Church Dogmatics! — what other kind *is* there?” — and then go on so to unfold the meanings, vitalities, and claims of church dogmatics as to address every problem from a single center.

What then must we do in practical, preaching and teaching ways to recover in the church such knowledge of what the church is that her life may be integral with her holy source, and her architectural form consonant with and ministerial to her nature? I have some specific things to say about that — but want to lead up to them by reflecting upon another crucial period in Western christendom when the church was faced with an analogous peril.

In his essay about Francis of Assisi, Gilbert Chesterton places the saint in his time. Francis came at the end of the long, dark, penitential tunnel of medieval times during which the last remnants of paganism had to be purged from the thought and feeling of the Christian faith. When, following such a purgation, nature is acknowledged as God's, but not God, then man knows a vast liberation. He can now really love and care for the world because it is not God! “Man has stripped from his soul the last rag of nature worship, and can return to nature.”

The sequence and paradox is the same as that we meet in St. Paul. Because nothing is intrinsically redemptive, and because God himself is redemptive — all things are fresh stuff for grace and human

creativity. Paul begins the Epistle to the Philippians with an absolute and narrow claim “I count *all things* as refuse — that I may know him” — and he ends with a song of human magnificence: “Whatsoever things are good, true, lovely — think on these things” — all to the glory of God precisely because these things are not redemptive but redeemed!

Chesterton is reporting about the world of late paganism. He says

... these people needed a new heaven and a new earth; for they had really defiled their own earth and even their own heaven. How could their case be met by looking at the sky, when erotic legends were scrawled in stars across it; how could they learn anything from the love of birds and flowers after the sort of love stories that were told of them? ... We know what sort of sentimental associations are called up to us by the phrase “a garden” ... Then let any one who knows a little Latin poetry recall suddenly what would once have stood in place of the sun-dial or the fountain, obscene and monstrous in the sun; and of what sort was the god of their gardens.²⁴

Against that statement of what once did really happen, may I suggest what must be our program in these days if our faith shall again be given forms to serve and bless it.

First, we must have such doctrinal clarification concerning the church, the word, the sacraments as shall restore to them their holy, particular, biblically attested source, power, and meaning. The church is the communion of saints — and if the much-abused fellowship is not given its character from that center it cannot be saved from being swallowed up by social or psychological categories. The word is our Lord Jesus Christ himself as the concretion in redemptive action of the love of the Creator for his creature — and if the preaching of the word be not thus centered, it cannot avoid being swallowed up by categories of moral counsel and religious idealism. The sacraments are gifts to our poverty, not occasions taking inventory of our accumulated spiritual riches. Baptism is placement, and the Holy Communion is presence — and that placement is a miracle of grace for men who have no claims upon it; and that presence is a miracle of grace for men who cannot create but only acknowledge creation and have creative joy in it.

Second, we must seek for a form of the church that announces faith in these realities — and then trust the power and integrity of those realities to accomplish their own work of beauty, grace, and evocation. Beauty is a product of truth; it is not a cosmetic.

Third, we must, I believe, perform a resolute calculated act of purgation. The church building *as such* is a symbol; it is not simply a place to hand symbols. If indeed it be in its total form a single symbol, there can be an antiseptic reduction in the nature and number of symbols within. We must purge out the cluttered and cluttering accumulation of secondary “church” effects, the thoughtless conventions, the mild clichés, the automatic repetitions, the taken-for-granted. The huge and growing catalogue of church “symbols” must be subject to purgation. And out of symbolic poverty we may again be open to new and intelligible beckonings.

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- * [All three spellings, "Keating," "Keaton," and "Keeton," appear in the original.]

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