the book

by SYNAXIS n. a periodical gathering

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THE BOOK

edited by
Erin Doom

SYNAXIS
n. a periodical gathering

EIGHTH DAY INSTITUTE
WICHITA, KS

A room without books is a
body without a soul.

-Marcus Tullius Cicero

I am not myself very concerned with questions of influence, or with the publicists who have impressed their names upon the public by catching the morning tide and rowing very fast in the direction in which the current was flowing, but rather that there should always be a few writers preoccupied in penetrating to the core of the matter, in trying to arrive at the truth and to set it forth, without too much hope, without ambition to alter the immediate course of affairs and without being downcast or defeated when nothing appears to ensue.

T. S. Eliot

The goal of reading is the application, in our lives, of what we read. Not to learn it by heart, but to take it to heart. Not to practice using our tongues, but to be able to receive the tongues of fire and to live the mysteries of God. If one studies a great deal in order to acquire knowledge and to teach others, without living the things he teaches, he does no more than fill his head with hot air. At most he will manage to ascend to the moon using machines. The goal of the Christian is to rise to God without machines.

Elder Paisios the Athonite

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Although Eighth Day Institute and Eighth Day Books have no formal affiliation or financial relationship, our support for each other is mutual and enthusiastic. Our mission of "renewing culture through faith and learning" is carried out through not-for-profit educational endeavors that seek to accomplish what Eighth Day Books does as a for-profit business through book sales: connect people to classics which shed light on ultimate questions and expose people to the teachings of the Holy Fathers.

SYNAXIS is a publication of Eighth Day Institute that promotes the renewal of culture through literature and book reviews.

To Lil Love, her family, and Northfield School of the Liberal Arts
for their entrepreneurial and educational legacy
and their support of Eighth Day Institute

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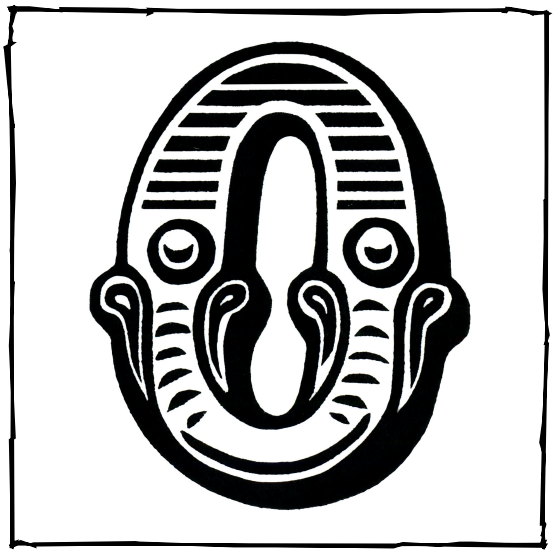


FORE WORD

Books are like rivers that water the whole earth.

The Primary Chronicle

BIBLIOMANIA

Erin Doom

I'VE PACKED AND unpacked thousands and thousands of books, hauled as many around the country for book tables, set up two small bookstores, traveled twelve hours just to make a stab-in-the-dark bid to purchase a monastery library, all while working for Mr. Warren Farha of Eighth Day Books – he and his staff continue to travel the country peddling books out of the blue Eighth Day van, a sort of modern-day version of Roger Mifflin's "caravan of culture" (see *Parnassus on Wheels* in Chapter Three). I've catalogued small libraries. When moving, I've burdened family members, friends and students with boxes and boxes full of books. I've nearly driven my wife mad with books encroaching on every nook and cranny of our home. Apart from the house, I've spent more money on books than any other material possession. I confess, I am an addict, and it wouldn't be out of line for me to introduce myself as such: "Hi, my name is Erin and I'm a bibliophile."

My love for books blossomed at an early age. By the second grade my buddy Thomas and I were pulling all-nighters, and we weren't playing video games. This pattern of reading into the wee hours of the morning was reinforced in high school under the influence of two great history teachers. Late-night reading has continued ever since, and I'm now proud to say my fifth-grade son and third-grade daughter are already following in my footsteps. Back in 1991, when mega-bookstores had begun invading major cities, I traveled the country in a drama group with a road manager whose

contagious love for books led us on out-of-the-way excursions to independent bookstores in practically every city we visited. During that year of travel, I began falling in love with the classics as I read works by Melville, Solzhenitsyn, Swift, Defoe, Salinger, and many others. To the distress of my fellow travelers, it was also the year I began to build a significant personal library.

After being laid off from a hospital job in 1997, I made a momentous decision to sign up for a mission trip to Mexico. That summer turned out to be a three-year life-changing adventure. My library had grown considerably and, like a true bibliophile, I couldn't resist taking as many books as I could on my journey south of the border. With my clothing and toiletries packed in a medium sized backpack and departure less than twelve hours away, I pulled an all-nighter wrestling over which books to squeeze into the extra-large duffle bag.

My new friends in Mexico thought I was a little *loco*, and my "mini-library" provoked a great deal of laughter; I was glad to be the source of their amusement. We were all happy – me with my books and my Mexican friends with their book-loving *gringo*. This habit of packing more books than travel essentials – or at least, what normal, non-bibliophiles would consider essential – did not end with my Mexico travels.

My addiction became increasingly apparent after my return from Mexico, particularly after joining the staff of Eighth Day Books. Thanks to an employee discount, my library began to grow by leaps and bounds. Books engulfed my apartment. I had to build larger and larger bookshelves to accommodate the books I was devouring on theology, early Church history, Orthodox spirituality, and the writings of the early Christian Fathers.

After reconnecting with several pals from my high-school youth group, we decided to meet on a weekly basis to read and discuss great books over pints and pipes. While we liked to think of ourselves as something akin to the Inklings, my wife quickly blasted such conceits by affectionately giving us a name that stuck: "The Geek Group." After several months of meetings, we decided to start an annual spiritual retreat/hiking trip. The morning of departure for our first trip arrived, and I was the last one to be picked up. Met with incredulous looks and then outright laughter, I boarded the van with a backpack – and nothing but a backpack. Instead of thinking to pack camping supplies, I had packed one

change of clothes and a large load of books, i.e., no tent, no sleeping bag, no toiletries except for a toothbrush – not much of anything apart from books. Books seemed the most natural and most important thing for a spiritual retreat, so that's what I took.

MY BIBLIOMANIA has now led me to venture out into the world of publishing. I have long dreamed of publishing a journal that would combine articles with blurbs from the Eighth Day Books Catalog. I've shared this dream with Warren many times over the past decade. I'm sure he probably thought it was just another one of my many wild and over-idealistic dreams. I admit that I am full of them. In addition to being a bibliophile, I am also an idealist.

To the unfortunate dismay of my wife, G.K. Chesterton has encouraged my idealism. In his chapter on "An Impractical Man," he offers these words:

> A man who thinks much about success must be the drowsiest sentimentalist; for he must be always looking back. If he only likes victory he must always come late for the battle. For the man of action there is nothing but idealism. (*What's Wrong with the World*, 20)

My idealism has become action, hence the product in your hands. Let me offer a brief threefold explanation of *Synaxis* (Gk. for "gathering") as an invitation for you to indulge in the work of this "impractical man."

First, each issue of *Synaxis* is intended to look, feel, and function like a book. The structure and contents have been mindfully crafted to provide a tool for book groups. Each of the eight chapters is presented in the form of a triplet: an opening poem, a supplemental piece, and a primary article. Although all eight chapters are intended to work together as a coherent whole, each chapter can stand alone as a catalyst for discussion. Tension has intentionally been built into the contents so as to provoke three simultaneous conversations: between the contributors, between the reader and the contributors, and between a community of readers in a local book group.

Second, each issue of *Synaxis* will focus on a theme of enduring relevance. This inaugural issue focuses on "the book." The physi-

cal book increasingly finds itself neglected – discarded and even burned by libraries, discontinued by publishers, abandoned by educators, and forgotten by consumers. Combined with pervasive advertising – apparently persuasive since 105 e-books are now being sold for every 100 printed books on Amazon – the glamour and convenience offered by the e-book seems to have created an implicit "no-questions-asked" policy regarding its replacement of the physical book. Our policy at *Synaxis*, in contrast, is precisely the opposite: questions are welcomed as a platform for dialogue and as a path to the truth.

Finally, each issue of *Synaxis* thus strives to initiate a dialogue by prompting a multitude of questions. In this issue, for example, Plato commences the conversation by asking if the invention of writing will do more harm than good. Leaping forward a couple of millennia, Warren Farha, proprietor of Eighth Day Books, poses a key question for the physical book in an age of the e-book: Why bother? (His characterization of the e-book as gnostic and his argument for a sacramental quality to the physical book was so provocative that I honor it here as a source of my idealism's conversion into action for this project.)

Shifting the conversation back a step by heeding the counsel of Socrates, who says that it is foolish to talk about quality and purpose before asking the more fundamental question of essence, Eva Brann, Tutor and former Dean of St. John's College, elaborates a fourfold explanation to her question: What is a book?

After a fictional piece by Christopher Morley that describes the disruptive, humbling, and ordering function of books, Dale Allison, Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Early Christianity at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, ponders the fate of the Church's Book: In an age that emphasizes speed-reading, can people still read slowly, attentively, and meditatively to discover the allusive biblical riches of what he describes as "an intertextual wonderland"? If Farha's sources are correct in asserting that electronic reading is fundamentally changing the way our brains function, i.e., an increasing inability to focus and remember, then Allison's piece is even more compelling, and the next two articles offer a possible remedy: "A Cordial Reading of God's Word" by Erasmo Leiva-Merikais, Professor of Literature and Theology at the University of San Francisco, and "Children's Classics and Orthodox Spirituality" by Joshua Sturgill, Eighth Day Books employee and

Eighth Day Institute board member.

While attentive reading of great books, especially the Bible, is undoubtedly important, Chapter Six presents an unexpected turn. For an inaugural issue that is admittedly a sort of ode to and defense of the printed book, this chapter is the most challenging. In his article "Caveat Lector," David Fagerberg, Associate Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame and Director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy, ponders the nature of theology and offers both critique and praise of books and the function they play in the life of a theologian. The supplemental article by Fagerberg's teacher and mentor, Aidan Kavanagh (late Professor Emeritus of Liturgics at Yale Divinity School) explores the negative consequences of Gutenberg's invention of the printing press: how Europe slid into textual obsession with the Bible and thus shifted the locus of discoverable truth from icon-covered walls, stain-glassed windows, and liturgical action to an exclusive locus of the biblical text. Although this chapter's argument seems to contradict the trajectory of this issue, it actually strengthens the thesis of "The Crystal Goblet," an earlier supplemental piece by the typographer Beatrice Warde that contends for a "transparent page" in which type functions like a window through which one focuses upon the ideas communicated rather than the quality of the type itself.

The penultimate chapter returns the conversation to the printed book, as Eric Gill, Catholic sculptor and typographer, explores the relevance of the hand-printing press for an industrial economy and considers how the nature of a book as something to be read should influence the production of a book (e.g., quality of paper, size of the book, kind of type, layout of text, etc.). As an echo to Gill and a strong influence on our own editorial stance, Barry Moser, renowned illustrator and proprietor of the Pennyroyal Press, emphasizes the wholeness of the book, "one wherein the materials, text, design, and pictures are so coherently joined that not one of the parts can be separated from it without diminishing the whole or even the parts themselves. . . . [A] book is . . . a coherent and intelligent marriage of text, type, and image."

The final chapter brings this issue's dialogue full circle, as educator and cultural critic Neil Postman questions Thamus' conclusion in Plato's *Phaedrus* that the technology of letters would be nothing but a burden on society. Affirming Postman's conclusion that every technology brings both burden and blessing and thus

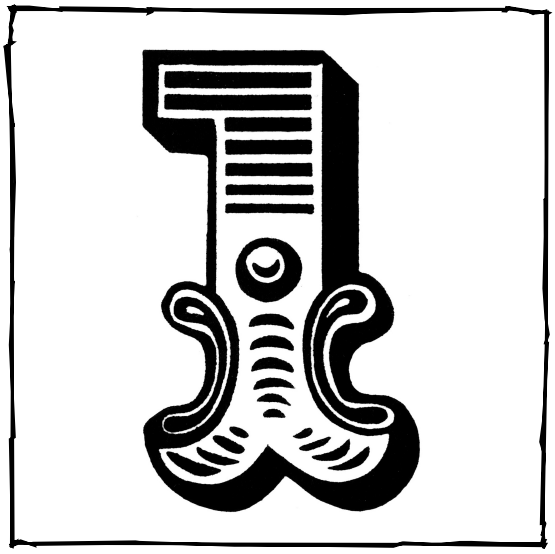
needs a good dose of Thamusian skepticism rather than Luddite rejection, the final selection, by Gregory Wolfe, founder and editor of *Image Journal*, contemplates the implications of the current and dramatic shift from a textual age to a virtual age, particularly for the Judeo-Christian tradition, which emphasizes sacred books and a Christian Savior called the divine *Word*. Hopefully the conversation across the centuries will be apparent. It is your job to listen attentively and, as Postman concludes, "join in it, revitalize it."

I would be remiss if I did not end by acknowledging the profound influence of Eighth Day Books. Warren has been peddling the classics for most of his life (his dream of starting a press to reprint works which have undeservedly fallen out of print became a reality about a decade ago – see the list of titles at the end of Chaper One). His relentless focus on the timeless – whether on the shelves in the brick-&-mortar store, on the pages of the catalog, or in the titles reprinted by the press – has shaped my vision for this journal. In addition to including a final word by a Father of the Church, practically all of the supplemental pieces are written by timeless authors. Moreover, our rule for gathering material to include in *Synaxis* is unabashedly based on the Eighth Day Catalogue's stated criteria for selecting books:

> We hope there is a coherence within this eccentric community of books, an organizing principle of selection: if a book sheds light on ultimate questions in an excellent way, then it's a worthy candidate for inclusion. Our desire is to provide a coherence of literature – be it history, theology, poetry, fiction, or cultural affairs – that explores those things that are beautiful, good, and true.

We, too, hope for an eccentric but coherent community of literature drawn from diverse genres that sheds light on ultimate questions and points readers to the Platonic trinity of the *good*, the *true*, and the *beautiful* which emanates from the One Triune God.

Heeding the opening epigraphic counsels, we pray that what follows will set forth the truth to help you and your fellow readers ascend to God. Like Eliot, we offer it without *too* much hope. However, our idealism compels us to hope this periodical gathering will in some small way contribute to the renewal of our culture.



WHY BOTHER WITH BOOKS?

We have preserved the Book, and the Book has preserved us.
David Ben-Gurion

AND YET THE BOOKS

Czeslaw Milosz

AND YET THE BOOKS will be there on the shelves,
separate beings,
That appeared once, still wet
As shining chestnuts under a tree in autumn,
And, touched, coddled, began to live
In spite of fires on the horizon, castles blown up,
Tribes on the march, planets in motion.
"We are," they said, even as their pages
Were being torn out, or a buzzing flame
Licked away their letters. So much more durable
Than we are, whose frail warmth
Cools down with memory, disperses, perishes.
I imagine the earth when I am no more:
Nothing happens, no loss, it's still a strange pageant,
Women's dresses, dewy lilacs, a song in the valley.
Yet the books will be there on the shelves, well born,
Derived from people, but also from radiance, heights.

 Composed at Berkeley in 1986, "And Yet the Books" appears on p. 468. Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2004) was a Polish poet, prose writer, and translator.

PHAEDRUS

Plato

SOCRATES: Enough appears to have been said by us of a true and false art of speaking.

PHAEDRUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: But there is something yet to be said of propriety and impropriety of writing.

PHAEDRUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Do you know how you can speak or act about rhetoric in a manner which will be acceptabe to God?

PHAEDRUS: No, indeed. Do you?

SOCRATES: I have heard a tradition of the ancients, whether true or not they only know; although if we had found the truth ourselves, do you think that we should care much about the opinions of men?

PHAEDRUS: Your question needs no answer; but I wish that you would tell me what you say that you have heard.

This portion of *Phaedrus* may be found in B. Jowett, tr., *The Dialogues of Plato, Vol. 1* (New York: Random House, 1937), pp. 277-278; for the complete dialogue, see pp. 233-282. Plato (429-347 B.C.) was a Greek philosopher, disciple of Socrates, great dialogist, and founder of the Academy in Athens.

Synaxis 1 :1

SOCRATES: At the Egyptian city of Naucratis, there was a famous old god, whose name was Theuth; the bird which is called the Ibis is sacred to him, and he was the inventor of many arts, such as arithmetic and calculation and geometry and astronomy and draughts and dice, but his great discovery was the use of letters. Now, in those days the god Thamus was the king of the whole country of Egypt; and he dwelt in that great city of Upper Egypt which the Hellenes call Egyptian Thebes, and the god himself is called by them Ammon. To him came Theuth and showed his inventions, desiring that the other Egyptians might be allowed to have the benefit of them; he enumerated them, and Thamus enquired about their several uses, and praised some of them and censured others, as he approved or disapproved of them. It would take a long time to repeat all that Thamus said to Theuth in praise or blame of the various arts. But when they came to letters, "This," said Theuth, "will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; it is a specific both for the memory and for the wit." Thamus replied: "O most ingenious Theuth, the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance, you who are the father of letters, from a paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute to them a quality

. . . the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance, you who are the father of letters, from a paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute to them a quality which they cannot have; for this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories . . . they will be hearers of many things and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality.

which they cannot have; for this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing;

they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality."

WHY BOTHER WITH BOOKS?

Warren Farha

I'VE BEEN CHARGED with the task of explaining in some coherent form "why books?" – that is, paper and ink between covers – rather than "books" in some digital format, whether displayed on a conventional computer screen, a "tablet," Kindle or Nook, iPad, or any variety of handheld objects. I think I was given the task because I've held forth with friends on many occasions (sometimes after a glass or two of wine) about the superiority of the former, and I must have waxed eloquent a time or two. Now I have my reward in full: to speak in an organized fashion, and without the accompanying wine. May God be with you, and me.

I admit this issue is visceral for me, but not only because my vocation is the selling of conventional books. It touches me at points of my development as a human being, so I'll continue here in a personal mode with some artifacts from my childhood, teenage years, and early adulthood. These artifacts are all, as you might have guessed, books.

Here is a copy of the very first book I remember "reading" – that is, as a four-year-old who could not yet really read, looking at the pages and narrating the story as best I could by looking at and

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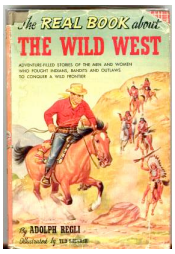
Originally presented at St. George Orthodox Cathedral in Wichita, KS, for the First Annual Eighth Day Symposium, January 29, 2011. Warren Farha is the owner of Eighth Day Books in Wichita, KS.

interpreting the interspersed illustrations. From the small bookshelf of books my family owned at the time, it was called *The Real Book about the Wild West*, by Adolph Regli (published in 1952 by Franklin Watts, and part of a series of books titled *Real Books*). I remember what seemed hours lying on our green-carpeted living room floor with this book, in my initial stages of reading. There were, of course, hours more with this book after I really *could* read, now absorbing the engrossing narratives and unconsciously developing a love for history.

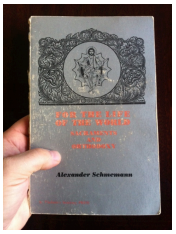


At age seven, in second grade, I happened to check out from the school library *George Washington* (published 1936), by the wonderful Norwegian husband and wife author/illustrator team of Edgar and Ingri D'Aulaire (their *Abraham Lincoln* won the Caldecott Award in 1939). The book's combination of unforgettably-vivid lithographed color illustrations, unabashed hero-worship, and patriotism, all conveyed in a compelling narrative, absolutely captivated me. For years after encountering this book, I drew pictures of George Washington and imagined scenes from the American Revolution, after the style and colors of the D'Aulaires. And I voraciously read books – both fiction and nonfiction – about American history, and specifically the Revolution. The pursuit was not due to any class assignments, but to my fawning love sparked by a couple of books, to the indelible imprints these discrete objects made on my forming mind and soul.

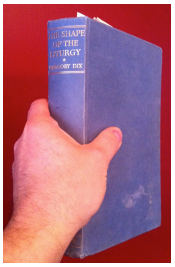
Fast-forward some ten years. I'm a high school junior, a cradle Orthodox Christian, caught up in the so-called "Jesus Movement" of the early 1970s sweeping the country at the time. I had a newfound enthusiasm for the Faith but few intellectual resources with which to undergird it. But I was a reader, and I was reading. In a footnote of a book I was reading called *Who Says God Created . . . ?* I saw a reference to a book by C. S. Lewis called *Mere Christianity*. I bought and read the book – *this* book. This cheap, mass-market paperback, *permanently* green and white, the text of which I boldly underlined in blue ink, *this book*, now barely

intact. *This* book, immeasurably forming my apprehension of the content and extent of Christian faith, exciting my imagination and expanding my comprehension of its vastness and wisdom. I went on to read a good portion of the Lewis corpus. It opened to me worlds of discovery not only in Christian apologetics, but in philosophy, mythology, literary criticism, and memoir. The foundations, as it turned out, of a bookstore.

A year later, I received a book by an Orthodox seminarian who had been assigned for a summer to our local parish. He quickly became a mentor to me, and brought my Orthodox roots into closer connection with my Jesus Movement enthusiasms. It was this book, *For the Life of the World* by Alexander Schmemann (in my memory permanently silver-covered with a lovely inscription on the title page from the giver), that interpreted all of salvation history through the lens of the Liturgy. It laid down a template by which to worship, by which to comprehend worship, by which to aspire to a way of living as a fully human being.



One more way station, ten years later: now married, working, but laid up for a few weeks with a slipped disc. I'm contentedly lying on a bed, enduring the pain with the prescribed Percodan. I'm reading Dom Gregory Dix's monumental *The Shape of the Liturgy* (*this* book, now jacketless, but which used to inhabit a forest-green jacket). And I'm learning that Schmemann's *For the Life of the World* meditations converge with the actual history of the Liturgy. I'm learning that the primordial Christian tradition of what we do in worship and in life in its fullness is in essence what Schmemann described as fulfilling our vocation as priests: giving thanks and joining ourselves to Christ's perfect self-offering to the Father. Here's the decisive passage from Dix, parts of which I can almost quote by heart:



> From the days of Clement of Rome in the first century, for whom our Lord is the "High-priest of our offerings" Who is "in the heights of the heavens" it can be said with truth that this doctrine of the offering of the earthly eucharist by the heavenly Priest at

> the heavenly altar is to all intents and purposes the only conception of the Eucharistic sacrifice which is known anywhere in the church. . . . I have read every sentence of every Christian author extant from the period before Nicaea, most of it probably eight or a dozen times or oftener. It is difficult to prove a negative from so vast and disparate a mass of material, but I have paid particular attention to this point for some years. I think I can state as a fact that . . . there is *no* pre-Nicene author Eastern or Western whose Eucharistic doctrine is at all fully stated, who does not regard the offering and consecration of the eucharist as the present action of our Lord Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity. And in the overwhelming majority of writers it is made clear that their whole conception revolves around the figure of the High-priest at the altar in heaven. (*The Shape of the Liturgy*, p. 253)

Dix's reading of "every sentence of every Christian author extant before the period of Nicaea" – an astounding claim given the enormous number of books from the period – resulted in a book that permanently enriched my participation in the life of the Church.

I could go on with other books – I am powerfully tempted. And I'm certain that each of you has a comparable set of books and memories that have indelibly shaped, informed, or changed your lives. But I hope you catch my meaning. Books – real, discrete objects – have been my own personal Bethels, "stones" that marked times of specific epiphanies for me. The object and the experience they mediated are inseparable.

Of course, there is also much to praise about physical books along more pedestrian lines, as marvelous technological objects in themselves. Listen to Robert Darnton, Renaissance scholar and director of the Harvard Library system, from his essay "E-Books and Old Books":

> Consider the book. It has extraordinary staying power. Ever since the invention of the codex sometime close to the birth of Christ, it has proven to be a marvelous machine – great for packaging information, convenient to thumb through, comfortable to curl up with, superb for storage, and remarkably resistant to damage. It does not need to be upgraded or downloaded, ac-

> cessed or booted, plugged into circuits or extracted from webs. Its design makes it a delight to the eye. Its shape makes it a delight to the eye. Its shape makes it a pleasure to hold in the hand. And its handiness has made it the basic tool of learning for thousands of years. (*The Case for Books,* p. 68)

SO NOW WE TURN from physical books – whether stone tablet, scroll, or codex – each of which have been the conveyors of thought for many millennia, to the electronic digital world in which we have been immersed for the last twenty years or so. The blindingly rapid rise of the internet (and the digital books it makes possible), I must admit, is as momentous as Gutenberg's press or the Industrial Revolution and all the electronic and communications revolutions that followed in its train. It seems unarguable that nothing's been the same since the internet arrived: we do business differently, buy and sell, pay and receive, communicate, organize our schedules, and *read* differently now. In breathtaking ways the internet is changing the structure of our whole civilization. And I think, if anything, I'm understating things.

Paleontologist Scott Sampson, in a short reflection in a collection called *Is the Internet Changing the Way You Think?* conveniently sums up the fundamental pro and con of the internet as the "Great Source for information and the Great Distraction, fostering compulsions to stay connected" (p. 244). On the "pro" side, we must give the internet its due. It is marvelous and almost magical, multiplying many times the store of knowledge available to anyone in mere moments, facilitating communication beyond our wildest imaginations even a half-century ago, and simplifying and accelerating hosts of previously tedious tasks. It's not hard to make a long list of the great things the internet has done for us, perhaps the most jaw-dropping (but potentially insidious) being Google's ongoing project to scan and make available digitally nearly every book in the world – the Google Book Search (to which we will return a bit later). Yes, the internet is a wondrous tool, indeed. The problem is, as with many new technologies, we forget that it is a tool. Instead of using the tool, the tool begins to use us. We be-

come unconscious of being used, as we are numbed by immersion in a new kind of technological miasma. Of course, Neil Postman dissected all this twenty years ago in his book *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*.

There has been an increasing torrent of books and articles recently reflecting on the internet as the "Great Distraction," and I've read a few. The first I'll mention is (provocatively titled) *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*, published in 2008 by Emory University English professor and former director of research and analysis at the National Endowment for the Arts, Mark Bauerlein. Bauerlein is *not* saying that "the Millennials" – those youth who've grown up in the Digital Age – are less intelligent than their predecessors. He *is* saying that due to the digital environment in which they live and move and have their being, they are working with a much smaller store of *acquired* knowledge, contrasting the dizzying quantity of information available online with that which has actually been embraced and mastered. Bauerlein collaborated with Dana Gioia, Catholic poet and head of the NEA from 2002-2009, in publishing the influential NEA reports *Reading at Risk* and *To Read or Not To Read: A Question of National Consequence*, which combine careful research and a sense of urgency about the rapid decline of reading in all age groups in the United States. The omnipresence of numerous screens – television, PCs, laptops, iPads, tablets, increasingly sophisticated cell phones – and their facilitation of immersion in texting and social media during all waking hours have steadily pushed aside time devoted to reading or attendance to serious music, theater, and fine art. Bauerlein warns:

> Every hour on MySpace, then, means an hour not practicing a musical instrument or learning a foreign language or watching C-SPAN. Every cell-phone call interrupts a chapter of Harry Potter or a look at the local paper. These are mind-maturing activities, and they don't have to involve Great Books and Big Ideas. They have only to cultivate habits of analysis and reflection, and implant knowledge of the world beyond. . . . Digital tools have designs on the eyes and ears of the kids, and they pursue them aggressively. Once youths enter the digital realm, the race for attention begins, and it doesn't like to stop for a half-

> hour with a novel or a trip to the museum. Digital offerings don't like to share, and tales of Founding Fathers and ancient battles and Gothic churches can't compete with a message from a boyfriend, photos from the party, and a new device in the Apple Store window. (*The Dumbest Generation*, pp. xi-xii)

Bauerlein goes on to report the sad collusion between avant-garde educators and the digital media industry to dethrone the book from its traditional place at the center of the school and the library, convinced that substituting digital reading on laptops and tablets is equivalent to reading books. He recounts one instance after another of libraries emptying their shelves of books, hundreds of millions of dollars spent to create wireless and paperless schools, with negligible or net negative results for the students. As the researcher behind the *Reading at Risk* report, Bauerlein has the expertise to marshal study after survey after anecdote to back up his dark vision of the increasingly desiccated nature of youth literacy and general historical and cultural awareness. He sees it as a threat not only to the quality and workplace preparedness of the graduates of our schools, but to the vitality and coherence of our communities and of democracy itself.

Whereas Bauerlein's book focuses mostly on the young, a book written in the same key strikes some different notes, no less alarming. Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* is an extension of the author's famous (or notorious) article in *The Atlantic*, published in 2008, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" Carr, a media and technology analyst, after "over a decade spending a lot of time online, searching and surfing" in the line of duty, began to be troubled after he realized that he had difficulty reading a book or a substantive article:

> My mind would get caught up in the twists of the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I'd spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That's rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration starts to drift after a page or two. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do. I feel like I'm always dragging my wayward brain back to the text. The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle. (*The Shallows*, pp. 5-6)

Carr freely grants that "The Web's been a godsend to me as a writer. Research that once required days in the stacks or periodical rooms of libraries can now be done in minutes. A few Google searches, some quick clicks on hyperlinks, and I've got the telltale fact or the pithy quote I was after" (p. 6). He describes the initial exhilaration of new technologies:

> The flood of free content [is turning] into a tidal wave. Headlines streamed around the clock through my Yahoo home page and my RSS feed reader. One click on a link led to a dozen or a hundred more. . . . I started letting my newspaper and magazine subscriptions lapse. Who needed them? By the time the print editions arrived, dew-dampened or otherwise, I felt like I'd already seen all the stories. (*The Shallows*, p. 16)

In an apt metaphor, Carr explains, "Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski" (p. 7). He continues:

> A serpent of doubt slithered into my info-paradise. I began to notice that the Net was exerting a much stronger and broader influence over me than my old standalone PC ever had. . . . The very way my brain worked seemed to be changing. It was then that I began worrying about my inability to pay attention to one thing for more than a couple of minutes. . . . [M]y brain, I realized, wasn't just drifting. It was hungry. It was demanding to be fed the way the Net fed it – and the more it was fed, the hungrier it became. . . . [T]he Internet, I sensed, was turning me into something like a high-speed data-processing machine. . . . I missed my old brain. (*The Shallows*, p. 16)

Carr, investigator that he is, launches forays into the history of reading, of the computer; into the history of neuroscience, recent discoveries from which emphasize the brain's "neuroplasticity" – the tendency of parts of the brain to reshape themselves in response to injury by way of compensation, or develop or atrophy by habitual use or disuse. Indeed, neurophysiology plays a significant role in Carr's narrative, as he relates scientific research revealing that interaction with the internet lights up the frontal cortex of our brains, where short term or "working" memory processes immediate experience; while reading conventional books exercises the

hippocampus, a different, deeper part of the brain associated with the transmission of long-term memory to the cortex of the brain.

All of which gives force to Carr's assertion that the internet changes the way we think. The internet, by its natural force of rapid movement from one screen to the next, from one piece of information to the hypertext's other – and the digital books to which it gives birth and to which it is so similar – occupy the lion's share of our daily online experience. Digital books share the habitual characteristics of their environment, the internet. Those experienced and embedded in the normal way of reading linear text in physical books might be able to read "deeply" the given digital text, but the increasing numbers of those immersed in a digital environment will only bring the tools given them by that environment. They will find it increasingly unnatural to read physical books, and I believe, increasingly unable and disinclined to read at all.

Carr's case against those who would seek to relativize the media of our reading becomes most passionate in his chapter, "The Church of Google." In it we are told of Google's self-described mission, "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," which, we are told by Google CEO Eric Schmidt, will take about 300 years (p. 152). (At this point I begin to get a little "creeped out," as my kids might put it, and begin to find myself mentally making Tower of Babel associations.) Google's "moon shot," as one of its chief executives put it, is the Google Book Search – the effort to scan and digitize all the books ever printed and make them "discoverable and searchable online" (p. 161). Begun in 2005, agreements with two dozen major research libraries have resulted in Google's digitizing over ten million books in the public domain (complex issues involved in scanning books under copyright are at stake in a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in New York City, the decisions from which will be of indefinite yet immense consequence for copyright law and for the future of Google Book Search). The results frighten Carr, who warns:

> The inevitability of turning the pages of books into online images should not prevent us from considering the side-effects. To make a book discoverable and searchable online is also to dis-

> member it. The cohesion of its text, the linearity of its argument or narrative as it flows through scores of pages, is sacrificed. What that ancient Roman craftsman wove together when he created the first codex is unstitched. The quiet that was "part of the meaning" of the codex is sacrificed as well. Surrounding every page or snippet of text on GBS is a welter of links, tools, tabs, and ads, each eagerly angling for a share of the reader's fragmented attention. (*The Shallows*, p. 165)

Of course, we need not wait for the completion of the GBS project to observe the rapid digitization of books and their consumption via Kindles and Nooks and Sony Readers and iPads. E-books are here, and will never go away. Their manifest qualities of convenience and immense storage capabilities are imposing, seeming to render any objections silly and Luddite. They are already selling in the millions and rapidly reconfiguring the publishing and bookselling industries. Books have been transformed into commodities since Gutenberg, but with the capability of downloading them onto handheld devices, a revolution is occurring, heedless of the long-term consequences. Books might now descend from being commodities to the ephemeral, disposable level of e-mails.

Nicholas Carr cuts to the chase in a passage from a short essay in the collection edited by John Brockman, *Is the Internet Changing the Way You Think?* After relating what to me is a pure nightmare scenario, the decision by a prestigious prep school in Massachusetts to empty its library of books and install "state-of-the-art computers with high-definition screens for research and reading," he quotes the headmaster as saying, "it is utterly immaterial to me whether they're doing [their readings] by way of a Kindle or by way of a paperback" (pp. 1-2). Carr begs to differ:

> Tracy [the headmaster] is wrong. The medium does matter. It matters greatly. The experience of reading words on a networked computer, whether it's a PC, an iPhone, or a Kindle, is very different from the experience of reading those same words in a book. As a technology, a book focuses our attention, isolates us from the myriad distractions that fill our everyday lives. A networked computer does precisely the opposite. It is designed to scatter our attention. It doesn't shield us from environmental distractions; it adds to them. The words on a computer screen

> exist in a welter of contending stimuli. (*Is the Internet Changing the Way You Think?*, p. 7)

I FIND ALL OF THIS deeply saddening and ask myself what has really been the origin of the foregoing observations. Why am I so sad? Is it because I sell books, and selling e-books holds no appeal? Is it because e-books threaten my livelihood? I think I can honestly answer no (there are many more immediate threats). I also reject what might be called the aesthetic objection to the electronic book (which I think can easily descend into sentimentality), declaiming the beauty of physical books as objects, the way they smell, the way they feel, etc. No, there is a more profound objection and resistance to the e-book, which, for lack of a better label, I'll call *theological*.

I'll just say it: e-books are a Gnostic technology that nourishes Gnostic tendencies. I'm being serious. I've been taught, and know historically, that Gnosticism is the ur-heresy. When we read physical books, the text is physically mediated in a delightful, infinite variety of ways. The word comes incarnate in ink and paper and covers. The word in e-books, I know, is also physically mediated, but it tends toward the virtual and renders the medium, well, immaterial. Just as the Docetic variety of early Christian Gnosticism taught that Christ only seemed to be human, so e-books lend a ghostly air to the screen presence of whatever text it displays.

I'll just say it: e-books are a Gnostic technology that nourishes Gnostic tendencies. . . . When we read physical books, the text is physically mediated in a delightful, infinite variety of ways. The word comes incarnate in ink and paper and covers.

I began this talk by relating a number of books and the deeply formative reading experiences they rendered, saying that "the object and the experience they mediated are inseparable." I can't imagine saying the same about any electronic reading experience. Yes, the electronic text is "there" – but just barely. There's not very much "there," there. The incarnate element involved in read-

ing has nearly disappeared, and our nature as composite beings of flesh and spirit – this nature for which Christ took flesh – are left strangely starved. Our physical natures, yearning for incarnate spiritual experience, are considered irrelevant. There is no longer a sense of journey or pilgrimage through a story, as anyone knows who's read a long text with delight or arduous sweat. The e-text floats in a boundless sea of nearly identical pages, and any sense of beginning, middle, and end has fled away. In a physical book, the text has particularity, to which we can relate even spatially – how many times have you been looking for a sentence or a passage, and said something like, "It's on the right hand page, about three lines from the top"? And this memory was immediate and precious to you? The proponent of the digital book might reply by doing an electronic search of his text and immediately locate the sought passage, but is there a real sense of *where it is* in relation to the rest of the book? The book itself is marked by our journey through it – yellow highlighter here, coffee stain there, spaghetti sauce spattered on page 45. We yearn for physicality – it's our created nature – and books satisfy. We mark them, they mark us. It's an intricate, beautiful physical/spiritual dance. "The object and the experience they mediated are inseparable." I might just as well have said that good books – good words incarnate – are sacramental. Mediators of grace. And consistent with our nature.

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Recovered Body
by Scott Cairns

No dimension of real human existence is ignored in these poems: faith, doubt, sexuality, mortality. For Cairns to separate the spirit from the body would be to ignore "*the very issue which / induced the Christ to take on flesh*." Thus, in *Recovered Body*, we meet Christ where he inhabits the physical, where the "*mystery of spirit [is] graved / in what is commonplace and plain – / the broken brittle crust, the cup*." In this way, Cairns' poems are sacramental – dramatic events that lead us to the cusp of faith's mysteries, where, for example, the import of "The Turning of Lot's Wife," can be seen anew: "In the impossible interval where she stood, Marah saw that she could not turn her back on even one doomed child of the city, but must turn her back instead upon the saved." Or where the story of Adam and Eve reveals that "The Entrance of Sin" comes not simply from an appetite for the forbidden, but also from a withdrawal from the body of creation, which God had deemed very good: "The beginning of loss was this: every time some manner of beauty was offered and declined, the subsequent isolation each conceived was irresistible." For all their theological weight, however, Cairns' poems never feel heavy. Like W. H. Auden, Cairns possesses a keen wit and a good ear. His graceful language enables him to speak naturally from within the Incarnational paradox, toward moments when word almost becomes act, when the presence of Christian mystery is palpable: "*All loves are bodily, require / that the lips part, and press their trace / of secrecy upon the one / beloved*."

74 pp. paper $16.00

Discerning the Mystery : An Essay on the Nature of Theology *by Andrew Louth*

Published over twenty-five years ago, this book is still the finest critique of the Enlightenment's ways of knowing, coupled with a winsome description of a distinctly Christian alternative. Responding to what he sees as a "division and fragmentation" both in theology and the larger culture due to "the one-sided way we have come to seek and recognize truth manifest in the way in which all concern with truth has been relinquished to the sciences," Louth sets out to describe the source of that fragmentation and to challenge the notion that we must "accept the lot

bequeathed to us by the Enlightenment." He carefully reviews central themes of several precursors who have already forged a critique of the epistemological imperialism of the Enlightenment, principally Giambattista Vico, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, who in distinct ways demonstrated the legitimacy of the humanities' unique apprehension of truth. Further relativizing Enlightenment claims, Michael Polanyi proposed that science itself depends on non-empirical elements of investigation for its method to function, what he termed "the tacit dimension." It is here that Louth sees a "pattern underlying the apprehension of truth" that is strikingly similar to that of the Fathers of the Church, who set forth an approach to knowing and experiencing truth that ultimately can be "seen and heard and handled" (1 John 1:1-3), but only by those who reside in the bosom of the Church's tradition and avail themselves of ways of knowing unique to it. Louth's rather brilliant rehabilitation of the Fathers' use of allegory in scriptural interpretation, which interweaves Scripture and tradition seamlessly, illustrates this approach. The matrix of allegory requires and manifests the "tacit dimension" of the guidance of the Spirit, and underlines the theologian's need to hear Him. Or as Evagrios of Pontus might put it, "Knowledge of God – the breast of the Lord. To recline there – the making of a theologian."

150 pp. paper $25.00

Orthodox Spirituality and the Philokalia

by Placide Deseille; translated by Anthony P. Gythiel

The *Philokalia* is unrivaled in importance among Orthodox ascetical writings. Yet like the Scriptures themselves, it is a collection of texts complex in origin and transmission, written over a period of a thousand years and assuming of its readers an intimate familiarity with its vocabulary and presuppositions. *Orthodox Spirituality and the Philokalia* is perhaps the only book entirely devoted to describing the essential elements of the tradition that gave birth to the *Philokalia* and then nourished its teaching generation after generation. It is a work – the first to appear in English by Placide Deseille – of profound scholarship and devotion, historical narrative, and topical anthology. Historical sections begin and end the book, offering a succinct outline of Orthodox spirituality as it relates to what Deseille calls "the philocalic tradition," from St. Anthony the Great to the present day, and the concluding discussion highlights the fragmented but fascinating presence of that tradition in the Christian West. The centerpiece of Deseille's work is the anthology with commentary, arranged according to themes such as deification (related to both Christology and anthropology), the sacraments, hesychastic prayer, mercy and charity, spiritual warfare, purity of heart, and contemplation. Deseille, a Cistercian priest-become-Orthodox monk, offers here the fruit of a lifetime's scholarship and existential pursuit of what it means to live

as a contemporary of the Fathers, a fellow pilgrim with them in the journey "toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

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by Fr. Paul O'Calloghan

This is a profoundly humble book in the sense of the Latin root of the word which indicates "from which something grows." The "soil" for this book is rich: the insights of Aristotle, biblical paradigms of friendship (David and Jonathan, Christ and the Beloved Disciple, Christ and Mary, Martha, and Lazarus), the reflections of the Church Fathers, and exemplars of contemporary moral and theological reflection such as David Ford, Pavel Florensky, John Zizioulas, John MacMurray, C. S. Lewis, Gilbert Meilaender, Paul Wadell, Carolinne White, and others. We'll extend the analogy: like soil that synthesizes its elements and transforms them, so this book is synthetic, carefully restating the essential contributions of each source while advancing them in intellectually acute and stimulating ways that make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. For Fr. Paul, an Orthodox priest, friendship is deeply revelatory of the relations of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. The pastoral reflections on the pitfalls and potentials of such a crucial aspect of our lives are among the most valuable aspects of this study. We offer it to you in hope that it will remind you, as it did us, that this overlooked dimension of our experience is a crucible of moral development, infused with a foretaste of the Kingdom.

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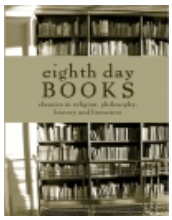

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WHAT IS A BOOK?

There is no mistaking a real book when one meets it. It is like falling in love.

Christopher Morley

SHAWL

Albert Goldbarth

EIGHT HOURS BY BUS, and night
was on them. He could see himself now
in the window, see his head there with the country
running through it like a long thought made of steel and wheat.
Darkness outside; darkness in the bus – as if the sea
were dark and the belly of the whale were dark to match it.
He was twenty: of course his eyes returned, repeatedly,
to the knee of the woman two rows up: positioned so
occasional headlights struck it into life.
But more reliable was the book; he was discovering himself
to be among the tribe that reads. Now his, the only
overhead turned on. Now nothing else existed:
only him, and the book, and the light thrown over his shoulders
as luxuriously as a cashmere shawl.

THE CRYSTAL GOBLET

Beatrice Warde

IMAGINE THAT YOU have before you a flagon of wine. You may choose your own favourite vintage for this imaginary demonstration, so that it be a deep shimmering crimson in colour. You have two goblets before you. One is of solid gold, wrought in the most exquisite patterns. The other is of crystal-clear glass, thin as a bubble, and as transparent. Pour and drink; and according to your choice of goblet, I shall know whether or not you are a connoisseur of wine. For if you have no feelings about wine one way or the other, you will want the sensation of drinking the stuff out of a vessel that may have cost thousands of pounds; but if you are a member of that vanishing tribe, the amateurs of vine vintages, you will choose the crystal, because everything about it is calculated to *reveal* rather than hide the beautiful thing which it was meant to *contain*.

Bear with me in this long-winded and fragrant metaphor; for you will find that almost all the virtues of the perfect wine-glass have a parallel in typography. There is the long, thin stem that obviates fingerprints on the bowl. Why? Because no cloud must come between your eyes and the fiery heart of the liquid. Are not the margins on book pages similarly meant to obviate the necessity

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The entirety of this piece was originally an address given to the British Typographers Guild at the St. Bride Institute, London, in 1932 and later published in 1955 in a book of Warde's essays under the same title. Beatrice Warde (1900-1969) was an American typographer, writer, and historian of printing.

of fingering the type-page? Again: the glass is colourless or at the most only faintly tinged in the bowl, because the connoisseur judges wine partly by its colour and is impatient of anything that alters it. There are a thousand mannerisms in typography that are as impudent and arbitrary as putting port in tumblers of red or green glass! When a goblet has a base that looks too small for security, it does not matter how cleverly it is weighted; you feel nervous lest it should tip over. There are ways of setting lines of type which may work well enough, and yet keep the reader subconsciously worried by the fear of "doubling" lines, reading three words as one, and so forth.

Now the man who first chose glass instead of clay or metal to hold his wine was a "modernist" in the sense in which I am going to use that term. That is, the first thing he asked of his particular object was not "*How should it look?*" but "*What must it do?*" and to that extent all good typography is modernist.

WINE IS SO STRANGE and potent a thing that it has been used in the central ritual of religion in one place and time, and attacked by a virago with a hatchet in another. There is only one thing in the world that is capable of stirring and altering men's minds to the same extent, and that is the coherent expression of thought. That is man's chief miracle, unique to man. There is no "explanation" whatever of the fact that I can make arbitrary sounds which will lead a total stranger to think my own thought. It is sheer magic that I should be able to hold a one-sided conversation by means of black marks on paper with an unknown person half-way across the world. Talking, broadcasting, writing, and printing are all quite literally forms of

thought transference, and it is the ability and eagerness to transfer and receive the contents of the mind that is almost alone responsible for human civilization.

If you agree with this, you will agree with my one main idea, i.e., that the most important thing about printing is that it conveys thought, ideas, images, from one mind to other minds. This statement is what you might call the front door of the science of typography. Within lie hundreds of rooms; but unless you start assuming that *printing is meant to convey specific and coherent ideas*, it is very easy to find yourself in the wrong house altogether.

> There is only one thing in the world that is capable of stirring and altering men's minds to the same extent [as wine], and that is the coherent expression of thought. That is man's chief miracle, unique to man. There is no "explanation" whatever of the fact that I can make arbitrary sounds which will lead a total stranger to think my own thought. It is sheer magic that I should be able to hold a one-sided conversation by means of black marks on paper with an unknown person half-way across the world.

Before asking what this statement leads to, let us see what it does not necessarily lead to. If books are printed in order to be read, we must distinguish readability from what the optician would call legibility. A page set in 14-pt Bold Sans is, according to the laboratory tests, more "legible" than one set in 11-pt Baskerville. A public speaker is more "audible" in that sense when he bellows. But a good speaking voice is one which is inaudible *as* a voice. It is the transparent goblet again! I need not warn you that if you begin listening to the inflections and speaking rhythms of a voice from a platform, you are falling asleep. When you listen to a song in a language you do not understand, part of your mind actually does fall asleep, leaving your quite separate aesthetic sensibilities to enjoy themselves unimpeded by your reasoning faculties. The fine arts do that; but that is not the purpose

of printing. Type well used is invisible *as* type, just as the perfect talking voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the transmission of words, ideas.

We may say, therefore, that printing may be delightful for many reasons, but that it is important, first and foremost, as a means of doing something. That is why it is mischievous to call any printed piece a work of art, especially fine art: because that would imply that its first purpose was to exist as an expression of beauty for its own sake and for the delectation of the senses. Calligraphy can almost be considered a fine art nowadays, because its primary economic and educational purpose has been taken away; but printing in English will not qualify as an art until the present English language no longer conveys ideas to future generations, and until printing itself hands its usefulness to some yet unimagined successor. [. . .]

THE BOOK TYPOGRAPHER has the job of erecting a window between the reader inside the room and that landscape which is the author's words. He may put up a stained-glass window of marvellous beauty, but a failure as a window; that is, he may use some rich superb type like text gothic that is something to be looked at, not *through*. Or he may work in what I call transparent or invisible typography. I have a book at home, of which I have no visual recollection whatever as far as its typography goes; when I think of it, all I see is the Three Musketeers and their comrades swaggering up and down the streets of Paris. The third type of window is one in which the glass is broken into relatively small leaded panes; and this corresponds to what is called "fine printing" today, in that you are at least conscious that there is a window there, and that someone has enjoyed building it. That is not objectionable, because of a very important fact which has to do with the psychology of the subconscious mind. That is that the mental eye focuses *through* type and not *upon* it. The type which, through any arbitrary warping of design or excess of "colour," gets in the way of the mental picture to be conveyed, is a bad type. Our subconscious is always afraid of blunders (which illogical setting, tight spacing and too-wide unleaded lines can trick us into), of

boredom, and of officiousness. The running headline that keeps shouting at us, the line that looks like one lone word, the capitals jammed together without hair-spaces – these mean subconscious squinting and loss of mental focus. [. . .]

Printing demands a humility of mind, for the lack of which many of the fine arts are even now floundering in self-conscious and maudlin experiments. There is nothing simple or dull in achieving the transparent page. Vulgar ostentation is twice as easy as discipline. When you realise that ugly typography never effaces itself, you will be able to capture beauty as the wise men capture happiness by aiming at something else. The "stunt typographer" learns the fickleness of rich men who hate to read. Not for them are long breaths held over serif and kern, they will not appreciate your splitting of hair-spaces. Nobody (save the other craftsmen) will appreciate half your skill. But you may spend endless years of happy experiment in devising that crystalline goblet which is worthy to hold the vintage of the human mind.

WHAT is A BOOK?

Eva T. H. Brann

IT IS OUR TRADITION that the first lecture of the year should be dedicated to our freshmen. They have newly joined a community whose program of learning centers on the scheduled reading of a pre-set list of books and on the twice-weekly discussion that takes place in the seminar. They have come to us chiefly because that is what we do here. I have read each of their applications, and I can vouch for the fact.

Then what sort of impression will I be making on them if I ask an absurd question like "What is a book?" – and ask it in public? Don't we, known to the world as a Great Books College, know what a book is, even what a great book is?

I was friends once with a little boy (we are still friends, but he is a big strapping lawyer now, a public defender, no less) who told me he was making a rocket to send into space. Because proper adults like to annoy little children I asked him "What do you mean, space?" He looked at me in big-eyed amazement (he was used to grown-ups having more answers than he had questions) and said incredulously: "Don't you even know what space is – you know, *outer* space?" So don't I even know what a book is, a *great* book?

"What Is a Book" first appeared in its entirety in *The St. John's Review* 41.1 (1991): 75-88. It was originally delivered as the Dean's opening lecture to freshmen for the 1991 academic year of St. John's College, Annapolis Campus. Eva Brann is a former dean (1990-1997) and the longest-serving tutor (1957-present) at St. John's College in Annapolis, MD.

Well, I do and I don't. I don't say that to create confusion. Contrary to what some of your upper-class colleagues may try to tell you, confusion is *not* our business, but rather clarification, partly because clear-headedness is one condition of open-mindedness. A slowly developing, limited clarity of mind does seem to be our business. [. . .]

There is a man – you will spend much of your year arguing with him – who intimates that it is foolish to talk about the quality and purpose of a thing before asking what it is. In the manner of this man Socrates let me then put my title question, to which we all know some obvious answers that turn increasingly unobvious under reflection: What is a book?

There is a man . . . who intimates that it is foolish to talk about the quality and purpose of a thing before asking what it is. In the manner of this man Socrates let me then put my title question, to which we all know some obvious answers that turn increasingly unobvious under reflection: What is a book?

A book appears to be, to begin with, a bodily thing. In an old college film, which I hope you get to see sometime, there is a dorm sequence of a student shouting upstairs to her friend: "Throw me down my *Iliad*." Down comes the *Iliad*. Or it might have been her *Paradise Lost*, I've forgotten. Is the *Iliad* then a thing subject to gravity, gaining distance as the square of the time? Is it *her Iliad* or Homer's *Iliad* or Achilles' *Iliad*? Where is the place of this *Iliad*? In a book, in the rhapsode's literal line-by-line memory, in the student's impressionistic memory, nowhere, in Troy, in Hades? I say Hades, because as you will soon read in the *Odyssey*, it is to the blood-drained invisible underworld that you must go to learn the great tales on which poetry works. Again, when is a book's time of being? When the story called the *Iliad* happened, in the twelfth century B.C.? When it was told, in the eighth century B.C.? When an Athenian commission first produced an official written version, in the sixth century

B.C.? Or whenever Johnnies read their seminar in the twentieth century, or, for that matter, in 1808 when the freshmen of this college (then called the "noviate class") first read Homer – in Greek? (T.F. Tilghman, *The Early History of St. John's College in Annapolis*, p. 36). Or whenever Homer's poem is at work influencing lives, as the vision of Achilles once, in the fourth century B.C., drove Alexander the Great to the deeds that made him so?

Or is it whenever the *Iliad* stands on a shelf waiting to be opened? In that most thought-provoking of children's books, Michael Ende's *Neverending Story*, the boy Sebastian, about to open the magical book he has stolen, says to himself:

> I would like to know what actually goes on in a book as long as it's closed. . . . One has to read it to experience it, that's clear. But it's already there beforehand. I would like to know, how?

These are tricky perplexities that push themselves forward when you approach this book-thing with questions such as Whose possession? In what place? At what time? Let me nonetheless stick for a while with the crudest set of solutions, those that take a book as a physical object.

Paul Scott, the author of the *Raj Quartet*, the work I think of as the most considerable novel of the time between the Second World War and our present, was much impressed by the following prosaic account of what it is to be a book:

> A small hard rectangular object, whose pages are bound along one edge into fixed covers and numbered consecutively. (*On Writing and the Novel*, p. 211, quoting Bergonzi)

As I flesh out this bare-bones definition of a bound paper book, do, please, compare what it means to read such a book with the unrolling of papyrus scroll on the one hand, and the scrolling of a computer display on the other.

Books, says the passage, are small and hard, which means they are safely carried hither and thither and can even be thrown down the stairwell. As sophomores you will read Augustine's autobiography, in which he confesses first his life of sin and finally his conversion to faith. He tells how his landlord let him use the garden

of the house Augustine was renting, and there he and his friend one day carried a book, or *codex*, as Augustine calls it, which means a set of wooden tablets, a sort of proto-book. It was not just any book, but a *codex apostoli*. It was a part of *The Book*, *to biblion*, in English, the Bible. (Let me take out a minute to say that the Greek word *biblion* means a thing made of *biblos*, which is the word for papyrus, while papyrus itself comes into English as paper.)

Augustine was, at that time, in great agony over his sins and his doubts. Suddenly, in the garden, he heard a child's voice saying over and over in a sing-song tone: "*Tolle lege, tolle lege*." "Take it and read it, take it and read it." So he took the book and read what he found, and at that moment it was, as he says in his beautiful Latin:

> Quasi luce securitas infusa cordi mea, omnes dubitationes tenebrae diffugerunt. (*Confessions* VIII, 12)

"As if a light of assurance had poured into my heart, all the shadows of doubt fled away." If the book had not been in the garden there might have been no voice, or if there had been a voice, Augustine would not have heeded it, or if he had heeded it, he would have had nothing to take up and read. And he would have missed the moment that made him, his conversion. It is because books are portable that the ready reader can sometimes come on the word fitly spoken.

To descend from the solemn to the ordinary: the bound paper book can be carried about more conveniently than most other containers of valuables except wallets – in a pocket, handgrip, or knapsack, to bed, bathroom, beach, or waiting room. How many of you spent months in high school carrying around a book until the time was ripe, and you took it and read it?

Besides being small and hard, the book of the definition is normally rectangular. Its rectangularity betokens the self-effacement of the visible layout of the text. Let me explain.

There is something called pattern poetry. An example is the Mouse's sad Tale in *Alice in Wonderland*, which looks like what it sounds like, a tail. You see here only the tail end of the tale:

‘Such a
trial
dear sir,
With no
jury or
judge,
would be
wasting
our breath.’
‘I’ll be
judge,
I’ll be
jury,’
Said
cunning
old Fury:
‘I’ll try
the whole
cause,
and
condemn
you
to
death [. . .]

The traditional book, it is true, suppresses the looking in favor of the reading. It is rectangular because it breaks the narrative into optically convenient and semantically arbitrary stacks of lines. In some traditions these are arranged horizontally, in some, like the Chinese and Japanese, vertically; some are read from left to right, and some like Hebrew, from right to left so that the book begins where an English book ends. The earliest Greek writing is sometimes read back and forth, which is called *boustrophedon*, meaning ox-turning, as in plowing. I am sure that all these conventions carry significance with them. For instance, the fact that Western readers’ eyes survey the page in the plane of the horizon back and forth, while Oriental readers move their head vertically as though nodding – there must be some meaning in that.

Next, Scott’s quotation says that the pages of a book are numbered consecutively. This pagination is, so to speak, the street ad-

dress of the narrative. That address system makes it possible to revisit locations in a book. For worthy books are meant to be read in a double way, so that the first reading is somehow already the second reading. One way is to follow the stacks of lines and the sequence of pages straight through. Of course, while we are barging on with the inexorable clock – say it is 6:30 on a seminar night – the time of the narrative warps back and forth. For example, the centerpiece of the *Odyssey*, Books IX and XII, where Odysseus turns poet and tells of the ten years when he seemed lost to the world, is all flashback; it is only with Book XIII that we return to the present of the story.

But there is a second way to scramble the time of reading. It is made possible by the fact that a book is a bound stack of numbered pages. That means you can put slips of paper or fingers in the pages you have passed. As a visible, weighty, numbered thing, a book is all there at once, and we can treat all its tale or argument as simultaneously accessible.

. . . a book is a bound stack of numbered pages. That means you can put slips of paper or fingers in the pages you have passed. As a visible, weighty, numbered thing, a book is all there at once . . .

Literary theorists have in fact invented a word for the writing that fully exploits the non-linear property of the book format. They call it "spatial" prose (J. Frank in *Spatial Form in Narrative*, 1977). It is spatial because it depends on continual back-reference, on always holding the text present, as if it were all there simultaneously just as space is – while time is always either gone or yet to come. It seems to be that the physical format of the bound book invites the writer to make spatialist demands on the reader. That does not mean that authors who may not have been writers at all, like Homer, or who wrote in scrolls that show only one place at a time, did not compose spatially. All great texts demand continual back-reference, but book texts make it mechanically easier. The theorists I have menitioned thought that the so-called "Modernist" writers, above all James Joyce, were peculiarly spatial, but you will see that every Platonic dialogue (for example)

requires you to refer back all the time – a demand which you cannot, of course, fully meet until you have studied your way through the text once. We might conjecture, on the other hand, that a people that values time and its sacred cyclical order might keep its scripture in scrolls, as do the Jews their Torah.

The other place where events that are strung out in time are kept simultaneous is memory. A book is indeed a memory analogue: an external memory. This seems to me a wonderful thing.

The last dialogue and the last book you will read this year – in May when all reading is a drag – is called the *Phaedrus*. In it Socrates will claim that any written text is pernicious because it can't answer back when questioned, and also because it acts as a pharmaceutical pacifier: It keeps you passively reminded and prevents you from being actively mindful. Readers of dialogues might point out to Socrates that the texts in which he appears do answer back, and readers of books might say that a paginated book does keep us actively casting back and forth.

Finally, a book, in Paul Scott's quotation, is bound along one edge between fixed covers. This physical fact means that books have spines; they are upright vertebrates. They normally stand on shelves next to one another. (I can't help telling you that in my private library at home only the books I respect stand up; the indifferent ones have to lie prone on the top shelves.) Only the spine shows, so a book is known by its backbone. That fact in turn means that a book is identified by author and title. In antiquity titles were evidently not always given by the author. Who knows whether Homer would have called his song about the wrath of Achilles after the name of Hector's city? Or what Aristotle would have called his lectures on being, later called by the ambiguous title *Metaphysics*, meaning either "the book that follows the *Physics*" or "the subject matter beyond nature"?

In modern times, on the other hand, titles are almost always carefully crafted announcements of the author's intention, and they are the first thing to think about as soon as you have finished the book once. Some titles reveal, some retract, some complement the contents of the book. For example, as a rising senior you will spend a glorious summer with Tolstoy's fourteen-hundred-page novel entitled *War and Peace*, of which 1340 pages are devoted to

war and sixty to peace. What did Tolstoy mean by his title? Did he mean that those last pages of peaceful family life, the so-called First Epilogue, have as much gravity, as much cosmic significance, as all the turmoil that went before? I think so, but you may find that your seminar divides around that question, which is made more interesting by the fact that the Russian word for "peace" also means "world."

THAT CONCLUDES MY unpacking of the definition of a book as a small hard rectangular object, made of paginated leaves bound along one edge. So far the answer to the question "What is a book?" has amounted to this: A book is the kind of artifact we call a medium. It is made to mediate a text to us.

In his *Physics* Aristotle will observe a fundamental twofoldness in the human world. Some things in it grow, or at least move by themselves, and these, he says, are natures. Other things are made by a human being out of some material according to a plan, and these we call artifacts. (I might say, incidentally, that one of our modern perplexities is our capability for turning natures into artifacts.) Now to figure out what a natural being or what a given artifact truly is – a house, a marble image, a tool – is complicated enough. But to think about the kind of artifact called a medium requires special subtlety. For a medium is meant to come between the receiver and the source in such a way as to convey a message while being itself overlooked. Telescopes, telephones, television sets, whose names mean respectively things for scanning objects that are far off, for hearing voices that are far off, for seeing images produced far off, are not the focus of the user's interest when they are transmitting, and go dead or empty when not in use. But as the book is not a medium that plays or replays some performance far off in space or even in time, so it is not like a tape or disk that goes inactive after it has been played. Sebastian's question – What goes on inside a book when it is closed? – is not purely phantastic; even an unread book seems to have a sort of secret vitality just because its text is all latent significance – imageless squiggles. [. . .]

To me there is something elusive and mysterious about this unpresented yet ever-present life of books which makes the question what happens within them permissible and plausible. Of course, I am too much of a coward seriously to oppose that arguments go on developing and characters go on conversing all over my library – and yet! And yet – they do seem to have done just that from reading to reading. The mystery here is that of mental life encased in a hard rectangular object.

A book, then, is a peculiar kind of medium, a medium not unlike a vessel of the spirit – that is what makes it understandable that people might kiss a book or swear on it or carry it always along.

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views from eighth day books

OF BOOKS

The Case for Books: Past, Present and Future *by Robert Darnton*

Neither a Luddite lamenting the digital age, nor an unabashed futurist trumpeting paper and ink's demise, Robert Darnton (former journalist, eighteenth-century historian, and director of Harvard University Library) offers a perspective as modern as his electronic publishing project, Gutenberg-e, and as timeless as that of Italian classicist Niccolo Perotti, who expressed disappointment with the newly invented printing press in 1471: "Because now that anyone is free to print whatever they wish, they often disregard that which is best and instead write, merely for the sake of entertainment, what would be best forgotten." These eleven essays appear in reverse chronological order: predictions about the future of books (and libraries), a look at contemporary online publishing, and reflections on the various "information ages" preceding this one. A pioneer in the field of the history of books, Darnton backs up his assertions about the "staying power of the old-fashioned codex" and celebrates the tactile beauty of paper. As a leading academic librarian, he addresses "Google and the Future of Books" and champions online access to scholarship. Readers will find much welcome consolation here.

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The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age *by Sven Birkerts*

"Being a curmudgeon is a dirty job, but somebody has to do it," Birkerts announces and proceeds to beautifully lament the quickening loss of the art of reading in our era of hypertextuality. By mixing memoir, historical narrative, and cultural critique, Birkerts argues by example against cyberspace's flattening of history, where private memory is being supplanted by public software, vertical depth is overwhelmed by horizontal "links," and hard-won, historical wisdom is losing ground to the evanescent present of the blinking cursor. While he concedes to certain advantages of a global information system, or scanning the whole of Greek literature into digital files, Birkerts' brilliant essays remind us that the truly essential, nourishing "networking" exists among a printed text, an

active reader, and the deep, ineffable "other" that all great books approach. The enthusiastically proclaimed coming digitalization and online availability of nearly every book that exists lends increased relevance to this prescient book, first published long before the advent of the e-book.

272 pp. paper $16.00

So Many Books : Reading and Publishing in an Age of Abundance *by Gabriel Zaid*

Although we rarely question the value of writing, producing, selling, and reading – books after all are our passion and our business – never have we experienced such broad confirmation of these activities as we find in *So Many Books*. Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, argued that books undermine our powers of memory and are inferior to conversation. Today's critics are more likely to point to the astounding number of titles published per year in issues of only a few thousand (more than a million) as a troubling development. But essayist Gabriel Zaid, at ease with the philosophy, history, psychology, and business of books, is their match, marshaling amazing facts and figures and constructing original arguments. Among the former are that 81% of Americans want to write a book; that Oxford University Press kept a certain translation from the Coptic into Latin (that sells an average of 2.6 copies/year) in print for 200 years; and that books that will sell for $30 to a few thousand people can't be given away to another ten thousand. Zaid weaves all into an utterly able defense of the book, and its irreplaceable contribution to cultural conversation. Touché, Socrates!

160 pp. paper $12.00

The Presence of Grace and Other Book Reviews *by Flannery O'Connor; compiled by Leo J. Zuber; edited with an introduction by Carter W. Martin*

Flannery O'Connor
d. 1964

In a review of the book *The Rosary of Our Lady*, Flannery O'Connor praises Romano Guardini using his own words: "the simpler the word expressing a truth, the more tremendous and at the same time the more deeply realized do the facts become." The same commendation can be made for O'Connor herself. The reviews collected here, most of

which were published in the Catholic newspaper *The Bulletin*, are sharp and to the point, rich with O'Connor's unique personality and sense of humor. Writing about J. F. Powers' *Morte d'Urban*, she cautions against comparing Father Urban to a "typical" American priest: "This reviewer would like to point out that Mr. Powers is a novelist; moreover a comic novelist, moreover the best one we have, and that Father Urban represents Father Urban. If you must look for anyone in him, Reader, look for yourself." Most of the books represented are by Catholics and profoundly Catholic in theme, though several works decidedly "outside the fold" offer a sense of O'Connor's palpable yet guarded ecumenical bent, such as Barth's *Evangelical Theology* and Robert Payne's *The Holy Fire*. In nearly all of the reviews, the real enjoyment comes from witnessing, as the introduction puts it, "the quality of Flannery O'Connor's mind at work on the serious intellectual content of her faith."

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translated and introduced by Jerome Taylor

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tury. Remarkable. Caroline Walker Bynum has said of it: "this treatise offers a vision of human knowledge as an integrated whole that works to perfect the human person. It is a crucial text for those interested in the study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, in the history of schools and pedagogy, and in the survival of the classical tradition in the West."

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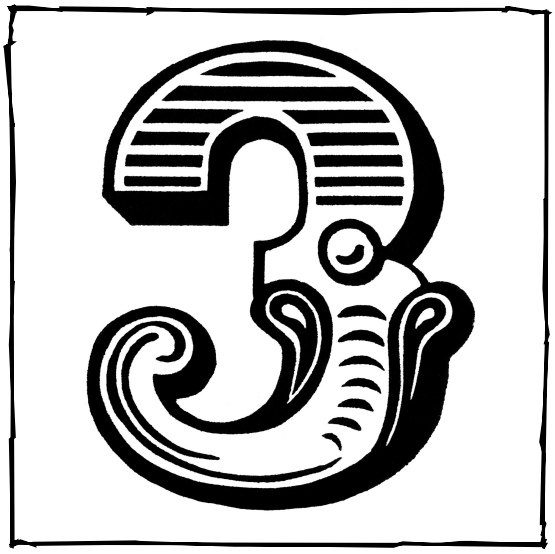

THE BOOKS OF MY LIFE

Employ your time in improving yourself by other men's writing so that you shall come easily by what others have labored hard for.

Socrates

ODE to THE DICTIONARY

Pablo Neruda
translated by Ken Krabbenhoft

BROAD OX BACK, ponderous
beast of burden, heavy book
systematized:
when I was young
I had no idea you existed, so wrapped up was I
in my own perfection:
I thought I was quite an item.
Puffed-up like a
moody bullfrog,
I pronounced: "I get
my words
straight
from rumbling Sinai.
I shall distill
their pure shapes by alchemy,
for I have magic powers."

The Book

The great Magus said nothing.

Ancient and weighty, in its worn
leather coat,
the Dictionary
held its tongue,
refusing to reveal its secrets.
But one day, after I had consulted it
and cast it aside
after I had
declared it
a useless, outworn thing,
after it had done long months
of duty as my easy chair
and pillow, without complaining,
it couldn't take it any longer: it rose up
in my doorway,
growing fast, rustling its pages
and its nests,
rustling its high branches.
It became a tree –
an authentic,
nourishing
apple tree, crab apple or orchard tree,
and words
quivered brightly in its inexhaustible canopy of leaves,
words opaque and musical,
laden with truth and sound.

I turn to
one of
your
pages:
Stodgy
Stolen

Synaxis 1:1

it's great
to form these syllables
out of air.
Farther down the page, there's
Storage,
a hollow word, waiting for olive oil or ambrosia.
And nearby there's
Stoop Stout Stove
Stork and Storm:
words
that slide by like slippery grapes
or explode when exposed to light
like blind seeds once confined
to vocabulary's cellars,
now come back to life, communicating life again.
Once again the heart burns them up.

Dictionary, you are not
a grave, a tomb, or a coffin,
neither sepulchre nor mausoleum:
you are preservation,
hidden fire,
field of rubies,
vital continuity
of essence,
language's granary.
And it is a beautiful thing,
to pluck from your columns
the precise, the noble
word,
or the harsh,
forgotten
saying,
Spain's offspring
hardened
like the blade of a plow,
secure in its role
of outmoded tool,
preserved in its precise beauty

and its medallion-toughness.
Also that other
word,
the one that slipped
between the lines
but popped suddenly,
deliciously into the mouth,
smooth as an almond
or tender as a fig.

Dictionary, guide just one
of your thousand hands, just one
of your thousand emeralds
to my mouth,
to the point of my pen,
to my inkwell
at the right
moment,
give me but a
single drop
of your virgin springs,
a single grain
from
your
generous granaries.
When most I need it,
grant me
a single trill
from your dense, musical
jungle depths, or a bee's
extravagance,
a fallen fragment
of your ancient wood perfumed
by endless seasons of jasmine,
a single
syllable,
shudder or note,
a single seed:
I am made of earth and my song is made of words.

PARNASSUS ON WHEELS

Christopher Morley

I WONDER IF THERE isn't a lot of bunkum in higher education? I never found that people who were learned in logarithms and other kinds of poetry were any quicker in washing dishes or darning socks. I've done a good deal of reading when I could, and I don't want to "admit impediments" to the love of books, but I've also seen lots of good, practical folk spoiled by too much fine print. Reading sonnets always gives me hiccups, too.

I never expected to be an author! But I do think there are some amusing things about the story of Andrew and myself and how books broke up our placid life. When John Gutenberg, whose real name (so the Professor says) was John Gooseflesh, borrowed that money to set up his printing press, he launched a lot of troubles on the world.

Andrew and I were wonderfully happy on the farm until he became an author. If I could have foreseen all the bother his writings were to cause us, I would certainly have burnt the first manuscript in the kitchen stove.

Andrew McGill, the author of those books every one reads, is my brother. In other words, I am his sister, ten years younger.

Excerpted from the first four chapters of Christopher Morley, *Parnassus on Wheels* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1917). Christopher Morley (1890-1957) was an American novelist and journalist.

Years ago Andrew was a business man, but his health failed and, like so many people in the story books, he fled to the country, or, as he called it, to the bosom of Nature. He and I were the only ones left in an unsuccessful family. I was slowly perishing as a conscientious governess in the brownstone region of New York. He rescued me from that and we bought a farm with our combined savings. We became real farmers, up with the sun and to bed with the same. Andrew wore overalls and a soft shirt and grew brown and tough. My hands got red and blue with soapsuds and frost; I never saw a Redfern advertisement from one year's end to another, and my kitchen was a battlefield where I set my teeth and learned to love hard work. Our literature was government agriculture reports, patent medicine almanacs, seedsmen's booklets, and Sears Roebuck catalogues. We subscribed to *Farm and Fireside* and read the serials aloud. Every now and then, for real excitement, we read something stirring in the Old Testament – that cheery book Jeremiah, for instance, of which Andrew was very fond. The farm did actually prosper, after a while; and Andrew used to hang over the pasture bars at sunset, and tell, from the way his pipe burned, just what the weather would be the next day.

As I have said, we were tremendously happy until Andrew got the fatal idea of telling the world how happy we were. I am sorry to have to admit he had always been rather a bookish man. In his college days he had edited the students' magazine, and sometimes he would get discontented with the *Farm and Fireside* serials and pull down his bound volumes of the college paper. He would read me some of his youthful poems and stories and mutter vaguely about writing something himself some day. I was more concerned with sitting hens than with sonnets and I'm bound to say I never took these threats very seriously. I should have been more severe.

Then great-uncle Philip died, and his carload of books came to us. He had been a college professor, and years ago when Andrew was a boy Uncle Philip had been very fond of him – had, in fact, put him through college. We were the only near relatives, and all those books turned up one fine day. That was the beginning of the end, if I had only known it. Andrew had the time of his life building shelves all round our living-room; not content with that he turned the old hen house into a study for himself, put in a stove,

and used to sit up there evenings after I had gone to bed. The first thing I knew he called the place Sabine Farm (although it had been known for years as Bog Hollow) because he thought it a literary thing to do. He used to take a book along with him when he drove over to Redfield for supplies, sometimes the wagon would be two hours late coming home, with old Ben loafing along between the shafts and Andrew lost in his book.

I didn't think much of all this, but I'm an easy-going woman and as long as Andrew kept the farm going I had plenty to do on my own hook. Hot bread and coffee, eggs and preserves for breakfast; soup and hot meat, vegetables, dumplings, gravy, brown bread and white, huckleberry pudding, chocolate cake and buttermilk for dinner; muffins, tea, sausage rolls, blackberries and cream, and doughnuts for supper – that's the kind of menu I had been preparing three times a day for years. I hadn't any time to worry about what wasn't my business.

And then one morning I caught Andrew doing up a big, flat parcel for the postman. He looked so sheepish I just had to ask what it was.

"I've written a book," said Andrew, and he showed me the title page:

PARADISE REGAINED
by
ANDREW MCGILL

Even then I wasn't much worried, because of course I knew no one would print it. But Lord! a month or so later came a letter from a publisher – accepting it! [. . .]

I have since thought that "Paradise Lost" would have been a better title for that book. It was published in the autumn of 1907, and since that time our life has never been the same. By some mischance the book became the success of the season; it was widely commended as "a gospel of health and sanity" and Andrew received, in almost every mail, offers from publishers and magazine editors who wanted to get hold of his next book. [. . .]

You can imagine that it didn't take long for Andrew to become spoiled at this rate! The next year he suddenly disappeared, leaving only a note on the kitchen table, and tramped all over the state for

six weeks collecting material for a new book. I had all I could do to keep him from going to New York to talk to editors and people of that sort. Envelopes of newspaper cuttings used to come to him, and he would pore over them when he ought to have been ploughing corn. Luckily the mail man comes along about the middle of the morning when Andrew is out in the fields, so I used to look over the letters before he saw them. After the second book (*Happiness and Hayseed* it was called) was printed, letters from publishers got so thick that I used to put them all in the stove before Andrew saw them – except those from the Decameron Jones people, which sometimes held checks. Literary folk used to turn up now and then to interview Andrew, but generally I managed to head them off.

But Andrew got to be less and less of a farmer and more and more of a literary man. He bought a typewriter. He would hang over the pigpen noting down adjectives for the sunset instead of mending the weather vane on the barn which took a slew so that the north wind came from the southwest. He hardly ever looked at the Sears Roebuck catalogues any more, and after Mr. Decameron came to visit us and suggested that Andrew write a book of country poems, the man became simply unbearable.

And all the time I was counting eggs and turning out three meals a day, and running the farm when Andrew got a literary fit and would go off on some vagabond jaunt to collect adventures for a new book. (I wish you could have seen the state he was in when he came back from these trips, hoboing it along the roads without any money or a clean sock to his back. One time he returned with a cough you could hear from the other side of the barn, and I had to nurse him for three weeks.) When somebody wrote a little booklet about "The Sage of Redfield" and described me as a "rural Xantippe" and "the domestic balance-wheel that kept the great writer close to the homely realities of life" I made up my mind to give Andrew some of his own medicine. And that's my story.

IT WAS A FINE, CRISP morning in fall – October I dare say – and I was in the kitchen coring apples for apple sauce. We were going to have roast pork for dinner with boiled potatoes and what Andrew calls Vandyke brown gravy. Andrew had driven

over to town to get some flour and feed and wouldn't be back till noontime.

Being a Monday, Mrs. McNally, the washerwoman, had come over to take care of the washing. I remember I was just on my way out to the wood pile for a few sticks of birch when I heard wheels turn in at the gate. There was one of the fattest white horses I ever saw, and a queer wagon, shaped like a van. A funny-looking little man with a red beard leaned forward from the seat and said something. I didn't hear what it was, I was looking at that preposterous wagon of his.

It was coloured a pale, robin's-egg blue, and on the side, in big scarlet letters, was painted:

R. MIFFLIN'S TRAVELLING PARNASSUS
GOOD BOOKS FOR SALE
Shakespeare, Charles Lamb, R. L. S., Hazlitt, & all others

Underneath the wagon, in slings, hung what looked like a tent, together with a lantern, a bucket, and other small things. The van had a raised skylight on the roof, something like an old-fashioned trolley car; and from one corner went up a stove pipe. At the back was a door with little windows on each side and a flight of steps leading up to it.

As I stood looking at this queer turnout, the little reddish man climbed down from in front and stood watching me. His face was a comic mixture of pleasant drollery and a sort of weather-beaten cynicism. He had a neat little russet beard and a shabby Norfolk jacket. His head was very bald.

"Is this where Andrew McGill lives?" he said.

I admitted it.

"But he's away until noon," I added. "He'll be back then. There's roast pork for dinner."

"And apple sauce?" said the little man.

"Apple sauce and brown gravy," I said. "That's why I'm sure he'll be home on time. Sometimes he's late when there's boiled dinner, but never on roast pork days. Andrew would never do for a rabbi."

A sudden suspicion struck me.

"You're not another publisher, are you?" I cried. "What do you

want with Andrew?"

"I was wondering whether he wouldn't buy this outfit," said the little man, including, with a wave of the hand, both van and white horse. As he spoke he released a hook somewhere, and raised the whole side of the wagon like a flap. Some kind of catch clicked, the flap remained up like a roof, displaying nothing but books – rows and rows of them. The flank of his van was nothing but a big bookcase. Shelves stood above shelves, all of them full of books – both old and new. As I stood gazing, he pulled out a printed card from somewhere and gave it to me:

ROGER MIFFLIN'S
TRAVELLING PARNASSUS
Worthy friends, my wain doth hold
Many a book, both new and old;
Books, the truest friends of man,
Fill this rolling caravan.
Books to satisfy all uses,
Golden lyrics of the Muses,
Books on cookery and farming,
Novels passionate and charming,
Every kind for every need
So that he who buys may read.
What librarian can surpass us?
MIFFLIN'S TRAVELLING PARNASSUS
By R. Mifflin, Prop't
Star Job Print, Celeryville, Va.

While I was chuckling over this, he had raised a similar flap on the other side of the Parnassus which revealed still more shelves loaded with books.

I'm afraid I am severely practical by nature.

"Well!" I said, "I should think you would need a pretty stout steed to lug that load along. It must weigh more than a coal wagon."

"Oh, Peg can manage it all right," he said. "We don't travel very fast. But look here, I want to sell out. Do you suppose that your husband would buy the outfit Parnassus, Pegasus, and all? He's fond of books, isn't he?"

"Hold on a minute!" I said. "Andrew's my brother, not my

husband, and he's altogether too fond of books. Books'll be the ruin of this farm pretty soon. He's mooning about over his books like a sitting hen about half the time, when he ought to be mending harness. Lord, if he saw this wagonload of yours he'd be unsettled for a week. I have to stop the postman down the road and take all the publishers' catalogues out of the mail so that Andrew don't see 'em. I'm mighty glad he's not here just now, I can tell you!"

I'm not literary, as I said before, but I'm human enough to like a good book, and my eye was running along those shelves of his as I spoke. He certainly had a pretty miscellaneous collection. I noticed poetry, essays, novels, cookbooks, juveniles, school books, Bibles, and what not – all jumbled together.

"Well, see here," said the little man – and about this time I noticed that he had the bright eyes of a fanatic – "I've been cruising with this Parnassus going on seven years. I've covered the territory from Florida to Maine and I reckon I've injected about as much good literature into the countryside as ever old Doc Eliot did with his five-foot shelf. I want to sell out now. I'm going to write a book about 'Literature Among the Farmers,' and want to settle down with my brother in Brooklyn and write it. I've got a sackful of notes for it. I guess I'll just stick around until Mr. McGill gets home and see if he won't buy me out. I'll sell the whole concern, horse, wagon, and books, for $400. I've read Andrew McGill's stuff and I reckon the proposition'll interest him. I've had more fun with this Parnassus than a barrel of monkeys. I used to be a school teacher till my health broke down. Then I took this up and I've made more than expenses and had the time of my life."

"Well, Mr. Mifflin," I said, "if you want to stay around I guess I can't stop you. But I'm sorry you and your old Parnassus ever came this way."

I turned on my heel and went back to the kitchen. I knew pretty well that Andrew would go up in the air when he saw that wagonload of books and one of those crazy cards with Mr. Mifflin's poetry on it.

I must confess that I was considerably upset. Andrew is just as unpractical and fanciful as a young girl, and always dreaming of new adventures and rambles around the country. If he ever saw that traveling Parnassus he'd fall for it like snap. And I knew Mr.

Decameron was after him for a new book anyway. (I'd intercepted one of his letters suggesting another *Happiness and Hayseed* trip just a few weeks before. Andrew was away when the letter came. I had a suspicion what was in it; so I opened it, read it, and – well, burnt it. Heavens! as though Andrew didn't have enough to do without mooning down the road like a tinker, just to write a book about it.) [. . .]

I'll admit that I said my next without proper calculation.

"Rather than have Andrew buy your old Parcheesi," I said, "I'll buy it myself. I'll give you $300 for it." [. . .]

I don't know whether it was the neatness of his absurd little van, or the madness of the whole proposition, or just the desire to have an adventure of my own and play a trick on Andrew, but anyway, some extraordinary impulse seized me and I roared with laughter. [. . .] I'm a home-keeping soul, I guess, and I love my kitchen and my preserve cupboard and my linen closet as well as grandmother ever did, but something in that blue October air and that crazy little red-bearded man just tickled me.

"Look here, Mr. Parnassus," I said, "I guess I'm a fat old fool but I just believe I'll do that. You hitch up your horse and van and I'll go pack some clothes and write you a check. It'll do Andrew all the good in the world to have me skip. I'll get a chance to read a few books, too. It'll be as good as going to college!" And I untied my apron and ran for the house. The little man stood leaning against a corner of the van as if he were stupefied. I dare say he was.

I ran into the house through the front door, and it struck me as comical to see a copy of one of Andrew's magazines lying on the living-room table with "The Revolt of Womanhood" printed across it in red letters. "Here goes for the revolt of Helen McGill," I thought. I sat down at Andrew's desk, pushed aside a pad of notes he had been jotting down about "the magic of autumn," and scrawled a few lines:

> DEAR ANDREW,
> Don't be thinking I'm crazy. I've gone off for an adventure. It just came over me that you've had all the adventures while I've been at home baking bread. Mrs. McNally will look after your meals and one of her girls can come over to do the housework.

> So don't worry. I'm going off for a little while – a month, maybe – to see some of this happiness and hayseed of yours. It's what the magazines call the revolt of womanhood. Warm underwear in the cedar chest in the spare room when you need it.
>
> With love,
> HELEN [. . .]

"TELL ME HOW YOU manage the thing," I said. "Do you really make it pay?" We halted at the top of the hill to give Pegasus a breathing space. The terrier lay down in the dust and watched us gravely. Mr. Mifflin pulled out a pipe and begged my permission to smoke.

"It's rather comical how I first got into it," he said. "I was a school teacher down in Maryland. I'd been plugging away in a country school for years, on a starvation salary. I was trying to support an invalid mother, and put by something in case of storms. I remember how I used to wonder whether I'd ever be able to wear a suit that wasn't shabby and have my shoes polished every day. Then my health went back on me. The doctor told me to get into the open air. By and by I got the idea of a travelling bookstore. I had always been a lover of books, and in the days when I boarded out among the farmers I used to read aloud to them. After my mother died I built the wagon to suit my own ideas, bought a stock of books from a big second-hand store in Baltimore, and set out. Parnassus just about saved my life I guess. [. . .] It costs me about four dollars a week to run Parnassus – generally less. If you clear that much in six days you can afford to lay off on Sundays! [. . .] I don't pay much over fifty cents for books as a rule, because country folks are shy of paying much for them. They'll pay a lot for a separator or a buggy top, but they've never been taught to worry about literature! But it's surprising how excited they get about books if you sell 'em the right kind. Over beyond Port Vigor there's a farmer who's waiting for me to go back – I've been there three or four times – and he'll buy about five dollars' worth if I know him. First time I went there I sold him *Treasure Island*, and he's talking about it yet. I sold him *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Little Women* for his daughter, and *Huck Finn*, and Grubb's book about *The Potato*. Last time I was there he wanted some Shakespeare,

but I wouldn't give it to him. I didn't think he was up to it yet."

I began to see something of the little man's idealism in his work. He was a kind of travelling missionary in his way. A hefty talker, too. His eyes were twinkling now and I could see him warming up.

"Lord!" he said, "when you sell a man a book you don't sell him just twelve ounces of paper and ink and glue – you sell him a whole new life. Love and friendship and humour and ships at sea by night – there's all heaven and earth in a book, a real book I mean. Jiminy! If I were the baker or the butcher or the broom huckster, people would run to the gate when I came by – just waiting for my stuff. And here I go loaded with everlasting salvation – yes, ma'am, salvation for their little, stunted minds – and it's hard to make 'em see it. That's what makes it worth while – I'm doing something that nobody else from Nazareth, Maine, to Walla Walla, Washington, has ever thought of. It's a new field, but by the bones of Whitman it's worth while. That's what this country needs – more books!"

. . . when you sell a man a book you don't sell him just twelve ounces of paper and ink and glue – you sell him a whole new life. Love and friendship and humour and ships at sea by night – there's all heaven and earth in a book, a real book I mean.

He laughed at his own vehemence. "Do you know, it's comical," he said. "Even the publishers, the fellows that print the books, can't see what I'm doing for them. Some of 'em refuse me credit because I sell their books for what they're worth instead of for the prices they mark on them. They write me letters about price-maintenance – and I write back about merit-maintenance. Publish a good book and I'll get a good price for it, say I! Sometimes I think the publishers know less about books than any one else! I guess that's natural, though. Most school teachers don't know much about children."

"The best of it is," he went on, "I have such a darn good time. Peg and Bock (that's the dog) and I go loafing along the road on a

warm summer day, and by and by we'll fetch up alongside some boarding-house and there are the boarders all rocking off their lunch on the veranda. Most of 'em bored to death – nothing good to read, nothing to do but sit and watch the flies buzzing in the sun and the chickens rubbing up and down in the dust. First thing you know I'll sell half a dozen books that put the love of life into them, and they don't forget Parnassus in a hurry. Take O. Henry, for instance – there isn't anybody so dog-gone sleepy that he won't enjoy that man's stories. He understood life, you bet, and he could write it down with all its little twists. I've spent an evening reading O. Henry and Wilkie Collins to people and had them buy out all their books I had and clamour for more."

"What do you do in winter?" I asked – a practical question, as most of mine are.

"That depends on where I am when bad weather sets in," said Mr. Mifflin. [. . .] "I've never found it hard to get lodging for Peg and a job for myself, if I had to have them. Last winter I worked in a bookstore in Boston. Winter before, I was in a country drugstore down in Pennsylvania. Winter before that, I tutored a couple of small boys in English literature. [. . .] As far as I can see, a man who's fond of books never need starve! But this winter I'm planning to live with my brother in Brooklyn and slog away at my book. [. . .] You see, my idea is that common people – in the country, that is – never have had any chance to get hold of books, and never have had any one to explain what books can mean. It's all right for college presidents to draw up their five-foot shelves of great literature, and for the publishers to advertise sets of their Linoleum Classics, but what the people need is the good, homely, honest stuff – something that'll stick to their ribs – make them laugh and tremble and feel sick to think of the littleness of this popcorn ball spinning in space without ever getting a hot-box! And something that'll spur 'em on to keep the hearth well swept and the wood pile split into kindling and the dishes washed and dried and put away. Any one who can get the country people to read something worth while is doing his nation a real service. And that's what this caravan of culture aspires to."

THE BOOKS of MY LIFE

Erin Doom

I REMEMBER BEING surprised by the Eighth Day Books application form: a blank piece of scratch paper. After asking for a form, I was given paper and pencil and asked to provide my personal information along with a list of a few books that had influenced my life. Almost a decade later, at an annual Eighth Day Christmas party, our bookish after-dinner fun involved a similar exercise. We each had to name the ten most influential books of our lives. Although I don't remember the exact list I gave that evening (nor do I remember the books I listed on the "application form"), a few years ago I fondly recalled this exercise and nostalgically proceeded to create a list. This time, however, I put my list in writing so I wouldn't forget. What follows is a slightly adapted and expanded version of that list, a glimpse, if you will, into the books of my life.

THREE TREATISES ON THE DIVINE IMAGES
by St. John of Damascus

I vividly remember the first time I read St. John Damascene's defense of icons. My wife and I had just recently experienced our first Orthodox Christian church service. It was late and I was reading in bed with the nightlite on when I came across a passage in which the Damascene monk describes an eighth-century church

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service that sounded exactly like the one we had just visited at St. George Orthodox Christian Church in Wichita, Kansas. The similarities between two church services separated by 1200 years struck me like lightning. As I continued to read, St. John's defense of icons helped me begin to understand the importance of the incarnation. By becoming human, God not only brought salvation to the world, but he also demonstrated his blessing of the physical world by using its materials to facilitate our salvation: a mother and a cave for his birth, flesh for his humanity, water for his baptism, bread and wine for the Last Supper, a tree for the cross, and iron for the nails.

FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD
by Alexander Schmemann

Alexander Schmemann's book reinforced the incarnation and sacramental view of the cosmos that I had learned from St. John. Two points, in particular, stood out. First, Schmemann suggests that man is fundamentally a worshiping creature (*homo adorans*). Second, he argues that the liturgy is a sacrament. From the moment we start preparing for liturgy, we set out on a journey: we begin leaving the world behind to initiate an ascent into the joy-filled Kingdom of God. Every dimension of the liturgy – architecture, candles, icons, hymns, homilies, crosses, water, bread, wine, etc. – and the order and manner in which they all work together, facilitates an ascent that culminates with the eucharistic banquet table in God's Kingdom.

THE SACRED IN LIFE AND ART
by Phillip Sherrard

Sherrard's book proved to be instrumental for my master's thesis on the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy. Sherrard further clarified my understanding of the sacraments, particularly the liturgy, the icon, and their transfiguring relevance for the modern world. Echoing Schmemann's articulation of the liturgy as an ascent to the Kingdom of God, Sherrard compares the liturgy to a mystery play: just as spectators are led stage by stage and act by act to the climax, the liturgy leads the worshipper to the Eucharist. To do so, according to Sherrard, the reality of two events must be

conveyed: the Incarnation, which "signifies the actualization of the Spirit in matter," and the Transfiguration, which "makes evident the consequence of this, and that is the sanctification or spiritualization of matter and of human and natural existence" (p. 73). The *ordo* that I had unconsciously encountered at St. George and had been introduced to by Schmemann is thus crafted to convey the reality of Christ's Incarnation and Transfiguration so that we may experience the transfiguring reality of the Eighth Day Kingdom of God.

ON THE INCARNATION
by St. Athanasius

My encounter with Sherrard coincided with my first year of teaching at Northfield School of the Liberal Arts. I had the privilege of facilitating a "Great Books" seminar for the seniors that first year. In addition to works by Sigmund Freud, Thucydides, William James, Anton Chekhov, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, Joseph Conrad, and Flannery O'Connor, we read this theological treatise. Written at a very young age and at a very tumultuous period in the history of the Church, St. Athanasius articulates a clear defense of the full divinity of Christ. Nicknamed *Athanasius contra mundum* ("Athanasius against the world") because of his key role in facilitating the Orthodox victory at the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in A.D. 325, Athanasius reaffirmed my understanding of the Incarnation and its central role in my spiritual life. Additionally, his most famous line, which encapsulates the two poles of the Christian scheme of salvation, caught my attention: "God became man so that man might become god."

THE WEIGHT OF GLORY
by C. S. Lewis

The notion of man becoming god was initially quite disturbing. Shortly thereafter, however, I came across an Orthodox theologian who suggested a more helpful translation for my Western ears: "God became man so that man might be glorified." I like that, especially in light of my favorite C. S. Lewis sermon which describes the vocation of humanity as sons and daughters of God

who reflect his glory in terms of brightness, splendor, and luminosity. Lewis is so inspiring I simply can't resist sharing him with you:

> We are to shine as the sun, we are to be given the Morning Star. . . . For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day *give* us the Morning Star and cause us to *put on* the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths [which] have peopled air and earth and water with gods and goddesses and nymphs and elves and the modern poetry [which] talk[s] as if the west wind could really sweep into a human soul, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. . . . When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch. . . . It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. (*The Weight of Glory*, pp. 42-43, 45)

While certainly inspiring, and extremely helpful for my intellectual grasp of Athanasius' famous saying about becoming gods, this vision of glorification also seemed to me overly idealistic. Athanasius and Lewis painted a picture in my mind of what I could become, but the practical question of *how* was still a dilemma for me.

THE LIFE OF ANTONY
by St. Athanasius

During my second year at Northfield I began teaching the History of Western Civilization. Committed to the "Great Books," I integrated the reading and discussion of about a dozen key texts – not just short selections from a typical source book, but entire books, including this hagiography in which Athanasius continues his defense of the incarnation and portrays Antony as a Christ-like figure. What struck me, however, were Antony's ascetic practices: locking himself in tombs and deserted fortresses, extreme fasting, battling demonic beasts, not bathing, sleeping on the ground. As I

read this gripping tale, I couldn't help but think such practices excessive. The strict lifestyles of Antony and the early desert fathers certainly come across as extreme to the typical American sensibility that prefers – dare I say worships – comfort and convenience. Their practices also seem to border on the Gnostic with seemingly negative attitudes toward the body and the material world. What I discovered, however, is that the denial of the flesh is simply a path to its renewal. To live one must die. The prelapsarian harmony between body and spirit can only be achieved through asceticism, i.e., spiritual athletic training. The Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov explains it this way: "The purpose of Christian asceticism is not to weaken the flesh, but to strengthen the spirit for the transfiguration of the flesh." Hence, the goal and fruit of all ascetical endeavors, whether married or celibate, in the city or in the desert, is a transfigured body that reflects the glorious splendor and luminosity of God, i.e., a creature one would be tempted to worship.

THE SAYINGS OF THE DESERT FATHERS
tr. by Benedicta Ward

THE WILDERNESS OF GOD
MARY AND THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION
THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY
DISCERNING THE MYSTERY
all by Andrew Louth

Shortly after being introduced to St. Antony, I began reading *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, a treasury of sound teaching on the spiritual life in the form of short and pithy sayings and stories. I also had my first encounter with Andrew Louth through his book *The Wilderness of God*. Louth develops the theme of the desert through the lens of the Bible and various other figures (e.g., Julian of Norwich, St. John of the Cross, Russian saints, T. S. Eliot, the Desert Fathers, et al.). The combined force of these two works, one ancient and one new, was deeply moving. I was especially impressed by the way Louth so effectively brought together such an eclectic array of personalities in a convincing argument for the desert's enduring relevance for the contemporary world.

I was curious to read more of Louth, and my next encounter was through two small booklets. The first, *Mary and the Mystery of the Incarnation,* helped me begin to understand the central role of Mary in the economy of salvation. As *Theotokos*, Mary is the Mother of God and thus worthy of the Church's hymnographic veneration as "more honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim." The second booklet, *Spirituality and Theology*, transformed my view of theology. According to Louth, theology "is, as the word suggests, some sort of understanding of God, some sort of articulation of awareness of God, of his relation to the world, of his activity within the world" (p. 1). I later came across a similar definition in Alexander Schmemann's book *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*: "Theology is above all explanation, 'the search for words appropriate to the nature of God' (θεοπρεπεῖς λόγοι), i.e. for a system of concepts corresponding as much as possible to the faith and experience of the Church" (p. 17). I thus learned that theology is not a systematic explanation of God so much as a humble attempt through words to offer a glimpse into the reality of God by means of one's experience of Him in the Church. Echoing a famous desert saying by Evagrius Ponticus, Louth concludes: "The theologian is one who prays, and one who thinks about the object of his loving prayer" (p. 13).

. . . theology is not a systematic explanation of God so much as a humble attempt through words to offer a glimpse into the reality of God by means of one's experience of Him in the Church. . . . "The theologian is one who prays, and one who thinks about the object of his prayer."

Louth was now three for three and I was hooked. So I next read one of his books that I have returned to more than any other book, apart from Scripture and liturgical texts. While *Theology and Spirituality* discusses the great divide that emerged between theology and spirituality in the Middle Ages when theology moved out of monasteries and churches into classrooms and textbooks, *Discerning the Mystery* critiques the role that science and the En-

lightenment have played in widening this gap. Fr. Andrew points to the patristic tradition as a path back to a proper understanding of theology, particularly its allegorical approach to scriptural interpretation. For the early Church Fathers, he argues, "allegory is a way of entering the 'margin of silence' that surrounds the articulate message of the Scriptures, it is a way of glimpsing the living depths of tradition from the perspective of the letter of Scriptures" (p. 96). He goes on to suggest that the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* and the Enlightenment method of historical criticism have replaced the patristic allegorical approach and the effects have been detrimental. Scripture now tends to be approached as an arsenal rather than a treasury, "a quarry from which we can extract the truth of God's revelation" through the same tool now used to extract meaning from literary texts: historical criticism. Louth thus helped initiate my return to what he describes as "the traditional devotion to Scripture as the Word of God which we find *par excellence* in the Fathers" (p. 101). He helped me begin to let go of my modern obsession with the scriptural text, to see Scripture and its words more as a window through which I could encounter the Word Himself. He also introduced me to another book that reinforced my shifting stance toward Scripture.

MEDIEVAL EXEGESIS
by Henri de Lubac

This massive four-volume work provocatively argues that Christianity is not truly a "religion of the Book." Citing St. Bernard of Clairvaux, de Lubac asserts that it is instead a religion of the word, but "not of a word, written and mute, but of a Word living and incarnate." De Lubac concludes that Christianity is not a biblical religion but the religion of Jesus Christ. To illustrate his argument, he explains why Origen of Alexandria, the third-century Herculean exegete, had such a joy and passion for Scripture:

Origen
d. 254

> What Origen searches for with such ardor, what he finds with such joy, is it not the Word of God

> himself, a Speech buried in the letter before being incarnated in the flesh? . . . For the sense of Scripture is not just any thought; it is not an impersonal truth; it is *He*. *The secret and hidden sense of Christ itself*. Here He is who is appearing behind this wall of the letter. He is living: He watches through the windows, He spies in across the trellis-work. One could believe Him to be entirely confined within the text, like the water within the urn of the Samaritan woman: but "He is worth more than the urn," He is the Source from whence it is filled. (Vol. 2, p. 159)

The patristic allegorical approach advocated by Louth and meticulously explicated by de Lubac has helped me seek and find that dancing Presence in my personal study of Scripture.

THE LETTER TO MARCELLUS
by St. Athanasius

CHRIST IN THE PSALMS
by Patrick Henry Reardon

FIRE OF MERCY, HEART OF THE WORD
by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis

Alongside the influence of Louth and de Lubac, these three books have been particularly helpful in teaching me to find Christ the Uncontainable Word beyond the surface of the textually-contained word. I read Athanasius' *Letter to Marcellus* annually because it inspires me to renew my commitment to daily dwell in the scriptures and to pray the Psalter on a regular basis. Reardon's *Christ in the Psalms* sits right next to my Psalter for two reasons: in addition to connecting the Psalms to their liturgical context, his short meditations help me discern Christ's dancing Presence throughout the Psalter. Written by a philologist and true craftsman of words, *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word* is a biblical commentary that does what a commentary ought to do: facilitate *lectio divina* and lead one to prayer and worship – that's precisely what it does for me (for a taste, see a sampling of its intro on pp. 103 - 112).

THE LIST OF INFLUENTIAL books I jotted down several years ago included about thirty titles. Instead of dragging on through the rest of that list, let me instead conclude by drawing together several texts which, combined with the aforementioned, have played such an important role in the development of my thinking as a doctoral student over the last several years.

"TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT"
by T. S. Eliot

From the beginning of my doctoral studies I have been interested in how the Church should exist in our world today. More specifically, how can the Church engage our secular culture in a manner that is creative and yet faithful to the Christian Tradition? As I reflect on this difficult but vital question, I find myself repeatedly returning to this essay by Eliot. Along with Lewis' "On the Reading of Old Books," it inspires me to keep myself immersed in the great old books.

A SECULAR AGE
by Charles Taylor

This work has been essential to the development of my thinking about secularism. Taylor sets out to explain why, on the one hand, it was practically impossible not to believe in God in 1500 in our Western culture, and why, on the other hand, it is easy and almost inescapable for many in the twenty-first century to dismiss the reality of God. He goes on to tell a long and detailed story of this momentous shift after offering a few preliminary contrasts of our movement from an enchanted world to a world of disenchantment, from a world in which God was implicated in the existence of society to one in which he is excluded, from a society in which sacred time frequently interrupted secular time to one in which time is empty and homogeneous, and from a world in which we lived in a cosmos to one in which we are merely included in a vast universe. Several books that have helped me reflect on these shifts include: *The Work of Enchantment* by Matthew Del Nevo, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* and *What is a Feast?* by Josef Pieper, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* by Robert F. Taft, and *The*

Spirit of the Liturgy by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI).

ON LITURGICAL THEOLOGY
by Aidan Kavanagh

THEOLOGIA PRIMA
by David Fagerberg

These final two books have been pivotal in opening my eyes to the organic, but too often broken, connection between liturgy, theology, and asceticism. I'll let Fagerberg, Kavanagh's student, summarize:

> Christianity involves liturgy, theology, and asceticism the way a pancake involves flour, milk, and eggs: They are ingredients to the end result. Leave out one and you don't have exactly the same thing anymore. Liturgy is a substantially theological enterprise; asceticism is a product of and prerequisite for Christian liturgy; liturgy and theology integrate by ascetical means. . . . [L]iturgy is the place of communion with God; asceticism is the imitation of Christ by a liturgist; and the end of liturgical asceticism is sharing God's life, rightly called *theologia*. (*Theologia Prima*, pp. x, 5)

THIS ISSUE'S FOREWORD opened with my playful confession of bibliomania. Well, I really am a bibliophile. I really do love books. But I love them because the great ones have changed my life over and over again. Their words have consistently connected me to the divine Word, and their stories have inspired me to run with perseverance the race marked out for me.

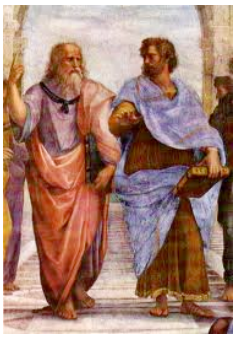
I also really do love bookstores, particularly local and independent ones. But I especially love Eighth Day Books, where I know that each and every one of the books of my life was ordered with care and attention by Warren Farha. I also know that my dear friends Warren and his staff personally unpacked them and either shelved them for me to find or held them for me to peruse (and hopefully purchase). The books of my life came from their hands

to mine, and they have subsequently steered the course of my life toward the Eighth Day Kingdom of God. Hopefully, they are making me less of a horror and corruption found only in nightmares and instead transfiguring me into a true theologian: an ascetical liturgist who truly prays, and a son of God who shares in His life so as to splendorously reflect His glory.

A line drawing of the Eighth Day Books storefront in Wichita, KS by Tim Ladwig

views from eighth day books

BOOKS of TIMELESS INTEREST



Plato : The Collected Dialogues

edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns

If you do not read Greek but wish to read Plato, this is the one volume to own: a comprehensive collection of the authentic dialogues sturdily bound for the Bollingen series. The editors have selected the best English translation of each book – Cornford's edition of *Parmenides*, Taylor's translation of the *Laws*, Jowett's version of the *Timaeus*.

1743 pp. cloth $49.50

Till We Have Faces : A Myth Retold

by C. S. Lewis

Lewis's reworking of the myth of Cupid and Psyche in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* was his favorite amidst all his works, and its lack of acclaim and the ambiguity of critical opinion disappointed him. But its insights into the depths of egotism and self-delusion and the processes by which one might be freed from that delusion have caused a resurgence of attention for what is perhaps Lewis's most original work. "In *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis turns to traditional mythology as a way of saying something about the depths of heart and soul he had previously left alone. This book is not a fantasy. It is a realistic novel. It is closer in insight to Dostoevsky than to the ancient myth of Cupid and Psyche from which the narrative springs" (Chad Walsh).

313 pp. paper $14.00

of related interest. . .

The Golden Ass *by Apuleius; tr. E.J. Kenney; Penguin Classic*

304 pp. paper $14.00

The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses *by C.S. Lewis*

132 pp. paper $11.99

Studies in Words *by C.S. Lewis*

342 pp. paper $24.99

Intruding Upon the Timeless : Meditations on Art, Faith and Mystery

by Gregory Wolfe; engravings by Barry Moser

There's lots of talk these days – good talk – about convergences of faith and art. Books are being published, conferences held, and academic programs initiated on the phenomenon. Theologians quote novelists, poets write theology, filmmakers unabashedly express faith. We have the sense that no small portion of such convergence can somehow be attributed to the influence of *Image: A Journal of the Arts & Religion*. It's a classy publication featuring articles and stories and reviews by and about literary and visual artists for whom faith is the mainspring of inspiration, or the Jacob's angel with whom they wrestle. Editor Gregory Wolfe has a brain about the size of Seattle and a heart nearly as large, generating sparks and musings, impatiences and provocations that fill the lead editorial of each issue. This book constitutes a selection of the best. Our favorite (maybe because we were there when he spoke it) is "Transfiguration," about the implications for art of Jesus on Tabor. But it was hard to choose. All the pieces brim contagiously with the conviction of their author, that "art that engages faith can body forth an incarnational balance between the letter and the spirit, make ancient truths new, and allow the time-bound to briefly and tentatively intrude upon the timeless."

172 pp. paper $9.99

The Brothers Karamazov

by Fyodor Dostoevsky; translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky

Fyodor Dostoevsky
d. 1881

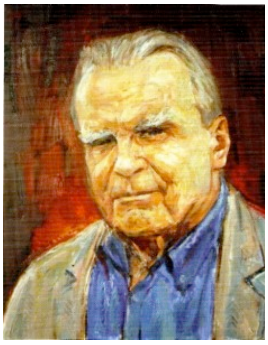
Dostoevsky's crowning masterpiece and the quintessential expression of his thought, *The Brothers Karamazov* tells the tale of a man's murder and the search to discover his murderer. As a novel, this book has every requisite: romance, vengeance, murder, intrigue, religion, philosophy, and a big dose of "whodunnit." Dostoevsky is without peer in his capacity for depicting numerous plausible characters and, thereby, presenting differing lines of philosophical thought compellingly. His famous depiction of Father Zossima, the Russian staretz, is contained in this novel, as is his infamous Grand Inquisitor. The blessing of belief, the curse of unbelief, the sordidness of life lived, refusing to believe, and the vacuity of the apathetic life are all portrayed. If one were to read only one novel by Dostoevsky, this would be the one to choose. And, if one were to choose

a translation, this would be the one. Critics have deemed this recent translation (1990) to be the most faithful to date, reflecting the wit and the varied stylistic levels of Dostoevsky's writing with a clarity that no other English translation achieves.

Everyman's Library edition 796 pp. cloth $26.00
Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition 796 pp. paper $18.00

The Witness of Poetry *by Czeslaw Milosz*

Not our witness of poetry, but its witness of us, alive in "a newly acquired historical consciousness" which portrays man's "exceptionality, strangeness, and loneliness [as a] creature mysterious to itself, a being incessantly transcending its own limits." Originally presented as a series of lectures, this collection of short essays (ranging through personal history, the biology of the poem, and a quarrel with Classicism) defines poetry as "a passionate pursuit of the Real," pointing out that for all the honeyed beauty of the Golden Age, we learn more of everyday life (and highest Truth) through the "uncivilized" style of the Gospels. Milosz does not elevate contemporary poetry to any level of greatness but contends that its enduring hope is humanity's own "elemental force" – to make memory a thing lived in the eternal now.



Czeslaw Milosz
d. 2004

120 pp. paper $20.00

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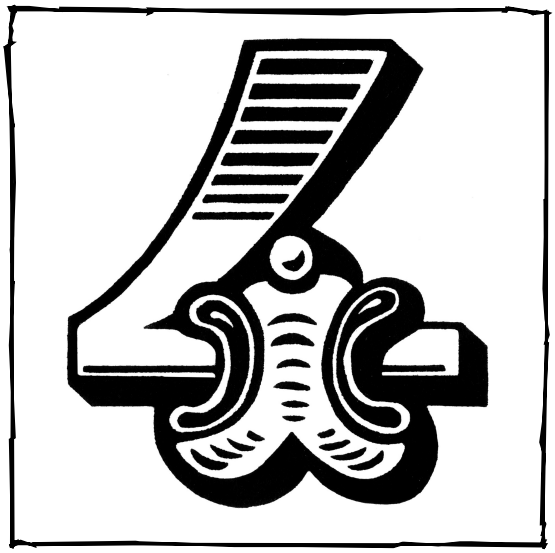

THE FATE OF THE BOOK

Books – the best antidote against the marsh-gas of boredom and vacuity.

George Steiner

READINGS

Czeslaw Milosz

YOU ASKED ME WHAT is the good of reading
the Gospels in Greek.
I answer that it is proper that we move our finger
Along letters more enduring than those carved in stone,
And that, slowly pronouncing each syllable,
We discover the true dignity of speech.
Compelled to be attentive we shall think of that epoch
No more distant than yesterday, though the heads of caesars
On coins are different today. Yet still it is the same eon.
Fear and desire are the same, oil and wine
And bread mean the same. So does the fickleness of the throng
Avid for miracles as in the past. Even mores,
Wedding festivities, drugs, laments for the dead
Only seem to differ. Then, too, for example,
There were plenty of persons whom the text calls
Daimonizomenoi, that is, the demonized
Or, if you prefer, the bedeviled (as for "the possessed"
It's no more than the whim of a dictionary).
Convulsions, foam at the mouth, the gnashing of teeth

 Composed at Berkeley in 1969, "Readings" appears on p. 262. Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2004) was a Polish poet, prose writer, and translator.

Were not considered signs of talent.
The demonized had no access to print and screens,
Rarely engaging in arts and literature.
But the Gospel parable remains in force:
That the spirit mastering them may enter swine,
Which, exasperated by such a sudden clash
Between two natures, theirs and the Luciferic,
Jump into water and drown (which occurs repeatedly).
And thus on every page a persistent reader
Sees twenty centuries as twenty days
In a world which one day will come to its end.

ON the READING of OLD BOOKS

C. S. Lewis

There is a strange idea abroad that in every subject the ancient books should be read only by the professionals, and that the amateur should content himself with the modern books. Thus I have found as a tutor in English Literature that if the average student wants to find out something about Platonism, the very last thing he thinks of doing is to take a translation of Plato off the library shelf and read the *Symposium*. He would rather read some dreary modern book ten times as long, all about "isms" and influences and only once in twelve pages telling what Plato actually said. The error is rather an amiable one, for it springs from humility. The student is half afraid to meet one of the great philosophers face to face. He feels himself inadequate and thinks he will not understand him. But if only he knew, the great man, just because of his greatness, is much more intelligible than his modern commentator. The simplest student will be able to understand, if not all, yet a very great deal of what Plato said; but hardly anyone can understand some modern books on Platonism. It has always therefore been one of my main endeavours as a teacher to persuade

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 "On the Reading of Old Books" appears in its entirety on pp. 200-202. C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) was a prolific Irish author, most known for his work on Christian apologetics, literary criticism, fiction, and medieval literature.

the young that first-hand knowledge is not only more worth acquiring than second-hand knowledge, but is usually much easier and more delightful to acquire.

This mistaken preference for the modern books and this shyness of the old ones is nowhere more rampant than in theology. [. . .]

Now this seems to me topsy-turvy. Naturally, since I myself am a writer, I do not wish the ordinary reader to read no modern books. But if he must read only the new or only the old, I would advise him to read the old. And I would give him this advice precisely because he is an amateur and therefore much less protected than the expert against the dangers of an exclusive contemporary diet. A new book is still on its trial and the amateur is not in a position to judge it. It has to be tested against the great body of Christian thought down the ages, and all its hidden implications (often unsuspected by the author himself) have to be brought to light. Often it cannot be fully understood without the knowledge of a good many other modern books. If you join at eleven o'clock a conversation which began at eight you will often not see the real bearing of what is said. Remarks which seem to you very ordinary will produce laughter or irritation and you will not see why – the reason, of course, being that the earlier stages of the conversation have given them a special point. In the same way sentences in a modern book which look quite ordinary may be directed "at" some other book; in this way you may be led to accept what you would have indignantly rejected if you knew its real significance. The only safety is to have a standard of plain, central Christianity ("mere Christianity" as Baxter called it) which puts the controversies of the moment in their proper perspective. Such a standard can be acquired only from the old books. It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to every three new ones.

C. S. Lewis
d. 1963

Every age has its own outlook. It is especially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books. All contemporary writers share to some extent the contemporary outlook – even those, like myself, who seem most opposed to it. Nothing strikes me more when I read the controversies of past ages than the fact that both sides were usually assuming without question a good deal which we should now absolutely deny. They thought that they were as completely opposed as two sides could be, but in fact they were all the time secretly united – united *with* each other and *against* earlier and later ages – by a great mass of common assumptions. We may be sure that the characteristic blindness of the twentieth century – the blindness about which posterity will ask, "But how *could* they have thought that?" – lies where we have never suspected it, and concerns something about which there is untroubled agreement between Hitler and President Roosevelt or between Mr H. G. Wells and Karl Barth. None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books. Where they are true they will give us truths which we half knew already. Where they are false they will aggravate the error with which we are already dangerously ill. The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books. Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer then than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the *same* mistakes. They will not flatter us in the errors we are already committing; and their own errors, being now open and palpable, will not endanger us. Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction. To be sure, the books of the future would be just as good a corrective as the books of the past, but unfortunately we cannot get at them.

THE FATE OF the BOOK

Dale C. Allison Jr.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN to the book? The purveyors of doom proclaim, Yet forty years and books shall be destroyed. Night comes, when no one will read. Papyrus and its descendants are done for. Information is moving from books to chips. People are reading less and less. More and more they are watching screens – TV screens, movie screens, computer screens. The ax has been laid to the root of book learning; our old pages are chaff that the technological wind drives away. [. . .]

Truth is, the future is fog, and nobody knows if books have had it. The facts will appear only when the things to come have come and gone. In the meantime, only the one who can count the sands of the sea knows very much. I certainly know nothing of the future, nor even whether there will be one. It is possible that, in a thousand years, only ancient historians will remember paper books. For all I know, education will then be by direct injection into the cerebral cortex. It is equally possible that in a thousand years large

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 "The Fate of the Book" appears in its entirety on pp. 93-111. Dale C. Allison Jr. is Errett M. Grable Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Early Christianity at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

numbers will still be pondering printed editions of *Macbeth*. Who knows?

So let us prudently eschew speculation about the future and consider instead the present, where things are clearer because closer to hand. People may indeed still be reading books, but who is reading Scripture? Although of the making and selling of many Bibles there is no end, appearances can be deceiving. [. . .]

One also suspects that much of the contemporary biblical trade is in gift Bibles – confirmation gifts, graduation gifts, and so forth – and one can ask how many such share the fate of high-school yearbooks forever kept but scarcely touched. The encouraging sales do not prove that we are laying up Scripture in our hearts. Not long ago a pollster sought to gauge the biblical literacy of the North American public. One of his multiple-choice questions concerned the identity of Joan of Arc (this was before her TV appearance a few years back). Ten percent thought that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife.

We should perhaps not much trust polls, this one included. I am surprised it was only 10 percent. But whatever the numbers, do not Christian ministers constantly complain that their congregations do not delight in the law of the Lord, that they do not meditate on that law day and night? And of course, if one goes outside the church, the post-Christian amnesia is unspeakable. Once, in a college class in the middle of the Bible Belt, I passingly referred to Adam and Eve, after which a student asked me to quit dropping names without explaining them. Another student in the same class asked me about Paul, saying that he did not know much about him, just that he was one of those guys in the Old Testament. My two stellar students represent an ever-growing multitude. The same pollster who asked about Joan of Arc discovered that 40 percent of his respondents thought most of the Hebrew Bible was written *after* the Crucifixion.

The situation appears to be desperate. It is easy to throw up one's hands, and I would not counsel anyone to do otherwise. I threw up my hands many years ago. It is the only reasonable response to this second coming of pre-Reformation illiteracy.

I could justify my surrender to despair with sundry observations about books in general. I could, for example, observe that the

Bible is a book, and then argue that its fate is bound up with the fate of all other books; and further that the Jeremiahs who contend that it is time to close the book on books are after all correct, and that when all books go away, ours will go away too. We could indeed get dramatic here. Maybe the old sociologists who were so sure about the obsolescence of religion were correct, albeit for the wrong reason. Maybe, when the churches shuffle off their holy book and become nothing more than sites on the Internet, the gates of Hades will have prevailed.

I could also muse about the fallen glory of books, how their mass production has, according to the principle of inflation, made them less valuable. I once worked in a bookstore, and a woman came in who wished to buy some books. I said, "What are you looking for?" She said, "Oh, I don't know, maybe some hardbacks – nothing too expensive." I patiently responded, "Could you be more specific?" She answered, "Well, I'm decorating, you know, and I need some books for my shelves, maybe fifty."

I might further, in promoting cynicism, regale you with horror stories about growing illiteracy – I once had a student ask me what a novelist is – or review the studies showing what no one but a fool could ever have doubted: that staring at a black-and-white page of unadorned print is pretty boring to those habituated to the colorful graven images of sitcoms, *Star Wars*, and GameBoy.

But all this has been discussed elsewhere. In this chapter it is my purpose to consider the fate not of all books but of one book, the church's book, the Bible. I could make any number of points. There are a hundred reasons for the demise of Scriptures. And, parenthetically, many of them I do not mourn. We have needed to change some of our opinions about what the Bible is and what it does. In the following pages, however, I venture rather to assay some of the debilitating changes. In good homiletical and Trinitarian fashion, I select three. Each has to do with the indisputable fact that the Bible was written in the days of our distant ancestors.

FIRST, THE BIBLE IS seemingly an anachronism. Where else but in churches and seminaries do people yet think that they can get the truth by reading an archaic tome? Do we

do this in university philosophy departments or medical schools?

Of course, it was not always so. Once upon a time many fields of knowledge were ruled by aged textual authorities. What was science during the Middle Ages? For many it was reading Aristotle. The Philosopher said it, so people believed it. He was the scientific *logos*, the word. One accordingly spent more time expositing than experimenting. The answers were in old books. It was the same with medicine. Or rhetoric. Or whatever. The working assumption of Abelard's *Sic et Non* was that the venerable authorities are not only superficially at odds: surely in the end they all agree upon everything. So all we have to do is interpret aright.

Once upon a time many fields of knowledge were ruled by aged textual authorities. . . . Shortly after the Renaissance, everything changed. Euclid ceased to be the last word on his subject. So too the rest of his ancient company – with one conspicuous exception. Protestant theologians and their churches decided to stick with an elderly book.

Shortly after the Renaissance, everything changed. Euclid ceased to be the last word on his subject. So too the rest of his ancient company – with one conspicuous exception. Protestant theologians and their churches decided to stick with an elderly book. The Reformers held on to the pristine Scriptures, to what they believed, in good Renaissance fashion, was the source of the river before it got polluted. Protestantism followed suit, and so our churches continued to do what nobody else did anymore – to find the first and last word in an old written authority, to settle issues with γεγραπται, "it is written."

The aberration is now more conspicuous than ever. Today's archetypal image is that of old computers – in this context "old" can mean less than five years – being constantly superseded. For us "improved" automatically goes with "new," as all the commercials prove. It is not like *Beowulf*, where the old sword is expected to be better than the new one. This does not work in our world,

either for TV sets or psychology texts. To be antiquated now is to be obsolete. The soft, deceitful wiles of mass production drive us to incessant novelty – biblical studies, by the way, included. Who cares about books on the historical Jesus or Paul written a scant thirty-five years ago? Precious few. Even the guild is now filled with people who don't know their fathers, mothers, or genealogy.

So what is modernity's natural response to, its instinctive feeling about the Bible? Surely that it is aged and so passé, a book outworn. If one goes into a large bookstore, one can yet find Plato's *Dialogues* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. But how many other books put together at least eighty generations ago are still in print?

Now it is true that being full of years still sometimes adds prestige. A restaurant may proudly advertise that it has been serving the public for forty-five years. And maybe a few oddballs read the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* because they think the ancients might have been on to something since forgotten. But it is no longer like the old days, when "newfangled" was always pejorative, and when the words "primitive" and "dated" were not. For most of us most of the time, age no longer in and of itself garners respect. And just as we readily ignore the elderly after we check them into the nursing home, so – sadly – we easily forget about the old books, because, after all, are there not a bunch of new ones?

In our interminably innovative world, so obsessed with so-called progress, where new knowledge as often as not does not build upon old knowledge but rather sweeps it away, it is more than counterintuitive to feel with the Renaissance theologians that our first duty is to peruse some ancient book and interpret and defend its contents – which is, after all, our Protestant heritage. When we pull out this book that is two thousand years old and say, "Look at this – all we need do is rightly divine the word of truth," we are doing what nobody else does anymore. What are the psychological ramifications of this? I suspect they are profound, and I believe that the churches ought to be doing all they can to persuade people that the past is full of treasure, that not all old things are has-beens. For those of us in the pews are, sadly, just like everybody else. Maybe we would still see Jesus, but we want him in a book just lately written, or if it is the old book, it had better be a

fancy study edition with bright new covers so we can delude ourselves into feeling that our Lord is really up-to-date.

I TURN NOW TO A second predicament that the Bible finds itself in: today it is a field of specialization ruled by experts. Now those would-be experts become such by learning a lot of languages, a lot of history, and then a lot of what are called "criticisms" – textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, reader-response criticism, and all the other esoteric "isms" that have been concocted of late. That is the long, hard road to status and reward in the field, to the teaching job, to getting published, maybe even to getting fifteen minutes of fame. The consequences are serious. When there are experts, everybody else becomes an amateur. Maybe we are undoing Luther – that is, taking the book out of the hands of the many and placing it in the hands of the few, the academic priesthood. If so, how will the amateurs respond? [. . .]

I have recently and reluctantly come to the conclusion that biblical studies are as much a part of the postmodern carnival as anything else. The Jesus Seminar has its booth over there, with Bob Funk and Dom Crossan calling out to passersby. And then there is Luke Timothy Johnson a few booths over. Tom Wright's got his own stand, too. They are all beckoning to us. Whom do we heed?

We had better heed somebody. For the Bible is from such a different time and place that we really do require some experts. There is, to be sure, a place for the old doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture; and I am a big believer in the power of the biblical stories as stories. My children first heard Genesis, Exodus, and the Gospels when they were learning Mother Goose. Moreover, I am not so silly as to say that, without the mediation of scholars, the Spirit cannot speak. Nor do I imagine that we need historians because we must believe only what the original authors or audiences believed, as if God would not want us to hear new things. Nonetheless, and however annoying it may be, the old book often leaves us nonplussed. Certainly it does me. How often have I wished to meet a traveler from an antique land?

Let me illustrate. The second chapter of Matthew reports that, near the time of Jesus' birth, "wise men from the East" appeared in

Jerusalem and declared, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him" (2:1-2). A few verses later is this: "When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was" (2:9).

Most commentators say that the star, if there was one, was one of three things – a planetary conjunction, a comet, or a supernova, that is, a new sun. But when was the last time one of those things went ahead of somebody, or stopped over a particular place? Where is our nose for nonsense? That a light high above could precisely guide people below just does not compute. Chrysostom knew it. Bethlehem's star did not, he wrote, "remain on high and point out the place, for it was impossible for the magi so to learn it; instead it came down and performed this office. For you know that a star could not possibly mark out a spot as small as that taken up by the body of a new-born."

He is right. Incidentally, Irenaeus, Origen, Chrysologus, Leo the Great, Theophylact, Aquinas, Nicholas of Lyra, and dozens of others also tell the tale of a Tinker Bell light flying hither and yon. So what is going on here? Modernity, as so often, is in our way. The ancient conception of a star was not our conception of a star. Neither Matthew nor his premodern interpreters imagined stars to be immense, inanimate, energetic masses billions of light years away from, and thousands of times larger than, our planet. Why on earth would they think that? They lived in antiquity; and in antiquity stars were alive – they were living beings. And in Judaism stars were angels and angels were stars. Job 38:7 says, "The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Revelation 12:4 says, "His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven."

When one reckons with texts such as these, of which there are countless more, and then recalls that in the Bible angels are bright, that they come down from heaven to earth, and that they can serve as guides, as in the story of the Exodus, then one is going to quit thinking about modern astronomical ideas, which are, after all, modern ideas. When reading Matthew 2, one will forget all the facts the planetarium so earnestly shares with its audiences at

Christmastime and conclude that this passage tells the story of an angel. One is going to agree – if one ever happens across it, as I once did – with the old *Arabic Gospel of the Savior*. Its version of the Christmas story contains this: "Behold, magi came from the east. . . . And there were with them gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And they adored him [Jesus], and presented the gifts to him. . . . In the same hour there appeared to them an angel in the form of that star that had before guided them on their journey; and they went away, following the guidance of its light. . . ."

. . . the Bible demands a certain sort of reading, a slow reading, a respectful reading, a meditative reading. It requires the sort of extended attention that puts things in the long-term memory. This is because, among other things, the canon is an intertextual wonderland.

Sadly, the Bible has become like the new editions of Dante, or even now Shakespeare. We need footnotes written by experts all over the place, because we do not know what so much of it is saying anymore. Now as the footnotes grow longer and longer, they displace the text, which recedes further and further away from us. That the fact is sad does not undo its inevitability. Annotated study Bibles are always enlarging themselves.

BUT OUR WOES DO not end there. There is a third problem to grapple with. It is this: the Bible demands a certain sort of reading, a slow reading, a respectful reading, a meditative reading. It requires the sort of extended attention that puts things in the long-term memory. This is because, among other things, the canon is an intertextual wonderland. [. . .]

Consider the feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6. Verse 39 says that the grass was green. This is strange. Mark's author was practically color blind, so when he says the grass was green, we had better ask why he says it. Is the adjective the sure trace of an eyewitness, or an indication of Palestinian spring, or maybe evi-

dence that the wilderness has begun to bring forth messianic bloom? I think not. In Mark 6 the people are like sheep without a shepherd before Jesus takes care of them. The feeding occurs beside the seashore in the evening. Everyone reclines, eats, and is satisfied. And all this happens upon the green grass. We are here given an equation to be solved: shepherd + green grass + having no lack + being beside the water + reclining = the Twenty-third Psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . ." But how many modern readers see this?

Sometimes we do not get the joke. We can equally miss the omnipresent allusions in Scripture. One reason is that our memorization skills are languishing. Plato saw it coming. He said that putting more and more on paper would become a substitute for memory. He was right. I frequently do not know something, only where to find it. I have memorized the lesser thing. Aldous Huxley had a set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* put into the back of his car, so he could look things up wherever he went. He carried his memory in his trunk. Much of mine is now on disk.

Ours is the age of that damned "rote memorization." My children, who can recite Blake, Shelley, and Keats, are anomolies for it. Our memories for print have become enfeebled. So when we read the Bible, we usually are not bringing the requisite intertexts along with us. We are not reading between the lines, which means we are not reading rightly.

Another part of the problem is that today we try *not* to read slowly. Speed-reading is one of the twentieth century's dubious contributions to the annals of education. Even when we do learn to read well, we are encouraged, for no good reason, to do so rapidly. But authentic reading should be like gazing at the stars: it demands that we stop. It should be like staring at a fire: it occasions reflection. It should be like bird-watching: it requires patience. We think reading swiftly is a sign of intelligence. Is it not just silly?

The ancients who read almost always read aloud – like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts – and most people could not read at all and so only *heard* texts. That required slowing down, as did the fact that the old texts were all written in continous script, without divisions or punctuation between words or sentences or paragraphs. One of the first references to somebody reading silently

comes from the fourth century A.D. It was a marvel that merited mention (Augustine had seen Ambrose do it). Now we all know that recitation makes for better memory than sight-reading alone. Conversely, not reciting or hearing something makes it less memorable. By reading silently, then, we have made books, including the Bible, less memorable.

We fail to catch scriptural allusions not because most of the Bible is like Heraclitus, who wrote obscurely so that only the highbrows would read him. The problem is, rather, us. Let me draw an analogy. Much of the power of Martin Luther King Jr.'s widely appreciated rhetoric came from his expectation that his hearers would perceive the implicit. When he gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, he expected his audience to hear in his first words, "Five score years ago," an echo of the first words of the Gettysburg Address. It was a way of saying, "My cause is the completion of what Lincoln began." When King spoke of "this sweltering summer of the Negro's discontent," he was alluding to the opening lines of Shakespeare's Richard III – "Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York" – and thereby telling the whites in his audience, "You cannot ignore me. I know your European tradition as well as you do." When he said, "We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream," surely he believed that his hearers would know this was from the Bible (Amos 5:24). King was asserting, "God is on my side."

Now I do not think that King expected too much of his audience. In his time and place, the implied connections were not occluded. But I know from disconcerting experience that, in the present day and age, most college students of whatever ethnic group reading King's speech are literarily challenged. They see only the conspicuous. For them the many tacit references, which add so much meaning, are beyond subtle: they are not there at all. As the culture changes, what was once obvious becomes invisible. Now we, the forgetful, need footnotes: "The Gettysburg Address was delivered by Abraham Lincoln on the occasion of. . . . Its opening words are. . . ."

We may still, thank God, comprehend the plain words of the Bible. But notwithstanding all good faith and goodwill, if that is

all we are comprehending, we are not reading well. If microscopes reveal our native blindness to many worlds, critical study and careful rereading inform us that the Bible holds a thousand hidden pictures, and seeing, we do not see: "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking" (Mark 8:24, NRSV).

Josephus said that first-century Jews had a "thorough and accurate knowledge" of the Scriptures. Maybe he was being a bit rhetorical. But he thought he could get away with it, and the New Testament writers – most if not all of them Jews – do not refute him. But could anyone today get away with claiming that mainline Protestants have a thorough and accurate knowledge of the Bible? We could put our congregations to the proof by letting them sing the once-famous lines from Toplady's old hymn "Rock of Ages":

> Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee!
> Let the water and the blood,
> From Thy riven side which flowed,
> Be of sin the double cure . . .

Would they remember John 19, where water and blood flow from Christ's riven side? Surely many of them would. Would they recall Exodus 17 and the water from the rock? One doubts it. Would they recollect 1 Corinthians 10, which says "and the rock was Christ"? Of course not. And would their memories retrieve Exodus 33, where Moses hides himself in the cleft of a rock? It seems scarcely possible. We have dropped "Onward, Christian Soldiers" from the hymnbooks. "Onward, Christian Readers" is never going to make it in. When Jesus asked, "Have you not read?" he expected an affirmative answer. Things change.

The situation, it seems to me, is truly dire. Maybe we shall never have a new birth of Bible reading, and our book shall indeed perish from the earth. I am certainly not holding my breath for our literary convalescence. If reading the Bible has lost its taste, how will its flavor be restored?

One might object that my reflections come from some sort of pessimistic Gnostic. Surely the salvation of the world does not depend upon reading skills. Coleridge did not write that they "prayeth best who readeth best"; and would it not be going too far to say

that the Lord knows the way of the literate, but the way of the illiterate will perish? Surely neither reading nor not reading counts for anything, but a new creation, which the Spirit that blows where it wills can work without pages.

Maybe so. But what if the Spirit prefers to move over the face of the text? That is my nostalgic opinion. For the Spirit must know that reading much and reading rightly invigorate our imaginations, and that not reading much and not reading rightly dull them; and with atrophied imaginations we have run and will run in vain. We need to grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and the text. My own version of Christian Darwinism holds that it is the fittest reader who will survive.

Some, less bookish than myself, believe that form is a matter of indifference. All we need, then, is an information transfer from one medium to another. Now I have not yet run across the proposal that we lay out the Bible in PowerPoint, but I do know those who think that we can make things better by transmuting Scripture into an audiovisual experience. That would secure the popular favor, would it not? On this matter I sit in the seat of scoffers, for Marshall McLuhan was right: form matters; all media are not equal. Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*, whatever else one may say about it, is no equivalent to the four written passion narratives. Even the best films can only reach so far. How could the movies ever do Leviticus or Proverbs or Romans or Hebrews? Surely the one who sits in the heavens laughs. "Bible," after all, means "book."

The church has a great stake in literacy, because people who do not love to read are not likely to wrestle until the breaking of the day with the Bible and the parasitic literature now needed to understand it. But how can the church promote a love of reading in general and of the Scriptures in particular? How can the book that we moderns have rejected become again marvelous in our eyes? I wish I had an answer.

Does anyone remember the famous British bookaholic Richard Heber, who so coveted books? For him, to see a book was to desire it. He stuffed the rooms, the cupboards, the corridors of eight large houses with his collection. But has not Heber's disease, which was once common enough to have a name, "bibliomania," been almost eradicated? When I now walk into my local public

library, I see more people at the computer terminals than in the stacks. In the age of ADD and Nintendo, the world is filled with more and more people just like my hairdresser. She wants to read and tries to read, but she just cannot do it. Five minutes after opening a book, she is surfing the Internet.

I KNOW NOTHING THAT offsets my depressing and unedifying analysis of our current situation. I think we are in trouble, and I honestly expect things to get worse. So all I can do, at the end of this chapter, is all too briefly offer a sort of personal testimony and explain why I have not myself given up on reading the Bible.

From a purely human point of view, the Bible has for me always been akin to reading one of the great detective novels, *Trent's Last Case*, or *The Three Coffins*. Early on I discovered the allusive nature of Scripture, and it has kept me in suspense ever since. I remember how animated I became, so many years ago now, when I first espied Matthew's new Moses typology, when I first saw that the series of events in Matthew 1-7 recapitulates the story of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt:

1. Israel's deliverer is born.
2. A wicked king sits upon the throne.
3. The king slaughters Jewish infants.
4. The hero's years after infancy go unrecounted.
5. He passes through the waters.
6. He goes into the desert.
7. He stays there for a period of time marked by forty units.
8. Temptation comes in the form of hunger and idolatry.
9. The deliverer goes up on a mountain.
10. We learn the commandments.

Discovering the pattern, scrutinizing the details, finding other Moses typologies in ancient literature, and investigating how much of Matthew's scheme readers across the centuries have perceived brought great joy, the joy of discovery. (And it was, by the way, discovery. Matthew never once condescended to say that Jesus is like Moses. He knew that the explicit is soon enough tedious, that the allusion fights fatigue. Meaning is unfolded not to obscure but

to improve communication: allusions give the imagination more to do and so heighten attention.)

My becoming aware of the new Moses motif stands for a host of experiences. In my case, then, distance from the Bible has made it more fascinating: a new planet is always swimming into my ken. I am ever intrigued because I am always just beginning to see something that the ancients knew but that we have forgotten. And the canon is sufficiently dense that, God willing, I still have three or more decades of exploration ahead. And after Saint Peter lets me into the world to come, I hope Rabbi Judah the Prince lets me sit in the dust at the feet of the Tanna'im as words of Torah pass between them. It would be heaven to be with the dogs that eat of the crumbs falling from that table.

But of course the Bible is so much more than a great puzzle book whose secrets can sometimes be unearthed by the reductionistic historical criticism with which, for good or ill, I was indoctrinated in my youth. The inexplicable divine mystery still speaks through the old pages and through my hermeneutical confusion; and in the end I must pursue the book because it has always pursued me. It has made me feel like a worm and no man, and it it has made me sing the song of Solomon. It has made known my transgressions so that they are ever before me, and it has freed me from my past so that I am free indeed. It has so shaped my intellect that, even when I do not end with it, I always begin with it. And what little good deed doing I have done has come from memory of the Good Samaritan and of the Son of Man's words to the sheep and the goats.

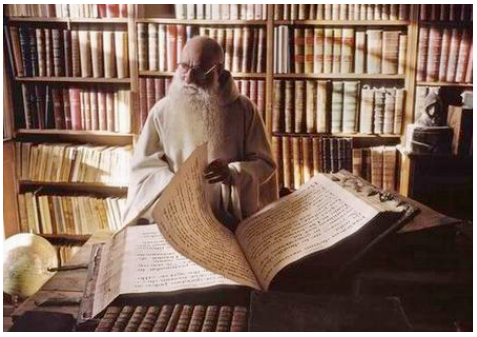
I have come to live and move and have my being in the Bible, as also in the Jewish Halakha and Haggadah that illuminate it, and in the history of its interpretation, and in the Christian traditions it has brought forth. I want this book read to me on my deathbed. Despite my modernity and my cynical nature, despite my dissection of it and my quarrels with it, the Bible remains profitable for teaching, for correction, and for training in righteousness. It comforts. It inspires. It commands. When I push its pages apart, I lay my finger on God's heart. I hate to see people not reading it.

views from eighth day books

BIBLICAL STUDIES

Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word : Meditations on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew

by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis; foreword by Louis Bouyer



Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Professor of Literature and Theology at the University of San Francisco) invites us to a "cordial" reading of St. Matthew's Gospel – cordial as understood by the Church Fathers who, despite being philosophers, theologians, and linguists, "never forgot that, above all. . . the Word of God intended to strike their hearts and evoke from them a response aimed at striking the Heart of God." Constantly situating the text within its liturgical context and convinced, like patristic exegetes, that every word of Scripture "seminally contains the whole Word," Leiva-Merikakis takes a short Greek phrase, or sometimes a potent individual word, translates it, and proceeds to dance around it, glossing it like a medieval scribe. Indeed, self-described as more scribe than commentator ("one who copies the Word of God and in his enthusiasm cannot refrain from scribbling random thoughts up and down the margins") these scribblings flow from the pen of a true "philologian" – a lover of words. Requesting that we play along as he demonstrates how "a detailed etymology, a remark on the symmetry and contrasts within a phrase, the way in which the same word used in proximity in two apparently different contexts establishes a subterranean link between seemingly unrelated passages," his sole prayer is that the radiance of the Word will shine forth and mold us, that it will "echo in our souls and establish its own rhythm in our thinking, feeling, and even breathing." Leiva-Merikakis' short ruminations on the Gospel of St. Matthew invite us on a transforming pilgrimage to the Heart of the Word, providing a taste of what Louis Bouyer has called a "true *lectio divina*, a meditative reading of the divine Word that is at once rigorously critical and deeply moving."

Volume One (Chs 1-11) : 746 pp. paper $31.95
Volume Two (Chs 12-18) : 800 pp. paper $31.95

Lovely, Like Jerusalem : The Fulfillment of the Old Testament in Christ and the Church *by Aidan Nichols, O.P.*

Aidan Nichols is after the heart of Israel in this illuminating exposition of the Old Testament. To quote Hans Urs von Balthasar, the Church "does not want its praise of God to derive simply and solely from the written word, but from the mind and heart of the Jews at prayer, from those who first formed the words, so that it can embrace them in its living tradition." Taking his title from a verse in Song of Songs ("You are beautiful as Tirzah . . . lovely, like Jerusalem"), Nichols gives an incisive overview of the Old Testament (the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings) followed by two sections that serve to unify the two Testaments – God's patterns of revelation and the manner of His self-manifestation. Nichols concludes with an explanation of typological interpretation and concrete examples (including Augustine, Gregory the Great, Origen, and Aquinas). Written by a Catholic primarily for Catholics, *Lovely, Like Jerusalem* is nonetheless a widely appealing work of both spiritual and theological means – apparent in Nichols' ability to elucidate the beauty of the relationship between the Old and New.

279 pp. paper $16.95

Christ in the Psalms
by Patrick Henry Reardon

Father Patrick seamlessly blends scholarship and devotional sense in this commentary on the Psalms: "All I have done here is to try to look at the Psalms through the lens of Christ, especially as contoured through the rest of the Bible and the liturgical worship of the Church," and his erudition and immersion in these sources seldom fail to yield rich and nourishing teaching. Take Psalm 23, read through ancient Christian eyes: "He leads me beside still waters" (baptism); "You anoint my head with oil" (chrismation); "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies . . . my cup runs over" (eucharist).

304 pp. paper $19.95

Prelude To Light *compiled and edited by Johanna Manley*

Any reader who has felt overwhelmed by the genealogies, wars, and perplexing prophecies of the Old Testament will appreciate the very practical (and deeply traditional) approach offered by this collection of daily readings. Key Old Testament passages (starting with Genesis and ending

with the Psalms) are selected for each day and paired with related New Testament readings and brief patristic commentary. Here is an opportunity to become more familiar with the great stories, wisdom, and history of ancient Israel – and to connect these scriptural treasures with Christ the Messiah, whose light shines through and unites both covenants.

386 pp. paper $29.95

The Sermon on the Mount Through the Centuries: From the Early Church to John Paul II

by Jeffrey Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen Spencer

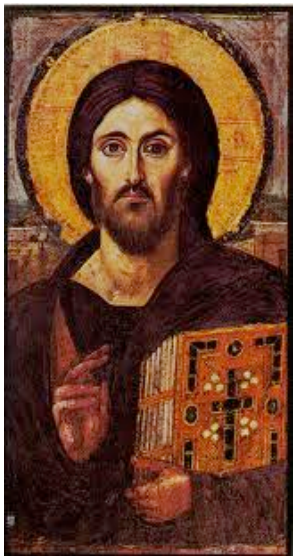
The Sermon on the Mount may well be the most controversial passage of Christian Scripture. John Chrysostom understood it as the foundational speech of the Christian *politeia* (citizenship) "who are called to a philosophical life lived always within an eschatological horizon." For Martin Luther it detailed how to live spiritually before God while participating in the world. John Calvin was prone to take a moderate stance on the Sermon's commands, while Dietrich Bonhoeffer and John Howard Yoder took Christ's words quite literally to heart not as requirements but rather as a description of the life of a people gathered by and around Jesus. "To be saved," they believed, was "to be so gathered." An insightful survey of influential scholars and theologians, *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries* integrates church history, biblical exegesis, and theology, examining theological traditions and the historical, social, and political contexts they directly influenced. Some of the contributors include Robert Louis Wilken, David Lyle Jeffrey, Mark Noll, Stanley Hauerwas, and Margaret Mitchell, examining such varied figures as John Wesley, Geoffrey Chaucer, Augustine, Charles Spurgeon, Hugh of St. Victor, John Paul II, Dante, and more. While the diversity of the Christian tradition can be clearly delineated, much of the reflection offered in these chapters is complementary rather than competitive. Surely all would agree with John Yoder when he surmised (in regard to the Sermon) that "the key to the obedience of God's people is not their effectiveness but their patience."

280 pp. paper $24.99

Houses of the Interpreter: Reading Scripture, Reading Culture *by David Lyle Jeffrey*

David Lyle Jeffrey will probably surprise you. An erudite scholar and author of twelve other books, he earned his PhD from Princeton and currently teaches Literature and Humanities at Baylor – all of which are academic distinctions worthy of note. But what's astonishing, even brilliant about Jeffrey's work is the way he marries the breadth of his knowledge with lucid and revelatory prose. What do we mean? As one re-

viewer put it, Jeffrey is "robustly pithy" and able to "breathe a refreshing sanity as well as wisdom" into the history and culture surrounding biblical interpretation. In these pages, Jeffrey means to direct us to "manifold rooms of Christian instruction" containing "portraits and parchments in conversation with each other down through the ages, and that these several voices, in their own reflection of the Holy Spirit, are of great value to us." Theologically, he draws sensitively and accurately from the Church Fathers as well as Louis Bouyer, Pope John II, John Wyclif, Henri de Lubac, John Bunyan, and Martin Luther. Quite a mix. On the literary side, he examines what Chaucer shows us about medieval biblical interpretation in *The Canterbury Tales*, how Hieronymus Bosch teaches us about parody and piety in his famed Haywain triptych, and why C. S. Lewis is the *sine qua non* of a fine reader. But the last sentence of the last essay is probably our best commendation of Mr. Jeffrey's work: "Each of us must daily pray . . . that we may come to know him who is the ground of all Truth, and so to have, in such measure as is possible for us, more of his mind about all these things."



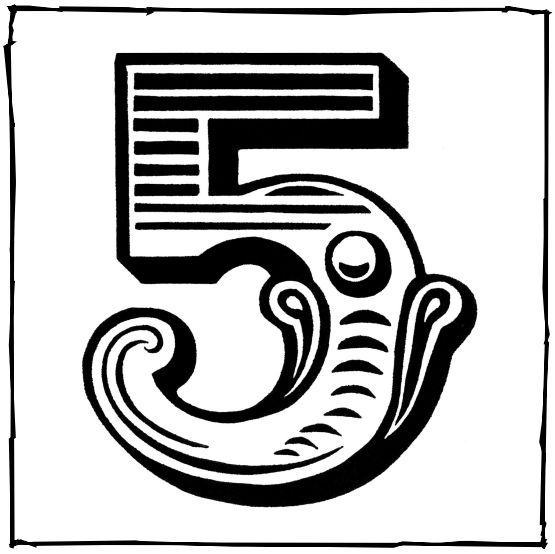
300 pp. paper $49.95

Studies in Matthew : Interpretation Past and Present

by Dale C. Allison Jr.

The author of a leading major critical commentary on Matthew here offers further insights into the Gospel and the history of its interpretation. Writing with theological sensitivity and a deft literary touch, he presents thirteen essays – nine previously unpublished and four thoroughly revised – on key passages, on structural features of the Gospel, and on patristic and modern interpretation. Exegetes, preachers, students, and other lovers of biblical narrative will read *Studies in Matthew* with profit and delight.

288 pp. paper $36.99



CHILDREN'S CLASSICS & ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

The more that you read, the more things you will know,
The more that you learn, the more places you will go.

Dr. Seuss

"THERE IS NO FRIGATE LIKE a BOOK"

Emily Dickinson

THERE IS NO Frigate like a Book
To take us Lands away
Nor any Coursers like a Page
Of prancing Poetry –
This Traverse may the poorest take
Without oppress of Toil –
How frugal is the Chariot
That bears the Human soul.

This poem appears in countless collections, including *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, p. 553. Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was a reclusive American poet.

A CORDIAL READING of GOD'S WORD

Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis

WHERE IS THE place in man by which an external reality can penetrate him and invade his whole being? Where is this center where man opens up, the point of convergence where the happy meeting of intelligence, will, and emotions can occur, where all the pulsations and fibers of a human life coalesce?

Doubtless, this central and privileged place in our being can only be the *heart*.

We are about to embark on a *cordial reading* of the Gospel of Matthew, in the strong sense: a reading with the heart. Too frequently nowadays we are enthralled by an exegesis that prides itself in being purely scientific, historicist, and archaeological, that tends to dissect the divine Word like a corpse, an exegesis that tends as well to squander the vital energy of the contemplative gaze by depriving it of its whole and living object and to banalize the sacred text by reducing it to the status of a document exclu-

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Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word: Meditations on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Vol. 1.* The entirety of this introduction to *Fire of Mercy* appears on pp. 19-49. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis is Professor of Comparative Literature and on the faculty of the St. Ignatius Institute at the University of San Francisco.

sively conditioned by the social, philosophical, and political situation of its time.

A "cordial" reading, by contrast, seeks to latch on to the impulse of life awaiting us within the text as in an ambush, in order to take flight drawn in its wake. We will try to put ourselves in a position of being illumined by the radiance of the text, of making ourselves available to its light, of being led by the hand of the Word on a pilgrimage to its light, of being led by the hand of the Word on a pilgrimage through what the Fathers called the *paradisus scripturarum*. Our hope is to allow the divine Word to shed over us the light he contains for whoever seeks for it with wide-open eyes.

The difference between a "cordial" and a "hypercritical" reading of the Gospel is perhaps best illustrated by a marvelous Hassidic story concerning Ezekiel and Aristotle, as retold by Martin Buber:

> Once, as many wise men were gathered around his table, Rabbi Israel of Rishin asked: "Why do people so rage against our master, Moses ben Maimon [that is, Maimonides]?" One rabbi answered: "Because in one passage he says that Aristotle knew more about the spheres of heaven than Ezekiel. How could one *not* rage against him?" Rabbi Israel then said: "It is just as our master Moses ben Maimon says. Two men came into the palace of a king. One of them concentrated on each room, admired with a connoisseur's eye the precious materials and the jewels and could not have enough of examining. The other whisked through the rooms, continually saying to himself: 'This is the house of the king, this is the king's garment, only a few more steps and I shall behold my lord the king.'" [1]

Although there is little doubt that the second of these visitors to the palace "chose the better part" by making the dwelling lead him to the dweller, nevertheless the first of these men could surely tell much about the king as a result of his curious examination of the king's surroundings. And so I must make it perfectly clear that, in

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[1] Martin Buber, *Die Erzählungen der Chassidim* (Zurich: Manesse Verlag, 1949), p. 498. English translation: *Tales of the Hasidim*, trans. Olga Marx (New York: Schocken Books, 1975).

proposing a "cordial" reading of Scripture, I am very far from denigrating in any way the work of serious exegetes in the name of a timid and intolerant pietism. The exegetical work of men like Luis Alonso-Schökel, Markus Barth, Joachim Jeremias, Olegario González de Cardedal, to mention only a few contemporaries, has always been one of the great intellectual treasures of the Church.

Analysis and prayer need not contradict one another; the former, in fact, can often be the warrant for the latter remaining rooted in the authentic object of faith. Each person in the Church, after all, must do what he can do best and what he has been given to do. But the hypercritical method of reading Scripture, often practiced as the *only* respectable method even by believing exegetes, can at once be the most erudite and the most superficial of all. In the multitude of its details, hypotheses, and options for interpretation, in the continual references to an extrascriptural data and "contexts," it can easily lose from sight the sacred text's unheard-of originality, its inviolable unity, its obviously mystagogical goal.

A CORDIAL READING is "naïve," if you will: while practicing it, I shall not consider the different possible "layers" of the text's didactical history. I shall speak of "St. Matthew" as sole author of the first Gospel; I shall spend no time inquiring as to whether there could have been a fragmentary or integral Aramaic or Hebrew text that could have served as a model for the Greek text, although a hypothetical "retranslation" into the Semitic idiom such as done by the French Hebraist André Chouraqui remains a most compelling and suggestive aid. All of this could indeed be fascinating from another perspective.

> . . . the essential thing is to receive the text of the Gospel from the hands of the Church within a liturgical context, which is to say, a context that aims at the living proclamation of the Word of God and that leads in a straight line to a prayer of adoration and thanksgiving.

But for the purposes of a cordial reading as I here intend to practice it, the essential thing is to receive the text of the Gospel from the hands of the Church within a liturgical context, which is to say, a context that aims at the living proclamation of the Word of God and that leads in a straight line to a prayer of adoration and thanksgiving. Experiencing the Word of God in this manner is what will subsequently bear the fruits of charity that are the measure of the efficacy in us of the work of the divine Word.

The Greek text we have before us, whatever its mysterious origins, is in fact *the* text that God in his providence has wanted to give his Church for twenty centuries. To insist on this or that textual problem as if it were an absolute – for instance, to say that such a passage is hopelessly "corrupt" or that this other passage offers inextricable redactional difficulties that "hide" the true sense, a sense that unfortunately can no longer be "explicated" – such insistence would more or less explicitly result in a denial both of God's providential wisdom and of his omnipotence, which supposedly ought to permit him to say what he wants, when he wants, and to whom he wants, without fear of not being understood due to the uncertainties and unreliability of human language and the precarious nature of the transmission of texts! A cordial reading, then, as I here envisage it, is a reading in the manner of the Fathers, who, while being the great philosophers, theologians, teachers, and linguists of their time, never forgot that, above all controversies regarding particular interpretation, the Word of God intended to strike their hearts and evoke from them a response aimed at striking the Heart of God.

Thus, we shall not approach the sacred text as a simple literary specimen, although, since it is a literary text, we will approach it with *at least* the same attention we would devote to the understanding of a great poem. Our reading seeks to allow the reader to be molded by the text; the text must echo in our souls and establish its own rhythm in our thinking, feeling, and even breathing. After all, it is the Word that judges us and grants us life, and now we who explicate it so as to make it lively and "relevant." It is not an act of cowardice to take *refuge* in the Word of God, just as it is not cowardly for the lungs to take in air, or for the hand of the hungry to reach out for bread. The only reason for God to have uttered his

Word in our world and in our hearts was for him to become incarnate in our own flesh and lives, and such a progressive "incarnation" can occur only through hidden acts of welcome that admit the Word with the same deliberate silence with which air is inhaled or bread chewed. Medieval monastic writers were not using an idle image when they spoke of *lectio divina* as chiefly consisting of the "mastication" of the actual text of Scripture, almost literally fulfilling the experience of Ezekiel: "I saw a hand stretched out to me, holding a scroll. . . . Then he said to me, 'Man, eat what is in front of you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the Israelites.' So I opened my mouth and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said, 'Man, swallow this scroll I give you, and fill yourself full.' So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey" (Ezek 2:9-3:3).

THE FORM OF THE present commentary will surely appear to be somewhat eccentric. Indeed, if we understand this quality literally and remember that "ex-centric" means "off the center," the meditation's eccentricity shall be its chief pride. In a scriptural commentary, it is the Word of God itself that must continually occupy the center of interest, the constant point of reference, and even the central position on the printed page. Such material centrality is but the external manifestation of the Christian's attitude of receptivity, which is another way of speaking of growth in pure obedience to God's self-revelation. In practice, theocentricity means logocentricity. The Christian goes to the text of God's written Word in an attitude of prayer like the Samaritan woman's as she went to the well with her bucket: he follows the instinct of his thirst and is drawn to the place of water there to discover instead Jesus in the scorching noonday solitude, that Jesus who, in the magnificent formulation of Irenaeus of Lyons, is *the fountain that thirsts to be drunk*. The bucket can only carry away so much of the precious liquid of life before it has to return again to be restored. The bucket, in its humble emptiness, never confuses itself with the well, and the commentator never confuses himself with the text. But the commentator finds his daily joy in dancing around the text as David danced around the Ark of the Covenant – yes, even if this means a certain nakedness before the

reader! Thus, certain silences and abrupt conclusions in the sacred text will find an echo in the commentary, which chooses as its "method" a pattern of free-roaming prayer (analogous to "progressive jazz" or Gregorian chant) rather than strict logical developoment. We shall rarely jump ahead in the Gospel story in anticipation of what is to come or take retrospective glances at the textual territory already covered: attaining an overall view of an alleged "superstructure" in the Gospel narrative shall not be our goal. Such is the business of another sort of exegesis. For our part, we shall be content with "the day and the verse thereof." The Fathers' aesthetics of revelation has as one of its pillars the conviction that the Word of God is so powerful and so profound that, in a real sense, each individual word seminally contains the whole Word. We shall do what we can to do justice to such a vision.

In our prayer, as in our commentary, empty spaces must be deliberately left open like liturgical silences where the water of the Holy Spirit can seep through to make the seed of the Word grow in strength and in peace. Not only in his personal interior prayer but also in his scriptural thinking and understanding, the Christian must learn from the Spirit how to utter a continual "Abba!," and this can happen only if it is the Spirit's always surprising logic, and not that of human syllogisms and constructs, that is operative. For this reason the language of Scripture and of the Christian liturgy, born as a response to Scripture, is much closer to the language of poetry with all its daring leaps than to the linear language of philosophy.

ONLY SYSTEMATIC thought in the style of the philosophers can rightly be expected to demonstrate its premises and to clarify its every statement beyond any logical contradiction or ambiguity. *That* is the genius and proper task of philosophy. We do not here want to engage a debate on the relative merits of the philosophical conceptual definition and the poetic figures and metaphors of the artistic imagination. But we do want to call the reader's attention to a fundamental characteristic of biblical expression: that it proceeds more on the basis of images than on that of abstract thought. Why did the eternal wisdom of God,

who presumably had every possible form of human and divine self-expression at its disposal, providentially select the literary genres of the story, the parable, the lyric poem, the epithalamion, the letter, the visionary narrative, the collection of wise sayings – all of these already existing in the ancient world – and even *create* one unparalleled genre, the kerygmatic Gospel narrative, rather than choosing the philosophical dialogue (Plato), the systematic treatise (Aristotle), or even the philosophical story (Bhagavad Gita)? I myself think it has something to do with Judaeo-Christian revelation being more a matter of the lived experience of God's dramatic intervention in my existence than of intellectual reflection about the Divine Essence. In other words, all of Scripture, including all scriptural genres, may be said to tend toward the central event of the Incarnation of the Logos, as is expressed in the collect for the Feast of the Incarnation: "O God, you willed that your Word should assume the full reality [*veritas*!] of human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. . . ." A religion whose cornerstone is the mystery of a woman's life-bearing womb, being receptive to the advances of the divine love, a religion whose Savior is a real man whose path to salvation never leaves the specificity and density of flesh and bone, cannot help having as its foundational texts the dramatic story, the poem of love, fear, and exultation, and the epistle that knits together the body of disciples in the womb of the Church.

We moderns have a miserably disembodied view of language. . . . In the Bible, as in all authentic poetry, the words themselves not only refer to the realities they signify but, like sacraments, themselves possess a reality of their own.

We moderns have a miserably disembodied view of language and its functioning. Every utterance is merely a parcel of information that dispels "mystery" or quantitative ignorance, or a proposition irrefutably leading to another proposition, which can clearly mean only this and not that. The language of the Bible, by contrast – especially the Psalms with their passional magnificence, Job with his paradoxes and sublime disdain for correct theology, the Apoca-

lypse with its horrifying yet glorious visions, the exquisite yet indestructable Song of Songs, the breathless Letters of Paul, the humble yet resplendent Gospel text – is based on a radically different manner of understanding words and their relationship to reality. In the Bible, as in all authentic poetry, the words themselves not only *refer to* the realities they signify but, like sacraments, *themselves possess* a reality of their own. This accounts for the element of surprise that everywhere in the Sacred Book is laying an ambush for our rationalism. Neither what God tells us about himself nor the manner in which he says it could have been guessed in advance by any deductive or inductive process. God is continually uttering the ineffable in Scripture. The weight of this ineffable utterance threatens to crack open the vessel that contains it.

God's poetic logic (he *is* more artist than philosopher, after all!) speaks to us, not in propositions and syllogisms, but in stern commands, in images, signs, gestures, whisperings of love, by both his manifest presence and his tangible absence, by both his words and his dramatic silences, *always* upsetting, overturning, the ordinary meaning of words and things. God's logic may thus be compared to the *logic of fire*, which enkindles everything it touches, not obeying any preexistent rule. And yet, who would not gladly plunge into such a conflagration? Once, when the whimsical French dramatist Jean Cocteau was asked what he would take with him out of a burning house, he responded without hesitation: "The fire!" If God is poet, he is more expressionist and surrealist than classical or romantic. The language of Scripture is more frequently fractured than harmonious, due to the very paradox of a created medium that is pressed into service to communicate the uncreated life of God. Who can forget the expression of man's necessary tremor before the holiness of God that Jeremiah emits in the Latin Vulgate as a series of stuttering sighs? "*A, a, a Domine!*" he exclaims.

IN THE FACE OF God's Word in Scripture, the most efficient "method" to begin understanding what God is saying to us is the same befitting our confrontation with a great poem or a masterpiece of painting or music or sculpture: the "method" of

wonderment, of admiration, rather than the disincarnate reductivism of a purely analytical or historicist view. In the concrete, what we have called the "logic of fire" is a dynamics of action, of situation, of visionary or everyday images of a primordial nature (water, earth, fire, wind), a logic that could also be termed the "logic of the icon", because both derive from the urgency and intimacy of human and divine presences in vital communication rather than from the persuasiveness of concepts and ideas. Think of John the Baptist in the desert pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God, think of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus in the form of a dove at the baptism in the Jordan, or of the supreme moment of the crucifixion, when our Lady is given us as Mother and when water and blood burst from Jesus' pierced side. No "ideas" or analytical efforts can explain to us the profound sense of what is occurring in each of these mysteries. It is the sacred image, the icon, that alone evokes the mystery of faith in the manner of a luminous epiphany. Like the sacred text of Scripture, slowly painted on the humble, gnarly wood of our souls, like the sacred text of our daily interior drama, the visible icon is a space where grace dwells because it is in the icon that the essential symbols of the drama of salvation have assumed the precise configuration that God, the supreme artist of the economy of redemption, has chosen to give it.

Graham Greene once quipped: "I don't believe in God. I touch God." Surely the opposition between an intellectual and a visceral faith, a faith of the whole man and therefore of the senses and the emotions, too, is ultimately artificial. But the British novelist is making a point paramount to Christianity and deeply rooted in Scripture. "Then he said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here; see my hands. Reach your hand here and put it into my side. Be unbelieving no longer, but believe.' Thomas said, 'My Lord and my God!'" (Jn 20:27f.). Angels can believe without the senses; man cannot. The degree to which Christianity, in the postmedieval period, first became rationalistic and then socio-activistic – the degree, that is, to which it ceased being a religion of living mystery to become a philosophy, a morality, or a sociology – goes very far in explaining the serious disaffection of very many persons born into the Christian Church in our day. Not so-called modern "materialism," not infidelity or laziness, not egotism or one-

dimensionalism, not satanic influence or fundamentalist proselytizing by Western or Eastern sects, should be identified as the primary culprits in the tragedy of the erosion of Catholic faith and life in our times, but rather one simple fact, which, moreover, underlies all the rest: the living Mystery of Christ Jesus cannot always or easily be *touched* in the life, liturgy, preaching, and works of the Catholic Church.

The Gospel calls us to a faith that is all at once intellectual, spiritual and visceral; if any of these elements is lacking, it is not the fullness of faith. The Christian must daily put his hand into the glorious wound in the side of Christ. In the momentous contact of my hand with the throbbing Heart of God, my mind will recognize and my mouth will proclaim the one Jesus to be both Lord and God, and I will then turn to offer my own side to the probing of all who are reaching out in the dark to find refuge in some accessible heart.

The theme, mood, and logic of our gloss, then, shall always be determined by the words and sequence of the sacred text itself. A meditation that is a "gloss" can never pretend to be more than a thrilled echo that refuses to let the impact and sound of the Word of God come to an end – a reverberation in the canyon of the heart, a rippling of concentric waves in the calm pond of the soul, made limpid by the Word's fiery breath. The choice of the qualifier "gloss," therefore, in describing the commentary, while intended to be playful, is not in any way meant ironically. The gloss will be longer or briefer at various places, since it should be little concerned with conventions of symmetry and other rules that apply more to the formal treatise. Frequently, a portion of the gloss will end abruptly, and we have introduced a graphic aid (the Hebrew letter a, for the "aleph pause") to signal the necessity to return to a listening silence. Given the centrality of the sacred text, we need not await the harmonious conclusion of human discourse: the very brusqueness of the halt in the gloss will remind us to listen again, in the silence that contains all words, to him who had been the first to address us.

CHILDREN'S CLASSICS & ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

Joshua Sturgill

IN THE COLLECTED Spiritual Homilies of St. Marcarius the Great, we find one particular passage which distills in a few words the depth of Orthodox Christian anthropology. St. Macarius writes:

> The Heart is but a small vessel, yet there are lions; there are poisonous beasts and all the treasure of evil. And there are rough, uneven roads; there are precipices. But there also is God, also the angels, the life and the kingdom, the light and the Apostles and the treasures of Grace – there are all things.

This Egyptian desert saint and founder of monasteries is not speaking metaphorically. He is articulating what the early Christians believed about the place of mankind in the universe, the condition of men and women at the outset of their spiritual life, and the location or focus of all Christian spiritual "work" done in concert with divine Grace. Our place? Man is a *microcosmos*, a little reflection

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of the entire universe, and its recapitulation. Our condition? We are the crossroads for all the aspects of eternity and all the events of time, both good and evil. The focus of our spiritual work? The beginning and end of spiritual work is the Heart.

All the ordinances of the Orthodox Church, all her sacraments and dogmas, purpose to return men and women to the place of the heart, and from there lead them to the presence of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven. From the Orthodox perspective, the great tragedy of modern man is not primarily immorality or unbelief – but rather that we fail to live from the center of our being where we have been made in the Image of God and where He speaks to us. We are divided and unfocused. We think, work, and even pray outside our heart.

Two questions naturally arise here. First, what is the Heart? "Heart" is a technical term for Eastern Christians with a more nuanced and theological meaning than is usually ascribed to it in contemporary speech. The "heart" or "deep heart" is the best translation of the Greek word *nous* which is usually (and unfortunately) rendered "mind" in English Bibles. But "mind" is too closely associated with thought, conjecture and reason – necessary human faculties, but not faculties at the center of our being. The *nous* is the "intellect" of ancient philosophy – the means by which we have direct apprehension of Truth, and so it is the place where we meet God and speak with Him. The *nous* is the "eye of the soul" – and ascetic practice in the Orthodox Church aims at clearing out and restoring this "eye" so that our spiritual sight will be clear. The *nous* is the "deep heart" where the Image of God has been irremovably stamped on our being. It is also important to note that the heart is both a *microcosmos* and a *microecclesia* – a holy temple – where it is possible for worship, prayer, and contemplation to continue without interruption, regardless of outward conditions. So the heart is at once the *eye* the *image* and the *place of meeting*.

There is a great Mystery in this. And what we could call a great "culture of the heart" – words and actions, music and doctrines and liturgy – has developed in the Orthodox Church solely for the purpose of helping men and women return to their heart and bidding them to take up the difficult life toward Christian perfec-

tion. To further illustrate this, the Greek word we usually translate "repentance" is *metanoia*, which means "change of heart."

The first question, "What is the heart," leads to the second: "How is this cleansing, this changing, of the heart to be done?" Broadly, everything we think and do can either cleanse or obstruct the heart. The life of the body and the life of the mind are equally brought under scrutiny when one wishes to return to the center. Fasting, Prayer and Almsgiving, the classic Christian disciplines, begin and carry on the work of detaching us from our servile dependence on the material world, while Paul's injunction "whatever is noble, beautiful or of good repute . . . think on these things" helps to re-orient the heart toward the source of Goodness, Nobility, and Beauty.

I believe, and my experience has demonstrated, that the best of fantasy literature – especially what is called "Children's Classics" – is a most effective means of awakening the heart and leading us to it. In fact, what makes a literary work a *classic* is precisely that its story, characters, and themes reveal in a figure something True about the "deep heart" and the nature of spiritual life. What Christian spirituality speaks of directly, the classics speak of as through the beauty of a prism. Spiritual guides give us a trustworthy map – but the classics are like photographs of the places we long to reach.

IN ORDER TO ILLUSTRATE how fantasy literature can awaken the heart so that we may begin a journey to the presence of God, I have chosen four virtues which the Orthodox Fathers require for the cultivation of the heart and for spiritual maturity. These four virtues are simple, yet they are only attained through difficulty – and the soul can be prepared and encouraged to attain these virtues by exposure to classic tales. These are the four virtues:

1. Testing – redemption through struggle
2. Fear of God – awe in the presence of the Holy
3. Faith – trust in God's benevolence
4. Mindfulness of Death – remembering our mortality

Orthodox writers speak clearly about these and other virtues, not as something added to us for the sake of spiritual life but rather as a revelation of what is natural to us and from which we are unnaturally separated. So we begin with how we are made, then see how far we have fallen, and finally begin the process of return. I want to briefly look at examples of our four selected virtues in the writings of four classic stories.

TESTING

All the great characters suffer. We suffer with them as their true selves are revealed, and their suffering instructs us in this most human art. Scripture says we must go through many trials, and the Orthodox Fathers teach us to expect temptations until our last breath. In J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf sits with Samwise and Frodo after Frodo's recovery from a deadly knife-wound. Two pronouncements by Gandalf illustrate spiritual suffering.

> "At the moment," said Gandalf, "I will only say that I was held captive." "You?" cried Frodo. "Yes I, Gandalf the Grey," said the wizard solemnly. "There are many powers in the world, for good or for evil. Some are greater than I am. Against some I have not yet been measured. But my time is coming."

Later in the same conversation, Gandalf is looking carefully at Frodo for any remaining symptoms of his ordeal with the Ring-wraiths.

> Gandalf moved his chair to the bedside, and took a good look at Frodo. The colour had come back to his face, and his eyes were clear and fully awake and aware. He was smiling and there seemed to be little wrong with him. But to the wizard's eye there was a faint change, just a hint as it were of transparency about him. "Still, that must be expected," said Gandalf to himself. "He is not half through yet, and to what he will come in the end not even Elrond can foretell. Not to evil, I think. He may become like a glass filled with clear light for eyes to see that can.

We are fully redeemed and revealed in testing, as these passages reflect so beautifully.

FEAR OF GOD

Awe and recognition of the presence of holiness are fundamental to our nature as "doxological," that is, worshipful beings. Orthodox Christians see themselves surrounded by a host of other persons – fellow humans and saints, ranks of angels, demons who have lost their personhood, and the Personal Trinitarian God. To some of these honor is due; to some veneration; to God, worship. In Kenneth Graham's *Wind in the Willows*, the Rat and the Mole have been out all night searching for Otter's lost son, Portly. Just before dawn, weary with frustration, they begin to hear music as if Someone is guiding them toward an island farther downstream. The music swells as they approach, and suddenly they find they are in the presence of the god of the animals who has helped them find the lost child.

> Perhaps the mole would never have dared to raise his eyes, but that, though the piping was now hushed, the call and the summons seemed still dominant and imperious. He might not refuse, were Death himself waiting to strike him instantly once he had looked with mortal eye on things rightly kept hidden. Trembling, he obeyed and raised his humble head; and then, in that utter clearness of the imminent dawn, while Nature, flushed with fullness of incredible color seemed to hold her breath for the event, he looked in the very eyes of the Friend and Helper . . . "Rat!" he found breath to whisper, shaking, "Are you afraid?" "Afraid?" murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. "Afraid! Of *Him*? O never, never! And yet – and yet – O, Mole, I am afraid!"

The author has captured in poetry the joy of obedience of the command to fear the Lord. It is clearer now why Solomon would say that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" if the scriptural theophanies, like this one, are filled with such clarity of vision.

FAITH

Faith is trust in God's benevolent providence. Halfway through *Pinocchio*, the title character becomes, through his own poor choice, very ill and even close to death. His friend the Blue Fairy

finds him on his sickbed. Pitying him, she mixes a potion that will make him well.

> So she dissolved a certain fine powder in half a glass of water, and handing it to the puppet she said tenderly, "Drink it, and in a few days you will be better." Pinocchio looked at the glass, made a wry face and then asked in a whining voice, "Is it sweet or bitter?" "It is bitter, but it will do you good."

A constant theme in the Christian spiritual life is to believe, to trust, that the chaotic and unpredictable are still ruled by Providence. In fact, anyone who can learn that sometimes "it is bitter but it will do you good" will find the undulations of life much easier to bear.

MINDFULNESS OF DEATH

We are mortal creatures. As such, we should always remember our weakness and the temporal limit of our lives. Throughout *The Magician's Nephew* by C. S. Lewis, one principle character, Digory, is constantly returning to the thought of his mother's illness. She is not expected to recover, and Digory feels the hopelessness and powerlessness of someone for whom all meaning has been drained out of life. This feeling becomes at various times sadness – as at his first meeting with Polly; anger – as toward Uncle Andrew's callousness; and finally stern resolve – as when a possible cure for his mother is found in the silver apples, but he must wait to ask permission for them so that the cure can be given lawfully.

> "But please, please can't you give me something that will cure Mother?" Up till then, Digory had been looking at the Lion's great front feet and the huge claws on them; now, in despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him as much as anything in his whole life. For the tawny face was bent down near his own, and (wonder of wonders) great shining tears stood in the Lion's eyes. "My son, my son," said Aslan, "I know. Grief is great. Only you and I in this land know that yet."

Those who keep the end always in mind will learn to ask for the right gifts and to pray with the proper humility, and will learn that

God understands our mortality and has made even death part of His plan for eternal life.

OF COURSE, I COULD go on and on about the preparation of the heart through stories. I could speak of spiritual wholeness in the conversations between Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter. I could mention the perseverance of the toy mice in *The Mouse and His Child*, or the amazing discernment shown in *The Little Prince*. I could learn not to judge my neighbor through great complicated characters like John Silver.

But I would like to finish with a thought about what we call the "real world" or "daily life." Very little is left in our culture to cultivate the Deep Heart and prepare it for spiritual life. We have all – even Christians – forgotten our calling to become, to grow, and to mature. We live outside our hearts, and so cannot act in simplicity according to our nature in the Image of God. Our Cartesian epistemology demands that we see the mundane as terminal – while true spirituality and its translation into literature whispers that the mundane is the edge of glory. Here are three final stories to illustrate this. Let us say the first is Real. The second illustrates the Real. The third denies reality.

> An Orthodox monk goes into his monastic cell. And when asked, "Why are you sitting here, not doing anything productive?" He replies, "I am not sitting, I am on a great journey."
>
> A little girl climbs into a wardrobe during a game of hide-and-seek. She suddenly finds that she has discovered a whole, strange country of ice and snow that must soon be brought to war and set free.
>
> A man, Rene Descartes, shuts himself in an oven for a day and is there "alone," with nothing but his thoughts. He emerges and begins to articulate a new philosophy: "I think, therefore I am."

The first two stories are remarkably consonant. The monk has entered his Deep Heart, and there encounters God and neighbor, experiencing in reality the image of Lucy entering the small space of a wardrobe and discovering there an unknown world. Both find

the inside bigger than the outside, and emerge from their encounter more than they were at the start.

But, the third story, the tale of Descartes' oven? History tells us this story is true. But the oven was not, for Descartes, an entrance to anything greater than himself. In fact, he emerged proclaiming that only a small part of himself was "real," and thereby denying the fullness of his humanity known as the Heart. Our culture has suffered the loss of its Heart ever since.

A CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC BIBLIOGRAPHY

The opening quotation was taken from *The Spiritual Homilies* of St. Macarius the Great, published by Paulist Press in their Classics of Western Spirituality series. Gandalf's observations of the change in Frodo after his ordeal with the Ring-wraiths is from *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, the first of *The Lord of Rings* trilogy, published by Houghton Mifflin. The story of Rat and Mole encountering the Guardian of the animals is from *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, and The Blue Fairy offers sage advice in *Pinocchio*, by Carlo Collodi. Both these works are available in many fine editions. Digory's conversation with Aslan takes place in *The Magician's Nephew*, one of the seven *Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, published by Harper Collins. Other references were made to the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling and to *The Mouse and His Child* by Russell Hoban, both published by Scholastic, Inc. Antoine de Saint-Exupery's *The Little Prince* is available from Harcourt, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is Public Domain.

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Sometimes it's best to let the author speak for himself: "Orthodox spirituality has as its goal the deification of man and his union with God, without being merged with Him. It has as a basic conviction the existence of a personal God, who is the supreme source of radiating love. He prizes man and doesn't want to confuse him with Himself, but maintains and raises him to an eternal dialogue of love. Such a spirituality has no place where an evolutionary progress of man, connected to a divinity conceived as an impersonal essence, is affirmed. This progress can have no result other than man's disappearance in the impersonal divinity. But the personal God, and thus the supreme source of love, can't be conceived as a single person, but as a community of persons in a perfect unity. You see then why the Christian teaching of a Trinity of Persons . . . is the only one which can constitute the basis of a perfect spirituality for man, understood as a full communion with God in love, without his being lost in it." [A short footnote: It's doubtful you'll find a more com-

prehensive and systematic treatment of Orthodox spiritual theology in a single volume. Staniloae can be technical, but he is also practical and clearly spoken, not beyond the patient reader.]

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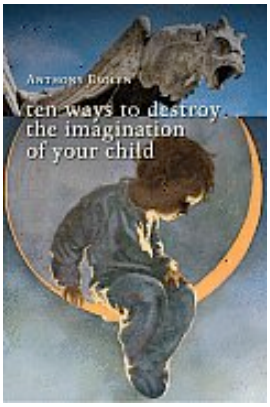

Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child *by Anthony Esolen*

Don't let the title fool you: although the author dishes up a wickedly funny satire on our misguided modern world, the heart of his book is a paean to the glories of childhood. Even as he skewers consumerism, political correctness, and the digital world, Esolen conjures up a richer universe awash in vivid sights and sounds, silence and wonder. He interweaves his biting pedagogical observations with enchanting boyhood memories and passages from Twain, Dickens, and Tolkien – all designed to awaken (in readers over 40, at least) a visceral longing for the nonvirtual world, and a passionate desire to wrest the next generation away from forces that "transmute gold [the imagination] into lead." Chapter titles mock the parenting how-to books, offering faux tips such as "keep your children indoors as much as possible" and "cut all heroes down to size," but Esolen proposes no pat recipe for cultivating imagination. Indeed, he criticizes modern education for its claim to foster "imaginative" learning by replacing its structural underpinnings – grammar, memorization, historical facts – with a shapeless "jellyfish" of unit studies and self-expression. Paradoxically, we need to demand less of children during leisure time – allowing unstructured play amidst those endless sports and music lessons – even as we demand more in the classroom. Like Wendell Berry, Esolen challenges his readers to rethink the "good life" and inspires us to recapture joys we wish we'd never traded away.

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Of related interest . . .

Imagination in Place *by Wendell Berry* 196 pp. paper $14.95

ON THE READING OF THEOLOGICAL BOOKS

When there is no human being that can bring us comfort, then God comes and brings us joy through a book.

Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica

JEROME

Stephen Mitchell

IN DÜRER'S ENGRAVING
you sit hunched over your desk,
writing, with an extraneous
halo around your head.
You have everything you need: a mind
at ease with itself, and the generous
sunlight on pen, page, ink,
the few chairs, the vellum-bound books,
the skull on the windowsill that keeps you
honest (*memento mori*).
What you are concerned with
in your subtle craft is not simply
the life of language – to take
those boulder-like nouns of the Hebrew
text, those torrential verbs,
into your ear and remake them
in the hic-haec-hoc of your time –
but an innermost truth. For years
you listened when the Spirit was
the faintest breeze, not even the
breath of a sound. And wondered

---

how the word of God could be clasped
between the covers of a book.
Now, by the latticed window,
absorbed in your work,
the word becomes flesh, becomes sunlight
and leaf-mold, the smell of fresh bread
from the bakery down the lane,
the rumble of an ox-cart, the unconscious
ritual of a young woman
combing her hair, the bray
of a mule, an infant crying:
the whole vibrant life
of Bethlehem, outside your door.
None of it is an intrusion.
You are sitting in the magic circle
of yourself. In a corner, the small
watchdog is curled up, dreaming,
and beside it, on the threshold, the lion
dozes, with half-closed eyes.

Christmas Gifts : Dawn
Wood Engraving by Eric Gill

ON LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

Aidan Kavanagh

WE ARE ACCUSTOMED to taking scripture much more seriously than rite. One reason for this is the thoroughly bad press liturgical rite received during the Renaissance and Reformation, a bad press which was not wholly undeserved. Western liturgy at the end of the Middle Ages was seriously hypertrophied, which means that there was simply more of it around than any but ecclesiastical experts could bear. With only a few exceptions, even these knew relatively little about the liturgy itself; thus they often overcompensated in their attacks on it or defense of it. The liturgy was inexorably brought into disrepute by both sides in the debate between new devotion and learning and the old, between Reformers and Catholics.

But an even more important development than liturgical hypertrophy was Europe's unavoidable slide into textual absorption, something stimulated by the invention of printing. Northern Euro-

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 The full text of this sixth chapter appears on pp. 96-121. Aidan Kavanagh (1929-2006) was a Benedictine monk at St. Meinrad's Archabbey, founder of the doctoral program in liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame, Professor of Liturgics at Yale University, and acting dean on multiple occasions of both the Yale Divinity School and the Institute of Sacred Music.

peans became literary humanists rather as southern Europeans had become aesthetic humanists, and proponents of the Reformation were largely men of the north who fell as easily into textual obsession with the Bible as they did into mistrust of urbane aesthetes from south of the Alps. The technology of printing helped to blow apart a moribund medieval world, unleashing forces which the modern world copes with uneasily still. And while it would be too much to say that printing reduced God's Word into words, since writing itself was responsible for that, it would be true to say that printing turned God's Words into a text which all people, literate or not, could now see as lines of type marching across a page. God's Word could now for the first time be visualized by all, not in the multivalency of a "presence" in corporate act or icon,[1] but linearly in horizontal lines which could be edited, reset, revised, fragmented, and studied by all – something which few could have done before. A Presence which had formerly been embraced by most as a kind of enfolding embrace had now modulated into an abecedarian printout to which only the skill of literacy could give complete access. God could now be approached not only through burning bushes, sacralized spaces, and holy symbols and events, but through texts so cheaply reproduced as to be available to all. Rite and its symbols could be displaced or got round altogether, and so could the whole of the living tradition which provided the gravitational field holding them together in an intelligible union. Rite became less a means than an

. . . printing turned God's Word into a text which all people, literate or not, could now see as lines of type marching across a page. . . . A Presence which had formerly been embraced by most as a kind of enfolding embrace had now modulated into an abecedarian printout to which only the skill of literacy could give complete access.

[1] See William Loerke, "'Real Presence' in Early Christian Art," in *Monasticism and the Arts*, ed. Timothy Verdon (Syracuse 1984) 29-51.

obstacle for the new textual piety. And once rite receded, so did the need for that kind of assembly whose common burden was the enactment of rite rather than attendance upon didactic exposition of set texts. The truth lies now exclusively in the text; no longer on the walls, or in the windows, or in the liturgical activity of those who occupy the churches.[2] Protestant iconoclasm was thus not, nor could it have been, selective or corrective. It was programmatic and across the board. It did not modify an old equation but wrote a new one.

Liturgical hypertrophy and the invention of printing by movable type were not, of course, the only factors involved in the reform movements of Catholics and Protestants during the sixteenth century and after. But when one tries to account for the fate of rite and symbol in Reformation and Counter-Reformation churches, the combined effects of liturgical hypertrophy and printing technology cannot be ignored safely. The two factors meshed. The technology of printing made it possible to put the texts of pruned liturgies into the hands of worshippers very quickly indeed for the first time ever and at rapidly decreasing cost. This rendered the extensive, complex, and expensive libraries of liturgical books which were needed for full celebration of the old liturgy obsolete in one stroke, as Archbishop Cranmer noted in the preface of the new English Book of Common Prayer of 1549. It also greatly speeded up liturgical change by giving this previously labyrinthine and long-term process over to committees of experts whose work was predominantly textual and theological rather than ritual and symbolic. This in turn made the liturgy of Christans much easier to control by positive ecclesiastical law administered through centralized bureaucratic offices of church government, something which was, as we have noted, largely unknown until then.

The liturgy was thus constricted to a set of texts which could not only be put cheaply into the hands of each member of the assembly, but which could be altered quickly and controlled effec-

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[2] The move here is from anagogy to exegesis. A sense of anagogy is captured nicely in an essay reviewing the intellectual foundations of medieval church building by the late Summer McK. Crosby, "Abbot Suger's Program for His New Abbey Church" in *Monasticism and the Arts* (Syracuse 1984) 189-206, especially 199 and 203.

tively even down to the details of layout and typography by groups of experts whose competencies were often tangential to the rite itself. Under such conditions, the liturgical action tended to shrink from being a complex diversity of intermeshing ministries and roles working together toward common ritual and symbolic purpose,[3] to concern itself more with the individual reaction of the worshipper to a text held in the hand and followed with the eye. Sermons, exhortations, and biblical readings could be followed with the eye as they were being read aloud by the minister. The liturgy began to shift from rite as an enacted style of common life carried on in rich symbolic ambiguity to the simultaneous reading and recitation of printed texts which were increasingly didactic in nature. Being subject to official change (Cranmer significantly reformed the Book of Common Prayer of 1549 again in 1552), an increasingly textual liturgy was liable to be relativized as theological positions and their political effects changed. This situation, which was by no means unique to England in the sixteenth century, dismayed many, exhilarated some, and loosened the social bonds which rite previously had helped to maintain among believers of diverse sorts from southern Italy to northern Scotland.

It is not easy for us who live on this side of the invention of printing to sense how very novel this sort of liturgy was to one who had never seen liturgical texts during worship but had only heard them, to one who therefore never felt compelled to sit still in ranks of immovable pews resembling lines of type marching across a page and to follow what was being said aloud by watching a text or reading a score. When we encounter such people today, as in

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[3] See *Roles in the Liturgical Assembly* (New York 1981).

parts of Italy, Greece, the Middle East, Russia, and elsewhere, their liturgical worship strikes us as helter-skelter and somehow impious. They move around in churches largely empty of pews doing a variety of dubious things, coming and going, apparently taking the service so lightly (except at certain moments) that they seem unconcerned. Augustine said that they talked during his sermons. John Chrysostom mentions that they cheered, wept, pounded their breasts audibly, and otherwise carried on during his. *Ordo Romanus I* implies that they were apt to steal even the gospel book during papal masses in the seventh century. They have been known to become rowdy when presbyters or deacons omitted something, to kidnap celebrants for one reason or another, and Augustine mentions that they stank so badly in the heat of a North African August that he had to leave the building. They met liturgically in tenements (*tituli*), forums, piazzi, welfare centers (*diaconiae*), streets, shrines, cemeteries, and cathedrals. Their worship spilled over into entire cities and their suburbs to become a movable feast which took most of the day. As we have noted, it was less a single service like ours than it was a whole series of interlocking services which began at dawn and ended only with sundown, when all civil business ceased. Everyone attended some of it. Only the remarkably pious attended it all.

This is what Christian rite had evolved into by the sixth century. It was episcopal rather than parochial in our modern sense and thoroughly urban. Its ministers each had their own appropriate liturgical book; everyone else knew their own parts by heart. [. . .]

THERE WAS rather more afoot in the sixteenth century than some disagreements over justification, the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, and papal primacy. A sense of rite and symbol in the West was breaking down and under siege. And since it now appears that those who sought to repair the breakdown were its products rather than its masters, they may be said with greater accuracy to have substituted something in its place that was new and, to them, more relevant to the times. It was a new system of worship which would increasingly do without rite, one in which printed texts would increasingly bear the burden for-

merly borne by richly ambiguous corporate actions done with water, oil, food, and the touch of human hands. *Orthodoxia* as a life of right worship modulated into a literate effort at remaining doctrinally correct. Worship provided the prime occasion during the week at which this literate effort could be exercised by giving austere attention to biblical texts under the tutelage of a learned ministry. The Bible became the syllabus by which ordained educators could instruct their unordained (and thus by implication unlearned) charges about doctrinal orthodoxy within a doxological setting whose other words and ceremonies were expendable. Liturgy had begun to become "worship," and worship to become scripture's stepchild rather than its home. And the primary theological act which the liturgical act had once been now began to be controlled increasingly by practitioners of secondary theology whose concerns lay with correct doctrine in a highly polemical climate. [. . .]

Primary theology was being reduced inexorably to secondary place and secondary theology was beginning to set the agenda for that educational event which liturgical worship was becoming. The *orthodoxia* of rite was dissolving and being reassembled as an *orthopistis* or *orthodidascalia* of concepts and methods controlled by learned ministers, professors, and ecclesiastical boards to be purveyed through a system of parochial "outlets" to those who, through no fault of their own, lacked certification as experts. These people constituted the proletariat of the merely baptized who were expected to bring their study texts – their Bibles, prayerbooks, and layfolk's missals – with them and to sit, schoolroom fashion, in rows of linotypical pews to be instructed by the knowing in the unknown.

In such an atmosphere, it is not surprising that other dimensions of rite began to fall away. The year with its liturgical seasons, feasts, and fasts were gradually replaced with secular or educational surrogates. Vestments faded or became ecclesiastical costumery, processions ceased or withdrew to the interiors of churches, affective devotion went out of style. Eucharistic dining became little more than eating in memory of an absent Friend. Marriage sank into a stale formality as the family bond loosened and children came to be regarded either as pets or as a serious nuisance. People finally stopped coming to church for education and

started going to graduate school. Popular culture suppressed social sanctions as personally oppressive and then succumbed to stress and anxiety without them. Ministerial preparation shrank into a sixteenth-century invention, the seminary, where alone true Christians were now to be found. Parishes became centers for education, social service, or cultural uplift where worship had to be commended as speaking to fluctuating human needs. *Sola scriptura* churches realized that they often had more Bach than Bible, and that the latter had migrated into Fundamentalism or passed back, oddly, into the possession of the old churches which had never taken *sola scriptura* seriously to begin with. This last rather ironic development perhaps signals that the printed text, which may have made the notion of *sola scriptura* possible in the first place, is losing its grip on modern minds as technology forsakes print for electronic systems whose "printouts" are convertible into images. An image, it is said, is worth a thousand words. This may be one reason why, at latest count, some 20 percent of Americans in this television age are reputed to be functionally illiterate.

Breaking down the western dichotomy between precise text and ambiguous image may make it possible to discuss scripture and liturgy as correlative aspects of rite and as yoked generators of *orthodoxia* once again. Such a discussion would have to begin by shedding our fixation with scripture as a text from which Christian liturgy somehow results as effect from cause. Short of this, it will not be possible to grasp the fact that before any books of the Christian Bible had been produced, Christian liturgy had already been not only conceived within the womb of Judaism but had also been born and had grown into a vigorous youth. It had already formed for itself liturgical hymns, prayers, structures, and procedure (e.g., for catechesis, baptism, and eucharist) to which evangelists, apostolic writers, and others could refer in the scriptural writings. Liturgy and scripture were compenetrating endeavors in earliest Christianity no less than they had always been in Judaism. The agent of each was the believing community within which patriarchs, prophets, kings, virgins, evangelists, wives, mothers, apostles, and all others lived, moved, worshipped and worked out their existence. Scripture and liturgy were each part and parcel of what has been called rite, that is, the whole style of life found in the

myriad particularities of worship, law, ascetical and monastic structures, evangelical and catechetical endeavors, and in particular ways of theological reflection. Scripture reflects all this. Liturgy concretizes all these as well as scripture too. In doing so, liturgy makes them all regularly accessible to those who assemble within such a particular style of life, be it at Jerusalem, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, Constantinople, New York, London, or Hong Kong.

Having shed our constricting fixation with scripture as nothing but a text, the discussion of it and liturgy will be in a better position to recover the appreciation of earlier centuries that God's most complete self-revelation was neither in words nor in print but amid a people and in the flesh. The Word became flesh and dwelt in our midst, where we saw more of Its glory and Its pathos than we perhaps cared to see. Not only did we hear him speak, we saw him act, and in acting he spoke more forcefully than words could. The One who was the ultimate source of Judaic rite, the very content of Judaic symbol, poured himself out to take his place in solidarity with others as a member of that rite, as a user and sustainer and renovator of its symbols. Because of who he was, he could say to his colleagues when he had read to them from Isaiah in the synagogue on a Sabbath, "Today in your hearing is this text fulfilled." All our words about God had become a present and living Word who walked our roads, entered our house, and sat at our table.

The link between scripture and liturgy is found in the radical incarnationalism expressed in Chalcedonian language by the Second Vatican Council's statement *Dei Verbum* 13: "For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as of old the Word of the eternal Father, when he took to Himself the weak flesh of humanity, became like other men."[4] Raymond Brown interprets this to mean that God does not merely *use* a human medium such as a human nature, a writing, or (I add) a liturgical event to disclose himself as it were from afar. Rather, God welds himself into the human medium while never becoming subordinate to it.[5] *Dei Verbum*, moreover, places deeds alongside words in describing biblical revelation, both of them

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[4] *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbot (New York 1966) 121.
[5] Raymond Brown, "'And the Lord Said'? Biblical Reflections on Scripture as the Word of God," *Theological Studies* 42 (1981) 3-19, especially 7.

fully human but "of God." The meaning of both deeds and words is God's meaning, but the deeds and words which manifest the divine meaning are also fully human and thus fully subject to all the limitations that go with being human. "There is a kenosis," Brown says, "involved in God's committing His message to human words."[6]

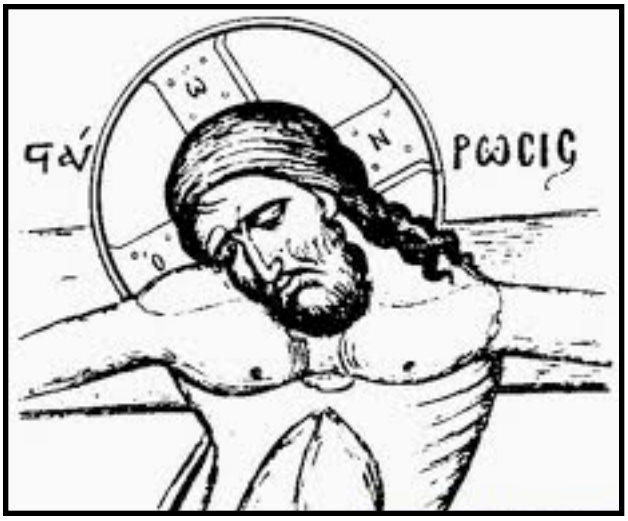
I SUGGESTED THAT THE link between scripture and liturgy can probably never be recovered and sustained unless we shed our fixation on scripture as a printed text. I do not mean something negative or anti-intellectual by this. Scripture-as-text has always had high importance for ascetics and scholars, and it always will. But the high-water mark of God's self-revelation nonetheless came not in the form of spoken or written or printed words. It came in the flesh of one called the Word, who made of those believing in him his own body corporate, a People of the Word. Those who are baptized and anointed in him, who are constantly nourished at his table, are the corporate presence by faith and grace of God's Word incarnate still in the world. There will never be any greater self-disclosure on God's part than this. In the incarnation of his Son the living God has been pleased to weld us into himself and fill us with his Spirit, which is a consolation. But that in doing so he never becomes subordinate to us is fearsome.

. . . the high-water mark of God's self-revelation . . . came not in the form of spoken or written or printed words. It came in the flesh of one called the Word, who made of those believing in him his own body corporate, a People of the Word.

There is nothing unusual about a deity being fearsome. Deities are well known for this quality. Nor is there anything unusual about a deity consoling its devotees. But there does seem to be something unusual about the way in which the God of Jesus Christ

[6] *Art. cit.*, 15.

is fearsome with such tenderness, consoling with such towering justice. The perfect icon of this is painted by the Christian Bible three times: in the accounts of Jesus' birth, his transfiguration, and his death and resurrection. The perfect enactment of this is the liturgy of Christians. For when they come to their liturgy, Christians approach not just a text, a proposition, a doctrine, an option, or a chance to grab the brass ring of grace or passing moral uplift. In their liturgy, Christians disport themselves warily with One for whom their universe is but the snap of a finger. They have the impertinence to play with the One who did not hesitate to yield up his only Son into our bloodstained hands. This is the One at whose table we sit by grace and pardon.



CAVEAT LECTOR: ON THE READING of THEOLOGICAL BOOKS

David Fagerberg

ALTHOUGH THERE is no listing for it on the IRS form, I sometimes describe myself as someone who reads for a living. It is true that this work is interrupted on a fairly regular basis by teaching classes, writing exams, and attending faculty meetings, but I try to look upon these as mere anomalies in my job description.

I might prove to skeptics that reading is a real occupation by pointing out that, just like other occupations, this career comes complete with its own midlife crisis. A midlife crisis occurs when youthful enthusiasm collides violently with the mature conclusion that the time remaining on the far side of the midpoint is inadequate to achieve all the goals conceived on the near side of the midpoint. Thus the blusterous banker comes to worry whether he will ever become as rich as he had intended, and the brash actor

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"Caveat Lector" first appeared in the July/August 2002 issue of *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*. Reprinted with permission. David Fagerberg is Associate Professor in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame and Director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy.

harbors secret doubts as to whether he will ever become a star, and I have begun to fret whether I will, in fact, as planned, read every book in theology before I die.

I am actually coming to suspect that some of them will escape me. It is becoming a real possibility that the imbalance between an expanding bibliography and dwindling supply of days means that I will finish in the red, debited, shy of my goal. It is just possible, I moan, that some text in Christology, ecclesiology, Orthodoxy, dogmatics, patristics, medieval studies, neo-Thomism, Biblical studies, Judaica, mysticism, monasticism, iconography, sacramentology, liturgiology, eschatology, scholasticism, church history, history of doctrine, hagiography, asceticism, angeology, or spirituality will escape my attention before I die.

Coming face to face with one's evanescing future provokes a sober re-evaluation of one's identity. My identity, in my capacity as professional reader, has often been designated "theologian" – at least that is what I have been called by confreres and innocents and well-wishers because the books I read are in theology. But with this midlife crisis comes a different awareness of the designation.

In most fields there is a difference between performing a task and reading about the performance of the task. Building a house is different from reading a book about the history of the hammer; making music is different from reading a book about Mozart's early childhood; and if the designation "carpenter" or "musician" belongs to the person with a hammer or violin in his hand, not the person with a book in his hand, then perhaps the designation "theologian" does not belong to the person with the library card. But then who does deserve the name?

THE TRADITION (the very one in which I read) seems to make just such a distinction between reading theology and being a theologian. Just because theology is the subject, the subject is not necessarily a theologian. It is not enough to be acquainted with the theological grammar; being a theologian means being able to use this grammar to speak about God. Even more, it means speaking of God. Even more, it means speaking with God. Evagrius of Pontus calls prayer theology. "If you are a

theologian you truly pray. If you truly pray you are a theologian." And before there were universities with theology faculty, it was possible to learn the grammar of *theologia*.

It is not just a matter of acquaintance with a concept. What is important is not the information, but being formed within – a different kind of in-formation.

> Once a brother came to Abba Theodore of Pherme, and spent three days asking him for a word. But the Abba did not answer, and he went away sadly. So Abba Theodore's disciples asked him, "Abba, why did you not speak to him? Look, he has gone away sad." And the old man said: "Believe me, I said nothing to him because his business is getting credit by retailing what others have said to him."

Apparently even the Desert had its form of graduate student T.A. who sought honor by letting it be known that they know someone. Rufinus Aquileiensis describes them thus.

> Their one desire is to see one of the holy Fathers, to hear some words from him, and then to repeat these, boasting that they have learned them from so and so. And if they perhaps acquire a little knowledge by listening, they immediately want to become instructors, and to teach not what they have done but what they have heard and seen, and they despise the others. They aspire to the priesthood, and try to mix with the clergy, not knowing that there is less blame in not wanting to teach when one is strong in virtue than in teaching about virtue when one is in the grip of passions and vice.

This accounts, I believe, for the numerous remarks in the ascetical tradition that criticize the attempt to find God by the intellect alone. The tradition does not distrust the intellect, only the intellect left to its own resources. Theologians formed of brain alone are susceptible to vicious pride. The Devil, according to *Unseen Warfare*,

> is wont to suggest to them thoughts that are lofty, subtle, and wondrous, especially to those who are sharp-witted and quick to make lofty speculations. Attracted by the pleasure of possessing and examining such lofty thoughts, they forget to watch their purity of heart and to pay attention to a humble opinion of them-

> selves and to true self-mortification. When the mind is firmly grounded in the self-relying thought that its own judgments are better than all others, who can cure it in the end? Then everything is so disorganized that there is neither place nor person for applying a healing poultice.

Such persons may be found in the *stoa* or in the academy, in the classroom or at the evening repast after a day of professional meetings, where Symeon the New Theologian can picture them.

> This is the disease not only of those who venture to speak about God on their own authority, but also of those who repeat by rote things which the inspired theologians of old said and wrote against heretics. They engage in vain curiosity, not to gain spiritual profit but to be admired by those who listen to them at banquets and reunions, and thus gain a reputation of being theologians. This saddens and disturbs me when I think of the awesomeness of the enterprise and of the judgments awaiting the audacious.

One must not only know the truth, but desire it, for "What is the use of knowing the truth and loving what is false?" Hugh of St. Victor wants to know.

THE PASSIONS MAKE it impossible to do theology. Evagrius seems to have been the first one to record a synthesized explanation of the journey to theology, but he himself had to learn humility from the monks in the desert. When he asks a certain old father to "speak some word whereby I may be able to save myself," the old man replies, "If you wish to be saved, when you go to any man speak not before he asks you a question." Evagrius' vanity is cut, and he regrets having even asked the question, saying, "I have read many books and I cannot accept instruction of the kind." Nevertheless, he is said to have profited greatly and goes forth to practice what this elder commands.

The Desert Fathers thought of man possessing three centers of action, or "faculties," called the intellective, incensive, and concupiscible powers. These are the capacity to think, the capacity to be moved in spirit, and the capacity to desire. So long as everything is in balance, reason will stand under God's law and direct our an-

ger and appetites toward their proper ends (there are injustices which deserve our anger, and things which we should desire at the right time, in the right way). But when the intellective capacity no longer obeys the divine law, then the other two abilities also lose their way, and a person is said to suffer the passions.

Passions of the intellective variety are vainglory, pride, unbelief, and ingratitude. Passions of the incensive variety are heartlessness, despondency, envy, and lack of compassion. Passions of the concupiscible variety are gluttony, greed, unchastity, and the desire for empty pleasures. This is not an exhaustive list, but one can see that the passions afflict the whole person, in all his capacities.

The ascetical tradition seeks a way to reintegrate the thought, spiritedness, and appetites of a person under God. Evagrius says the journey to such a deified state runs through three stages, beginning with *praktike*, leading to *physika*, and arriving at *theologia*. Theology is therefore much more than a simple liquidation of ignorance. It is the fruit of a rightly-ordered existence. This is why Evagrius' book-reading does not bring him as close to being a theologian as the person whose practice in humility has created right thinking, right feeling, and right appetite. The ascetic seeks *apatheia* (dispassion, or rightly ordered faculties) which John Cassian translated as *puritas cordis* (purity of heart), which Augustine to Petrarch to Kierkegaard have said means "to will one thing." To will God, and God alone, is a mark of *theologia*.

Theology is . . . much more than a simple liquidation of ignorance. It is the fruit of a rightly-ordered existence. . . . The theologian knows what matter is for, and therefore knows the cure for what is matter with the world.

"Seek the reason why God created," said Maximus the Confessor, "for this is true knowledge." Only after the passions are tamed can one think clearly about anything, including creation, including the Creator. The theologian knows what matter is for, and there-

fore knows the cure for what is the matter with the world. He knows the world to be a finite temple for the infinite.

THE WOULD-BE THEOLOGIAN, therefore, should seek out those persons who can guide him to overcoming the passions. The accreditation such teachers possess is not always what one would expect. We must find someone who knows the grammar of the heart even if he does not know the grammar of classical languages. "Abba Arsenius was once asking an old Egyptian for advice about his temptations. And another, who saw this, said: 'Abba Arsenius, how is it that you, who are so learned in the Greek and Latin languages, come to be asking that uneducated countryman about your temptations?' He answered: 'I have acquired the world's knowledge of Greek and Latin: but I have not yet been able to learn the alphabet of this uneducated man.'"

If there is any doubt as to what Abba Arsenius was saying, the story is recorded again. "Abba Evagrius once said to Abba Arsenius: 'How is it that we educated and learned men have no virtue, and Egyptian peasants have a great deal?' Abba Arsenius answered: 'We have nothing because we go chasing worldly knowledge. These Egyptian peasants have acquired virtue by hard work.'" It is not the case that the person with the most books is always the person with the most virtue.

This conclusion must nettle the professional theologian, especially while he is still finishing his student loan payments. Symeon the Pious tells his spiritual pupil, Symeon the New Theologian, to "gain God for yourself and you will not need a book." The pupil apparently took it to heart, for he writes,

> He who has acquired consciously within himself the Teacher of spiritual knowledge has gone through all Scripture, has gained all that is to be gained from reading, and will no longer have need to resort to books. How is this? The person who is in communion with him who inspired those who wrote the Divine Scriptures, and is initiated by Him into the undivulged secrets of the hidden mysteries, will himself be an inspired book to others –

> a book containing old and new mysteries and written by the hand of God . . . .

When God writes his life, the theologian becomes, himself, an autograph of God. He is taught by the Holy Spirit, and, St. Gregory of Sinai says, "the intellect, once purified and reestablished in its pristine state, perceives God and from him derives divine images. Instead of a book the intellect has the spirit."

If one searches, one can find in the tradition a few encouraging words to say about book-owners. Abba Epiphanius admits that "the acquisition of Christian books is necessary for those who can use them. For the mere sight of these books renders us less inclined to sin, and incites us to believe more firmly in righteousness." And John Climacus advises gentle patience and tolerance towards my type. "Do not be a harsh critic of those who resort to eloquence to teach many important things, but who have few actions to match their words. For edifying words have often compensated for a lack of deeds. All of us do not get an equal share of every good, and for some the word is mightier than the deed . . . and vice-versa for others."

NEVERTHELESS, ONE should be careful about the trouble that could be caused by owning books, since even a very small pile of books could get in the way. "A brother asked Abba Serapion: 'Speak to me a word.' The old man said: 'What can I say to you? You have taken what belongs to widows and orphans and put it on your window-ledge.' He saw the window-ledge was full of books." And:

> Abba Theodore had three good books. And going to Abba Macarius, he said to him: "I have three good books and am helped by reading them. But other monks also want to read them, and they are helped by them. Tell me, what am I to do?" And the old man said: "Reading books is good, but possessing nothing is more than all." When he heard this, he went away and sold the books, and gave the money to the poor.

If your library causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better to go into the Kingdom of God empty-handed than to go to Gehenna with your library intact.

Courting popularity is a regular pitfall for scholars, as St. John of the Cross knows.

> There comes to them a certain desire to speak of spiritual things in the presence of others, and sometimes even to teach such things rather than to learn them. Many can never have enough of listening to counsels and learning spiritual precepts, and of possessing and reading many books which treat of this matter, and then spend their time on all these things rather than on works of mortification and the perfecting of the inward poverty of spirit.

C. S. Lewis supposes that the devils also know how to use theological books to their advantage. When Wormwood, the novice tempter in *The Screwtape Letters*, finds the person he has been assigned begin to slip from his fingers, he asks his uncle what to do. "As long as he does not convert it into action, it does not matter how much he thinks about this new repentance," Screwtape tells him. "Let the little brute wallow in it. Let him, if he has any bent that way, write a book about it; that is often an excellent way of sterilizing the seeds which the Enemy [God] plants in a human soul."

Awareness of this spiritual fact leads Gregory of Sinai to urge restraint before contributing to the world's pile of books by writing one yourself. He concurs with Maximus the Confessor that there are only three motives for writing which are above reproach and censure: to assist one's memory, to help others, and as an act of obedience. According to Gregory,

> It is for the last reason that most spiritual writings have been composed, at the humble request of those who have need of them. If you write about spiritual matters simply for pleasure, fame or self-display, you will get your desserts, as Scripture says, and will not profit from it in this life or gain any reward in the life to come. On the contrary, you will be condemned for courting popularity and for fraudulently trafficking in God's wisdom.

The ascetical tradition I am citing from expresses concern not about intelligence or intellection, but about the particular temptation of pride which will come to dabblers and dilettantes. Pascal manages to impale both himself and his reader on the irony that we can become vain even while excoriating vanity.

> Vanity is so anchored in the heart of man that a soldier, a soldier's servant, a cook, a porter brags, and wishes to have his admirers. Even philosophers wish for them. Those who write against it want to have the glory of having written well; and those who read it desire the glory of having read it. I who write this have perhaps the desire, and perhaps those who will read it.

THIS WAY OF LOOKING at things is not intended to make us cynical about theology books, or even cynical about the people who read them. It may admit that the struggle to become a theologian may be abetted by a book. (Although it would have to be the right kind of book. Isaac the Syrian cautions that "Not every book is conducive to recollection. Books that deal with speculative theology are not usually helpful for purification of the heart. Changing from one book to another leads to wandering thoughts. Do not think that every book of instruction on the fear of God will lead automatically to purity of conscience and to recollection . . .")

This only says that being a theologian has less to do with the subject matter of the book, and more to do with the subject reading the book. The reader must make some attempt at the truth he is reading. When my teacher, Paul Holmer, tried to get us to read our textbooks in this way, he used to say that one cannot peddle truth or happiness: what a thought cost in the first instance, it will also cost in the second.

The point was made also by Abba Theodore. "When a brother began to talk and enquire of Abba Theodore about matters of which he had no experience, the old man said to him: 'You have not yet found a ship to sail in, nor put your luggage aboard, nor put out to sea, and are you already in the city which you mean to reach? If you make some attempt at a thing you are discussing, you will discuss it as it truly is.'"

In order to discuss theology, one must make an attempt at theology. But theology is prayerful communion at the end of a long journey which begins in asceticism, not in the library, because, John Climacus said, "It is risky to swim in one's clothes. A slave of passion should not dabble in theology."

views from eighth day books

LITURGY & THEOLOGY

The Wellspring of Worship

by Jean Corbon; trans. by Matthew J. O'Connell

The author, a member of the Dominican community in Beirut, has given us a glimpse into the essence of worship, which is primarily an immediate participation in the ceaseless heavenly reality of Trinitarian life, the eternal Liturgy. Though compact, this book lays open a wealth of insight into the history and theology of the Liturgy, defining in surprisingly immediate and personal discourse terms which in similar works might appear technical. The final section, which includes chapters on the relation of liturgy to personal prayer, sanctification, work, remembrance of the poor, and mission, reveals Corbon's vision of liturgy to be properly comprehensive, free of forced attempts at "relevance." Difficult to find, Corbon's work is again available, offering sustenance for those yearning to carry the light they have witnessed in the Church's worship back out into the world.

266 pp. paper $17.95

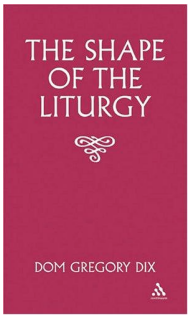
Springtime of the Liturgy *by Lucien Deiss*

A collection of primary liturgical texts from the beginnings of Christianity to the fifth century. The dazzling varieties and continuities of these ancient liturgies with our own are evident. The editor's comments, though minimal, are helpful; but little commentary is needed. The texts, unadorned, speak with their own pristine power.

307 pp. paper $29.95

The Shape of the Liturgy *by Dom Gregory Dix*

Massive in scope, peerless in scholarship yet unexpectedly able to evoke awe and adoration, this book traces the development of the Liturgy from its roots in the Synagogue and the Last Supper, through its divergent Eastern and Western forms up to the English Reformation. Dix's work has been seminal in modern liturgical studies, revealing the essential meaning of the Eucharist as the Church's joining herself in the self-offering of Christ to the Father.



704 pp. paper $89.95

Synaxis 1 :1

The Psalter According to the Seventy

A beautiful edition of a beautiful English translation of the Septuagint version of the Psalms, designed for use at Vespers and Matins in the Orthodox Church. As such, it is divided into twenty *kathismata*, or groupings of Psalms, which facilitates the reading of the whole Psalter every week during divine services. The book is durably bound (pocket edition in green and full-sized edition in blue) with gold stamping and two-color printing.

4x6 pocket format ; 298 pp. cloth $17.50
full-sized edition ; 298 pp. cloth $32.50

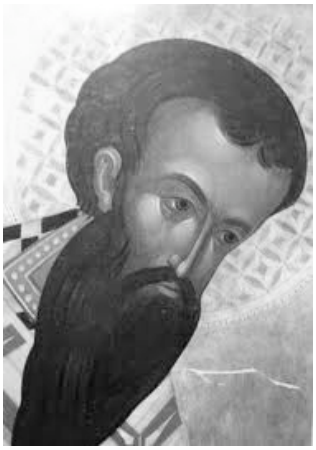
God's Many-Splendored Image : Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation *by Nonna Verna Harrison*

A brilliant patristics scholar and Eastern Orthodox nun, Sr. Nonna raises existential questions that beguile children and adults alike with their simplicity: What makes me the way I am? Is it possible to become good? Am I free or a prisoner of circumstances? Mining the Church Fathers for answers to satisfy our present age as well as those of the past, she unearths and follows a buried vein that underlies all the rest: What does it mean to be created in the image of God? At once modest and erudite, profound and down to earth, her approach offers both guidance for living amidst modern confusions and contradictions and a fine introduction to patristic anthropology. Harrison honors the Fathers without hesitating to address deficiencies such as the omission of women from many texts, or pointing out alternatives better suited to a modern sensibility. For example, since "people today are tempted to depression and despair," she acknowledges that "telling oneself over and over that one is the worst of sinners" is unlikely to make us humble; instead, follow St. Basil's advice to remember "when exhilarated with limitless powers and possibilities . . . that one is made in God's image." She rounds out the book with tangential issues (art, science, the natural world) whose significance fully emerges in light of humanity's creation in the divine image.

207 pp. paper $24.00

On the Human Condition *by St. Basil the Great translated by Nonna Verna Harrison*

The Acts says of the early Christians that "the whole group were of one heart and soul . . . and nobody said that anything he had was his own, but to them all things were common." Possessions are transient, but the Faith is the inheritance of every generation, that which we still have "in common" with the Church of the first centuries. Consequently, we care-



fully select and (gently) insist on the study of patristic sources. Through our Fathers and Mothers we are able to join our lives to those early Christians, to be of one heart and soul with them. St. Basil the Great is a recognized bearer of sacred Tradition. This valuable collection of his works "brings together the major themes in Greek Patristic anthropology – the image of God in the human being, the Fall from Paradise, and the human condition in the present life and the age to come." In fact, there isn't a more compact and readable primer of St. Basil's genius as Father of the Church, guide of monks, and master of rhetoric. St. Basil "addresses the questions posed by the human condition with characteristic clarity, balance and sobriety," so that we can possess the ageless mind of the Church. Included are St. Basil's "On the Origin of Humanity"; "Homily Explaining that God is Not the Cause of Evil"; "Homily against Anger"; and selections from the "Long Rules" – with other writings and discourses.

128 pp. paper $16.00

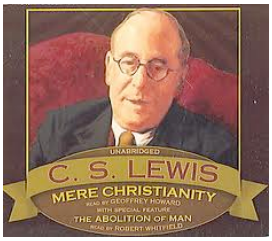
The Divine Sense : The Intellect in Patristic Theology

by A. N. Williams

The modern tendency to divorce intellect from spirituality, theology from contemplation, was altogether foreign to the early Church. "Patristic writers," Anna Williams observes, "reason from forms of prayer and liturgical practice to theological positions, and from theological data to principles of ascetical life, with a smoothness betokening the unstated assumption that these areas . . . belong to the same sphere of discourse and concern." In *The Divine Sense*, Williams maps intellect or mind as a unifying theme that permeates five centuries of patristic literature, from Justin and Irenaeus through the Cappadocians, Augustine, and Cassian. She questions tired (and less than rigorous) assumptions that Christianity borrowed its intellectual veneer from Neo-Platonism – indeed, the Fathers' "opportunistic" approach to Hellenistic philosophy rejected more precepts than it adopted. What in fact made Christianity unique among religious cults was its "inescapably intellectual dimension, requiring as a condition of membership [baptism] the grasp and profession of what it proclaimed to be true." (Interestingly, while the Fathers locate the origins of intellect in divine wisdom, they never discuss "mind" per se as an attribute of God – a paradox Williams addresses in her carefully crafted analysis.) "By the end, one may still wonder whether mind is the sole

unifying principle in the patristic theologies Williams has selected to study," notes a reviewer. "But whatever other candidates one may suggest for this role, she has made a powerful case for it."

252 pp. paper $29.95



Mere Christianity *by C. S. Lewis*

Perhaps Christianity does not so much need to be defended as to be accurately described. If this is the case our candidate for most accurate description and most universal intelligibility is Lewis' *Mere Christianity*. Originally a series of radio broadcasts, it retains a humble conversational tone without sacrificing the essential philosophical and theological soundness and depth of Lewis' thought.

175 pp. paper $13.99

175 pp. cloth $24.99

On the Incarnation *by St. Athanasius*

"This is a good translation of a very great book. St. Athanasius stood *contra mundum* for the Trinitarian doctrine 'whole and undefiled.' When I first opened *De Incarnatione* I soon discovered by a very simple test that I was reading a masterpiece, for only a master mind could have written so deeply on such a subject with such classical simplicity." So says C. S. Lewis in his introduction to this landmark of Christology. What can we add to this master's description of a master's description of the Master?

120 pp. paper $15.00

Beginning to Read the Fathers *by Boniface Ramsey*

An exceptionally lucid and carefully organized introduction to patristic literature by a Dominican scholar and student of the great Quasten. This is the best work of its kind, supplemented by appendices like "A Patristic Reading Program," which provides a much-needed guide through centuries of patristic writings, and a timeline which places these writings in the context of historical and ecclesiastical events.

280 pp. paper $19.95

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FRIEND YOU STAND ON SACRED GROUND

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BEATRICE WARDE

Beatrice Warde penned this famous Monotype broadsheet in 1932 to showcase Eric Gill's typeface, Perpetua: tilting capitals modeled from the lettering on Trajan's Column in Rome. Warde believed classical typography offered a "clearly polished window" through which to communicate ideas.

AN ESSAY ON TYPOGRAPHY

Eric Gill

THE PRINTING PRESS was invented, we are told, in order that books might be multiplied more quickly and cheaply than could be done by handwriting. Further, we are asked to believe, the early printers were so obsessed by the desire to serve their fellow men by the spread of literature that they had no thought to spare for the business of printing as a good kind of work in itself. And further, it is suggested, the invention of the printing press was inspired by precisely the same ideas and motives as inspire the invention of 20th century machinery; that the 'hand' press is in essence the same kind of machine as the 'power' press, and that printing in the fifteenth century was as much 'mass' production as it is in the twentieth.

¶Whatever may be said as to the motives of our forefathers (and we must beware of the common fault of historians of seeing the

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Eric Gill's *Essay on Typography*, originally published by Sheed & Ward in 1931, is a collection of nine loosely connected essays. Excerpted passages are drawn from chapters seven ("The Instrument") and eight ("The Book"). Although gifted as a sculptor, engraver, illustrator, and portrait draughtsman, the primary work of Eric Gill (1882-1940) was lettering – drawn or carved in wood or stone. He created two famous types, Perpetua and Gill Sans, and advocated "unjustified" typesetting, i.e., making the spaces between words equal, resulting in an uneven righthand margin. To help create a cleaner edge and more consistent pages, Gill liberally employs ampersands, contractions, and paragraph marks in place of indented lines.

past in terms of the present), it is certainly true that printing is quicker than handwriting, and that the world is served by the spread of literature – though it is not at all certain that it is served well. But, on the other hand, it is not in the least probable that the early printers had no eye for good printing or thought of printing as an inferior way of reproducing lettering. It is not true that a hand operated printing press is essentially the same as one automatically fed and operated by what they call 'power', any more than it is true to say that a hand loom is essentially the same kind of machine as a power loom. It is not a proper use of words to call the work of Caxton 'mass' production; and least of all is it true to say that the early printers were simply men of business.

Eric Gill
d. 1940

¶Here we may content ourselves with the following affirmations: 1. The printing press is a tool for making prints better, as well as quicker, than it can be done by pressing with the unaided hand. The press, whether the pressure be applied by means of levers, screws or rollers, is not simply suitable but indispensable. 2. Writing may be all that calligraphers say of it, & printed lettering is neither better nor worse; it is simply a different kind of thing. Good printing has its own kind of goodness; the motives of its inventors do not concern us. 3. The service rendered to the world by printers is best talked about by those who are served. The printer had better confine his attention to the well doing of what he wants to do or is asked to do, namely to print. When the servant brags about his services it is probable that he is stealing the spoons.
¶Just as some young men want to be engine-drivers, others to be stone carvers, & others 'something in the city', so some want to be

printers. What kind of press should such be advised to procure? Assuming that by printing they mean letterpress printing, and by printer they mean the man doing the actual job of setting type and taking prints therefrom (i.e. assuming that they do not mean simply employing men to produce printing under their direction), then there is no sort of doubt that the best sort of tool for the purpose is one operated by a hand lever. This tool gives the maximum of control with the maximum of distraction. It is most important that the workman should not have to watch his instrument, that his whole attention should be given to the work. A sculptor does not see his hammer and chisel when he is carving, but only the stone in front of him. Similarly the hand press printer can give his whole attention to inking & printing, and hardly see his press. It is far otherwise with the automatically fed power press. Here the printer becomes little more than a watcher of his instrument, a machine-minder. If he be conscientious he will from time to time take a print from the accumulating pile and see whether it is up to the standard set by his overseer; but his main attention must be given to the machine to see that it is running smoothly. Thus with power printing the printer is inevitably a different kind of man from the hand press printer, and the work done is also of a different kind. It is not a question whether machine work be better or worse than hand work – both have their proper goodness – it is simply a matter of difference. There are some who aver that between good machine printing and good hand printing there is no visible difference, and certainly none worth mentioning. This may very well be so in particular cases; for the craftsman and the mechanic often imitate one another. Such & such a hand press printer may be able to produce work of such dead accuracy that you would think that it had been done by mechanics. Such and such a firm of machine printers may, by careful study of the best museum examples, be able to produce works which, though printed in the 20th century, have all the appearance of having been printed in the 18th. Nevertheless, it remains obvious that the general style of mechanically produced work is different & violently different from the style of that produced by hand; that the proper and characteristic work of the 20th century bears little likeness to that of the 15th; that industrialism demands different men and produces different things.

¶In spite of occasional jibes & sneers our argument, then, is not at all that things made by machinery are bad things, or that the handicraftsman is the only kind of man that merits salvation. The industrialist is very welcome to all the credit he can get as a servant of humanity. The time has come when the handicraftsman should cease altogether either to rail at him or envy him. Let each go his own road. The handicraftsman must see that if a million people want the Daily Mail on their breakfast tables it is no affair of his, for he cannot possibly supply them. On the other hand the man of business should be the first to admit that if handicraftsmen can still make a living by printing, they are welcome to do so. The industrialist makes no claim to produce works of art; he does so nevertheless – when he is not imitating the art works of the past. The artist makes no claim to serve his fellow men; nevertheless he does so – when he is not wholly led astray by the notion that art is self-expression or the expression of emotion. The man of business will rightly and properly employ the industrial method (so long as men will submit to them) and machinery (so long as he can procure it). The artist will naturally confine himself to such tools as he can control with his hands.

¶As the machine demands in the operative a virtue of the will (conscientiousness & good will) or a sharp eye in the overseer, before the mechanical product can secure the technical perfection which is not only proper to the machine but its chief reason for existence, so the response of the craftsman's tool to the control of his hands demands in him a corresponding virtue. But this virtue is one of the mind, judgement. Those are in error, accordingly, who suppose that when the craftsman strives after technical excellence he is emulating the machine standard. And those are even more grieviously mistaken who suppose that if the craftsman neglect his responsibility to exercise good judgement and skill in the actual performance of his work, the consequent lack of uniformity (in the colour of his pages or the weight of his impression) will give to his work the vitality or liveliness which is characteristic of hand work.

¶It may be said of all printers that their job is to reproduce on paper the exact face of the letters which they have set into pages. This face is of a definite, constant and measurable size and shape; with any one press and any one paper there is a right & exact quan-

tity of ink & pressure necessary to reproduce that face without either exaggeration or diminution. When the power printer has found this he has simply to let the machine run on, & 'mind' it to ensure that it run regularly. When the hand printer has found his ink and pressure combination he has constantly to exercise his judgement and manual skill lest his sheets become either too pale or too black. Both sorts of printers aim at evenness, & both are to be blamed if they fail to achieve it. But there is this to be observed: that, in the event, they will be found to have produced different qualities of evenness. The press & method of inking, & sometimes the paper, which the craftsman uses are such that the colour of his work, at its best, is balanced on the very razor edge of accuracy. On either side his tools force on him a very slight margin, so that he is as a tight-rope walker whose deliberate balance gives a different delight from that of the mechanical gyroscope. On the other hand, the power printer, who has not to consider the trifling inconstancies which are inseparable from any hand-operated tool, can achieve a dead level of uniformity in which there is not the smallest apparent variation. Nor is it unreasonable that this perfection should be barren & motionless. While good work, accordingly, from either world should be praised with different praise, it is unreasonable for the craftsman to mistake the shame of vague press-work for the glory of his more humane and livelier method of work.

THE WORLD OF 1931 reads daily news-sheets like that one called the Daily Mail; it is brought up on them; it both produces them & is formed by them. We may take it that the Daily Mail represents the kind of mind that we have got, and in all kinds of subtle ways books are expected to conform to the Daily Mail standard. Legibility is what the Daily Mail reader finds readable; good style is what he finds good; the beautiful is what pleases him.

¶Makers of books, therefore, who refuse this rather low standard are compelled to efface personal idiosyncrasy & to discover, if it be possible, the real roots of good book-making, just as St. Benedict in the 6th century, confronted by the decayed Roman society,

was compelled to discover the roots of good living. Good book-making, good living – that is to say not what you or I fancy, but what the nature of books and the nature of life really demand.

Makers of books . . . are compelled . . . to discover, if it be possible, the real roots of good book-making, just as St. Benedict in the 6th century, confronted by the decayed Roman society, was compelled to discover the roots of good living. Good book-making, good living – that is to say not what you or I fancy, but what the nature of books and the nature of life really demand.

¶It is all very well for the men of commerce, the commercial people, to brag about themselves as servants of humanity & of the human mind. They say grandly enough that a book is a thing to be read, implying that a book is not a picture to hang on a nail. But this grand air of serving one's fellow men, putting aside a modicum of hypocrisy, does not carry us very far unless we know by whom books are to be read. The standard of readableness is dependent upon the standard of the reader, & the standard of book-making upon the standards of those who make them and of those for whom they are made. Books made by & for unreasoning people may well be expected to conform to unreasonable standards.

¶It is necessary to point out these facts because many who write typographical criticism seem to think that the business of making books has proceeded steadily from worse to better ever since the invention of printing; they take no account of the steadily increasing pressure of commercialism. Whether we approve or disapprove of the methods of modern commercialism (& we have never denied that many great powers & innumerable small conveniences have been conferred upon us by the wedding of experimental science and capitalist book-keeping – the abolition of 'double-entry' would paralyse modern trade as much as the abolition of paper would paralyse modern architecture) we cannot deny that the character of those modern things which are not curbed by the strictest

utilitarianism is that of materialist triumph tempered by fancifulness and sloppiness, & that they are altogether without grace either in the physical or spiritual senses of the word.

¶A book is a thing to be read – we all start with that – and we will assume that the reader is a sensitive as well as a sensible person. Now, the first thing to be noticed is that it is the act of reading & the circumstances of that act which determine the size of the book and the kind of type used; the reading, not what is read. A good type is suitable for any and every book, and the size of a book is regulated not by what is in it but by the fact that it is read held in the hand (e.g. a novel), or at a table (e.g. books of history or reference with maps or other necessarily large illustrations), or at a desk or lectern (e.g. a missal or a choir book), or kept in the pocket (e.g. a prayer book or a travellers' dictionary). ¶On the contrary some hold that size of book and style of type sh'ld be specially chosen for every book; that such & such a size is suitable for Shakespeare; such and such for Mr. Wells's novels, such and such for Mr. Eliot's poems; that the type suitable for one is not suitable for another; that elegant poetry should have elegant type, & the rough hacked style of Walt Whitman a rough hacked style of letter; that reprints of Malory should be printed in 'Black Letter' and books of technology in 'Sans-serif'. There is a certain plausibility in all this, & even a certain reasonableness. The undignified typography of the Daily Mail Year Book is certainly unsuitable for the Bible; a fine italic might be suitable for Milton but unsuitable for a translation of Jean Cocteau but might be unsuitable for a pocket prayer book. And as to size: it is impossible to print the Bible on too grand a scale, but third-rate verse might look and be absurd in a book requiring a lectern to hold it. Nevertheless, the reasonable producer of books starts with the principle that it is the reading, not the reading matter, which determines the size of book and the style of type; the other considerations come in only as modifying influences. In planning a book the first questions are: who is going to read this, and under what circumstances?

¶If, then, there are normally four sizes of books, it would seem that there sh'ld be four sizes of type. A pocket book demands small type, say 8 point, for reasons of space. A book held in the hand demands type of about 10 or 12 point on account of the length of

the human arm and the normal power of human eyesight, assuming a normally legible type. Table books & lectern books, normally read further from the eye, demand types of still larger sizes, say 14 or 18 point or over. But the sizes of types named here are not binding on anybody; it is only the principle we are concerned with.
¶The proportions of books were formerly determined by the sizes of printing papers. These were always oblong in shape (probably because this was the shape most easily handled by the makers, or, perhaps, because the skins of animals used for writing on in medieval times are of this shape, and so books followed suit) & when folded in half and in half again and so on, made a narrow folio, a wide quarto, a narrow octavo, &c. But with the machine made papers now almost universally used these proportions are only retained by custom, the width of the web of paper and the direction of the grain being the only determining factors. Books printed on machine made paper can, these factors understood, be of any shape that pleases you. And thus the commercial book designer is, to a greater degree than his predecessor, released from the thraldom of any considerations but that of what will sell.
¶As to what does or should sell, we may say that the things which should form the shape & proportions of the page are the hand and the eye; the hand because books of wide proportions are unwieldy to hold; and the eye because lines of more than 10-12 words are awkward to read. (With longer lines, set solid, i.e. without leads between them, there is difficulty in following from one line to the next, &, even if the type be leaded, a long line necessitates a distinctly felt muscular movement of the eye and, in extreme cases, of the head.) As to the height of a page, this again is governed by the needs of hand & eye; a very tall page necessitates either a distinct movement of the neck of the reader or a changing of the angle at which the book is held in the hand, & such things are simply a nuisance. It may be that there are other considerations than those of physical convenience which have helped to determine the normal octavo page; it may be that such a proportion is intrinsically pleasing to the human mind. It is, however, sufficient for us to see that there is a physical reasonableness in this proportion, and we may safely leave the discovery of other reasons to professional aestheticians.

¶The shape of the page being given, it remains to discover the best proportions for the lines & mass of type printed upon it. Here again physical considerations are a sufficient guide. Two things are to be thought of: the type & the margins. Let us consider the margins first. The inner margin exists simply to separate a page from the one opposite to it, and need be no wider than is enough to keep the printed words clear of the bend of the paper where it is sewn in binding. The top margin, again, needs only to be sufficiently wide to isolate the type from the surrounding landscape of furniture and carpets (just as a 'mount' or frame is used by painters to isolate a picture from wall paper, &c.). On the other hand, the outer and bottom margins need more width than is required for mere isolation, for it is by these margins that the book is held in the hand; enough must be allowed for thumbs, and the bottom margins need more than the side or outer ones. These considerations being allowed for, we may now consider the margins in relation to one another, & it will be seen at once that, taking one page at a time, i.e. half the 'opening', slightly more must be allowed to the top margin than is required for mere isolation; for if you make the top and inner margins equally narrow, the outer margin wide and the bottom still wider, the text will appear to be pushed off the top. We may say then that the general rule should be: a narrow inner margin, a slightly wider top margin, an outer margin at least double the inner, and a bottom slightly wider than the others; the exact proportions being left to the judgement of the printer. It is to be noted that unless the outer margin be at least double the inner, the two inner margins, seen together when the book is opened, will appear to be pushing the text outwards off the page. [. . .]

¶The title page should be set in the same style of type as the book and preferably in the same size. The unfortunate printers who regard the title page as the only source of interest in an otherwise dull job are the miserable descendants of those scribes who knowing and even appreciating the glory of the books they wrote out naturally gave a glorious beginning to them. The title of a book is merely the thing to know it by; we have made of the title page a showing-off ground for the printers & publishers. A smart title page will not redeem a dully printed book any more than a smart cinema will redeem a slum. ¶The title of the book & its author's

name must be given somewhere. They may be placed at the top of the first page of the book, or at the top of the contents page, if any, or on a blank page left for the purpose. ¶The addition of the publisher's name & address has the sanction of long establishment & the compulsion of the law; but, apart from the needs of advertisement, such things should, like the name & sign of the printer, be placed at the end of the book where indeed they naturally come. In the industrial world, however, the necessity of advertisement is felt to be paramount, & the typographic exigencies have been compromised. It would be better to be frank about this &, to avoid the present confusion between the needs of the book & those of the publisher, to place the publisher's name & address & sign on a page by themselves preceding the title or opening page of the book proper. Thus on opening the book the first printed page would give the bare title & the advertisement of the publisher, the next would give the title, sub-title if any or list of contents &, continuing on the same page or at the top of the next, the beginning of the book itself. By this arrangement the legitimate demands of both printer and publisher would be met.

¶The bulk of the book is also a thing to be considered. By increasing the margins and leading the type the number of pages will be increased, and this may be desirable on various grounds. For instance where great legibility is required the leading of the type is helpful; or where the text is short and the book consequently a very thin one, the increase of margins and the use of leads may give that bulk to the book which habit has made pleasant. Even the business of bookselling makes its legitimate demands; books commend themselves to buyers by their weight, bulk and size as well as by their titles or their typography, and this is not entirely foolish. Books have got to be handled as well as read, and they have got to stand on shelves. Nevertheless there is

. . . books commend themselves to buyers by their weight, bulk and size as well as by their titles or their typography, and this is not entirely foolish. Books have got to be handeled as well as read, and they have got to stand on shelves.

no occasion to go to extremes in this matter, & it is as foolish to make a thick book of a short story as it is, by small type and cramped margins, to make one volume of a book which is properly two. [. . .]

¶The question arises: how many copies of a book should be printed? There are several appropriate answers to this question. The first is: as many as can be sold; and this is the only answer we shall consider here. But there are two primary considerations in the selling of anything: (a) the number of people who can be supposed to desire a thing because it is desirable in itself; and (b) the number who can afford to buy it. If all those to whom a book is desirable can afford to buy it, then the edition is properly limited to 'all those'; but if only a few can afford to buy it, the edition is properly limited to that few. What is this book? How ought it to be printed? These things being determined, the ground is clear for the consideration of the problem of the number of possible buyers.

¶It is obvious that the number of possible buyers of expensive books is comparatively small. This will always be so, and rightly. That everybody should be 'rich' is, in the nature of things, neither possible nor desirable. That everybody should be able to read or even wish to do so, is extremely doubtful. There is therefore no question of the limited production of expensive books involving any injustice, and, apart from the efforts of a few earnest enthusiasts, the production of cheap literature, whether daily newspapers or books, is without doubt the affair not of those interested in books but of men of business interested in money. They do not ask themselves: how well can this thing be done? but: how large a market can we 'tap'? And to this end they have brought into existence all the manifold powers of machinery & advertisement – a vicious circle; for the more the human race is degraded by industrialism, the larger is the market for inferior articles; in order to reach a larger and still larger number of buyers you produce a lower and still lower quality of goods.

¶But here we are not concerned with such a problem. Obviously there is only one just cause for the limitation of an edition, and that is the size of the market. Provided you are concerned to make books as well as they can be made – and this not so much in a spirit of piety (though we do not disdain the virtue of Prudence) as

in a spirit of reasonableness, for ultimately there is no happiness in a world in which things are not as good as they can be – the size of your edition will depend simply upon your judgement and experience as to the number of possible buyers. And if, owing to the time factor, you cannot supply in a reasonable time all who would buy, then you can produce second & third editions.
¶We may here go into the question of the artificial limitation of numbers in order to capture a 'collectors' market. Properly understood this is a purely 'business' matter, and the printer whose first concern is quality is not a man of business. Let us suppose that both the craftsman and the industrialist have produced as many of their respective products as they can sell. What further can either of them do? ¶The craftsman can introduce into his workshop a bit of machinery, and, without its being noticeable to his customers, produce the same number of books more cheaply & therefore more profitably. He will continue to produce the same number, but now, instead of that number being the largest number he can sell, it will be the most profitable number. ¶The industrialist can introduce into his factory a book designer who has studied in the museums where they store pre-industrial productions &, by careful watching of the work of 'private' presses and of the market supplied by them, he may produce, at a very considerably higher price than they cost him to make, a 'limited' edition which will make almost as much appeal to collectors as the work of Cobden-Sanderson & his predecessor. This is simply a matter of business.
¶There are, then, two principles, as there are two worlds. There is the principle of best possible quality, and the principle of greatest possible profit. And there is every sort of compromise between the two. Whether, as seems probable, industrialism win a complete victory, or human nature so far reassert itself as to overthrow industrialism, is not here our concern. For the present we hold simply to the conviction that the two principles and the two worlds can exist side by side, industrialism becoming more strictly and nobly utilitarian as it recognises its inherent limitations, and the world of human labour, ceasing any longer to compete with it, becoming more strictly and soberly humane.

THE WHOLE BOOK

Barry Moser

ON THE 8TH OF MAY, 1932, George Bernard Shaw wrote a brief but telling letter to a young illustrator named John Farleigh. Shaw wrote at the suggestion of his publisher, William Maxwell, who knew Farleigh's work and thought that the addition of his wood engravings to Shaw's story, *The Black Girl in Her Search for God*, would make the book both more attractive and more marketable. So Mr. Shaw wrote to Farleigh saying:

> *Dear Sir*
> *As I am old and out of date, I have not the privilege of knowing you or your work. But Mr. William Maxwell of Clark's of Edinburgh tells me that you can design, draw and engrave pictures as parts of a printed book, which, you will understand, is something more than making a picture and sticking it into a book as an "illustration." The idea is that you and I and Maxwell should cooperate in turning out a good looking little volume consisting of the story contained in the enclosed proof sheets . . . and say, a dozen pictures.*
>
> *Are you sufficiently young and unknown to read the story and*

Barry Moser, ed. Jessica Renaud, *In the Face of Presumptions: Essays, Speeches, and Incidental Writings by Barry Moser.* Reprinted by permission of David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc. "The Whole Book" appears on pp. 95-101. Originally delivered as a speech to the American Bookseller's Convention in Anaheim, California, on May 23, 1992. Barry Moser is on the faculty of the Illustration Department at the Rhode Island School of Design and is Professor in Residence at Smith College in the Department of Art. He also serves as Printer to the College.

make one trial drawing for me for five guineas? That is if the job interests you?

Faithfully,
G. Bernard Shaw

Looking at this letter closely, I find several things of interest.

First, Shaw not only realized that Farleigh would immediately understand that illustrating a book was "something more than making a picture and sticking it in," but he also recognized that designing, drawing, and engraving were all inseparable parts of a printed book. In this letter, Shaw implied an important concept, a philosophy, if you will, which is the very core of my work: The Whole Book.

By "the whole book" I mean this: Books are made of paper, type, ink, bindings, and a text – which sometimes, though not always, benefits from illustrations. "The whole book" is one wherein the materials, text, design, and pictures are so coherently joined that not one of the parts can be separated from it without diminishing the whole or even the parts themselves. For me, a book is what a painting is for a painter – a thoughtfully conceived and carefully executed object; an adroit arrangement of plastic elements; a coherent and intelligent marriage of text, type, and image.

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The second thing of interest in Shaw's letter comes when he notes to Farleigh that "The idea is that you and I and Maxwell should co-operate in turning out *a good looking little volume* [italics mine]."

Now, outside of writing stories and novels, bookmaking, like architecture and filmmaking, is inherently social in nature. It is unlike the solitary nature of say, painting and sculpture, which requires nothing of anyone else but the artist (except, of course, suppliers of utilities and manufacturers of paraphernalia, and even these are not always a given). In bookmaking there must be collegiality and co-operation, as Shaw put it, between author, editor, and illustrator. Indeed, bookmaking mandates co-operation not only between author, publisher, editor, and illustrator, but also with art director, typographer, marketing director, production manager, paper supplier, printer, binder, distributor, and eventually the bookseller.

This is not to say, however, that I, or others like me, do not while away countless hours alone. We do. Our craft demands it. But the daily solitude is punctuated by frequent phone calls from editors, art directors, colleagues, friends, and production managers creating new projects, reconciling editorial issues, swapping recipes, correcting chromalins, adjusting typography, choosing binding materials, commiserating about deadlines or parenthood, or writing flap copy. No book can be produced without this kind of constant and flexible co-operation.

The third thing in Shaw's letter I want to highlight is something that my Mamma always told me was impolite to talk about in public: money. Shaw brings up this ugly matter when he queries Farleigh, "Are you sufficiently young and unknown to . . . make one trial drawing for me for five guineas?"

Now, I am not going to say that I work simply to make money. Mind you, it is precisely the sort of thing I could say just to be ornery or iconoclastic. In fact, I could polish my ornery iconoclasm with historical bons-mots. For instance, did you know that Raphael based his fresco fees on a per-head basis? That Rubens invented the painting production line to earn greater sums of remuneration (and subsequently became astonishingly wealthy)? Or that Titian lived in his own palace? Of course, we don't even want to begin talking about composers and writers! But if I were to say that about myself, it would be disingenuous. While I certainly work for money, much like the artists I just mentioned, there is a higher purpose that calls me to my craft. But – that "higher purpose" is not the ennobling of the human spirit, nor the enrichment

of man's existence, nor any such self-serving, self-aggrandizing hogwash. It is, quite simply, in sculptor David Smith's words, an arrogant need to create.

And this overriding need to create has afforded me some unusual critical receptions. For example, on January 21, 1991, writing in the Book World column of the *Washington Post*, David Streitfeld said: "Barry Moser is so prolific he could form his own book of the month club." In the next sentence he feels he has to drive his point further home: "Moser has his detractors who say that he works too fast. . . ."

Now, I'm not given to taking critics too seriously. I am much of the same mind as Max Reger when he responded to a critic by writing the following, "Sir, I am sitting in the smallest room in my house, I have your review in front of me. Soon it will be behind me." Nevertheless, Mr. Streitfeld's comments do give me an interesting – if unintended – platform from which to make a few observations.

It is true that I have been involved one way or another in the production of a number of books – over two hundred so far – but it seems that taking note of my productivity is the limit of my critic's observation. Had he considered the nature of my productivity more carefully, he may have come up with other more interesting things to say. For instance:

"Mr. Moser must love little children to do so many books for them."

Had he written this, I would respond, yes, I do love children, but I do not make books for them any more than I make books for adults. Ten years ago, if anyone told me that I would be speaking at the 1992 ABA as a writer and illustrator of children's books, I would have found it amusing and would have thought it hardly likely. My life at the time was immersed in making *livres d'artiste*, illustrating *Moby-Dick*, *The Divine Comedy*, *The Æneid*, *The Odyssey*, and illustrating the poetry of David Smith, William Stafford, and Paul Mariani. I was also up to my adenoids producing a folio *Alice in Wonderland* at my own Pennyroyal Press. But even my *Alice* with its nightmare-like illustrations, scholarly shoulder notes, and a final portrait of Alice naked, was not envisioned as a book for children. It was, as are all my books, created

with me as the audience. For I believe with such artists as Goethe, Flannery O'Connor, and Alfred Kazin that first, I work to entertain myself; second, I write and draw in order to find out what I'm thinking; and third, in all I do, I seek to understand. To satisfy some deep and curious part of my soul. If someone else enjoys my work, or is transported to another time and place, or is amused by it, or perhaps even benefits from it, well, that's a dividend. Because for me it is all a matter of satisfying that arrogant need to create.

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Consider also that my critic could have said, in conjunction with my "detractors" who say that I work too fast, "I wonder what would happen if Moser worked slower?"

And I would respond, "Hell, budrow, I can't work any slower."

My workday is pretty much like everybody else's – up in the morning, work all day, relax at night, and then go to bed. I don't begin my workday at 4 a.m. like I used to, and I don't work nights any more, keeping my evenings, as Eudora Welty says, for family and friends. And yet, I'm more productive now than I was when I worked those insane, grueling hours – perhaps that says something about experience, maturity, and the unacknowledged benefits of gray hair.

But anyhow – what exactly is it about making so many books that bothers people? Had I stayed a painter (which is what I was trained for) and had I spent all my hours developing a comparable visual fluency and versatility whereby critics would review my paintings as they do my books, I daresay no critic would ever accuse me of being overly prolific if I produced only six or eight paintings a year! Apparently book critics see productivity in a different light. And it is a serious "misreading" of the book maker's work, for making books is no more nor less a complex and profound an activity than making paintings.

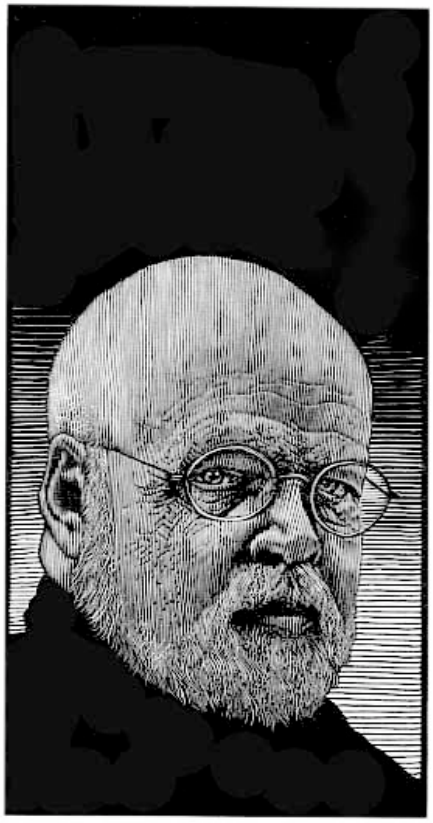
Then, consider this: the critic could have said, "Moser must

love his work to do so much of it." And I would respond, "Yes, I do love my work." As Matisse said, work is paradise. My love for my work and my love for my children are the twin engines that drive my life. There is never a morning that I do not look forward to hugging and kissing my kids, and (after the coffee is made and the dogs are fed), getting down to work. I look forward to my work because, for one thing, my work comes easily to me, as I am sure composing music came easily to Georg Philipp Telemann. And in this, I join the ranks of most of the artists I know.

In fact, I did a private poll of some artist and writer friends a few years ago. I asked them this simple question: "Is it easy for you to write (or illustrate) books? At first, Jane Yolen, Cynthia Rylant, Jane Dyer, and Patty MacLachlan, among others, all resisted my request that they answer with a simple yes or no, but when I pushed and nagged them – and confessed to them that it was easy for me – they all answered in kind. Yes, they all agreed, it was easy for them. And if you stop to think about it, it has to be. How else could Telemann have written over forty operas, 600 overtures, and over sixty settings of the Passion of Christ? It's what he did every day. It's what all artists and writers do. We make things. And if the very act of making things were a constant difficulty every time we started exploring a new idea then we would never get beyond our medium and into the idea. I think that's what William Faulkner alluded to when he said that all he needed to do his work was "paper, tobacco, food, and a little whiskey." But let me say, as my friends said to me in resisting my question, that while it's easy for writers to write, and for painters to paint, it is not easy for writers or painters to write or paint well. No matter how good the writer or painter may be, writing and painting *well* is a gut-wrenching experience. Not only do we have to make our materials behave the way we want them to (which is not always the way *they* want to), we also have to enter into a cheerless and contentious battle with the most devastating critic there is – the "inner critic" as Ben Shahn calls it – the one that lives inside your viscera, inside your brain and heart.

At the Rhode Island School of Design, where I sometimes teach, I criticize my students' work with generosity, kindness, and a sensitivity to their needs. But when I criticize my own work, I

am abject, insensitive, ruthless, and – sometimes – destructive. I know of no critic who would rip or shred or burn one of my paintings or engravings, regardless of how much he hated it. Yet ripping, wadding, shredding, and burning are commonplace, almost ritual, events in my studio. If my *Washington Post* critic knew how much work I destroyed in the course of a day, he would probably faint away in a paroxysm of astonishment.



Self Portrait Wood Engraving
by Barry Moser

Finally, consider this: my critic could have said, "Moser must have a big mortgage to have to make so many books." Now had he said this, I would have thought him well above average in perception. I do have a big mortgage, and I have that big mortgage precisely because, as our critic has it, I am prolific – or, as I see it, because I work hard. Remember that George Bernard Shaw asked John Farleigh not if he were willing to make a trial drawing for him, but if he would be willing to make a trial drawing for him *for five guineas*. Shaw understood better than most that art is damned hard work and not a charitable enterprise.

And remember, too, that Shaw and Maxwell employed Farleigh's talents not for the sake of art nor because Shaw so admired Farleigh's work, but to make the book more marketable.

Quibbles with critics aside, let me conclude by saying that making illustrated books, as Mr. Shaw quite rightly observed, is a great deal more than making pictures and sticking them into a book

as "illustrations." The whole book is a richly complex undertaking, one in which co-operation between the sundry parties involved is paramount, and one in which knowledge of history, and art, and technology are indispensable. But it is not, as Shaw also observed, a philanthropy. I need to make enough money each month so that I can continue to make more books. My publishers need to turn a profit so they can stay in business and produce more books. And you, the booksellers, need to sell enough books to pay your staffs and maintain your stores so you can sell more books. And though it may go without saying, I believe that most of us – authors, illustrators, publishers, booksellers – are in this business because we love books and are dedicated to them. And not just to books either, but to good books. And good books, as George Moore said, are invincible things, neither malice nor stupidity can crush them.

The whole book is a richly complex undertaking . . . . But it is not, as Shaw also observed, a philanthropy. I need to make enough money each month so that I can continue to make more books. My publishers need to turn a profit so they can stay in business and produce more books. And you the booksellers, need to sell enough books to pay your staffs and maintain your stores so you can sell more books. . . . I believe that most of us - authors, illustrators, publishers, booksellers - are in this business because we love books and are dedicated to them. And not just to books either, but to good books. And good books, as George Moore said, are invincible things, neither malice nor stupidity can crush them.

views from eighth day books

WAYS of SEEING

The Sacred in Life and Art *by Philip Sherrard*

"The concept of a completely profane world," Sherrard writes, "of a cosmos wholly desacralized, is a fairly recent invention of the human mind." The attempt to implement this standard as the force by which we determine the course of our social, economic, political, and personal lives is even more recent and, according to Sherrard, enormously destructive. Such an endeavor requires us first to "blind our intellectual sight with a sacrilegious and fraudulent notion of the physical universe," which he boldly calls the "cataract of modern science." Only by reawakening us with the consciousness of the sacred can this flow of secular philosophy abate. *The Sacred in Life and Art* presents Philip Sherrard's contribution to this reawakening by discussing the holy sacraments, the relationship between the artist and the sacred, the problem of modern art, the concept of art and originality, the art of the icon, the art of transfiguration (understood as the art of holiness), and the mysterious art of nuptial love. As with most of Sherrard's books, the text is packed dense with philosophical and theological potential and takes some work to digest. Read it slowly. Neither artist nor layman will be disappointed. Both may even discover the vocational door by which a life infused with the sacred is entered: "Here contemplation – not aesthetic but religious – reveals itself, in life as in art, as the loving of every created reality: a love, an 'ontological tenderness,' that raises what is created above itself and liberates it from its bondage, its isolation, and even from death itself."

162 pp. paper $29.95

Three Treatises on the Divine Images
by St. John of Damascus; translated by Andrew Louth

Perhaps no name is more synonymous with the subject of early Christian art than the eighth-century monk John of Damascus. Renowned in both East and West for his profound yet clearly expressed theology, St. John remains our most accessible defender of Christ glorified in His Church, and this desire is foundational to each of the treatises presented here. He is careful to explain what is meant by "image" and "worship," and he makes a distinction between different forms of veneration. Without St. John's contribution, the politi-

cal and social concerns of the late Byzantine Empire could have eclipsed the humble beauty and proper use of art in Christian life. Christian iconography is not idolatrous, says St. John, but a biblical and an integral part of our apostolic heritage (A new translation, by the leading scholar of the Damascene monk in the English-speaking world).

163 pp. paper $17.00

The Rublev Trinity : The Icon of the Trinity by the Monk-Painter Andrei Rublev

by Gabriel Bunge; translated by Andrew Louth

Among the most instantly recognizable images of Eastern Christianity is the icon of the Holy Trinity by the hand of St. Andrei Rublev. Its transcendent and enduring quality appeals across the centuries to peasant and scholar alike. This great work of ecclesial art has generated innumerable cultural, religious, and philosophical studies, and caused St. Pavel Florensky to declare: "There exists the icon of the Trinity by St. Andrei Rublev; therefore God exists." Among these many studies, we offer one by Benedictine hermit and contemplative Gabriel Bunge, recent convert to Orthodoxy and author of the extraordinary guide to prayer *Earthen Vessels*. Fr. Bunge gently brings us face to face with the Rublev Trinity and hands us the tools to understand its message. To do this, he attempts to translate the language of image into the simpler language of words. Beginning with the iconographic tradition generally and the Russian tradition specifically, with full-color illustrations, the book's (and the Icon's) ultimate message is that Pentecost is an ongoing experience: the Church caught up into the life of the Triune God.

120 pp. oversize cloth $32.00

Earthen Vessels : Practice of Personal Prayer According to the Patristic Tradition *by Gabriel Bunge*

222 pp. paper $14.95

AND THE PIXEL WAS MADE FLESH

Wisdom demands a new orientation of science and technology toward the organic, the gentle, the elegant and beautiful.

E. F. Schumacher

ALEXANDRIAN FRAGMENTS

Scott Cairns

after the fire

In those uncertain hours following our famous
conflagration, I surveyed with no small measure
of chagrin the scorched rubble, the thousand thousand

scroll rods charred and emptied of all but ashen curls,
steaming parchment, the air bitter and far too hot,
our book vaults fallen, the books reduced to cinder.

And in that moment the sun first lit our city's
eastern quarter, I found myself alone, in awe:
from that ruin, a forest had sprung up overnight,

as a wavering expanse of smoke white trees, pale
birches, original as the local laurel,
but shifting with the morning's faintest breath. They rose

 "Alexandrian Fragments" appears on p. 19. Scott Cairns is an American poet, memoirist, and essayist who is Professor of English at the University of Missouri and Co-Director of MU Writing Workshops in Greece.

to where their reaching branches twined to canopy
our broad destruction, so that each trunk expanded
at its uppermost and wove a fabric overhead –

now white, now red, now golden from the sun's approach.
Beneath that winding sheet our ravished corpus lay
razed, erased, an open, emptied volume in repose

insisting either new and strenuous reply,
or that we confess our hopelessness and turn away.

THE JUDGMENT of THAMUS

Neil Postman

YOU WILL FIND IN Plato's *Phaedrus* a story about Thamus, the king of a great city of Upper Egypt. For people such as ourselves, who are inclined (in Thoreau's phrase) to be tools of our tools, few legends are more instructive than his. [. . .]

I begin my book with this legend because in Thamus' response there are several sound principles from which we may begin to learn how to think with wise circumspection about a technological society. In fact, there is even one error in the judgment of Thamus, from which we may also learn something of importance. The error is not in his claim that writing will damage memory and create false wisdom. It is demonstrable that writing has had such an effect. Thamus' error is in his believing that writing will be a burden to society and *nothing but a burden*. For all his wisdom, he fails to imagine what writing's benefits might be, which, as we know, have been considerable. We may learn from this that it is a mistake to

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 "The Judgment of Thamus" (the first chapter of *Technopoly*) appears in its entirety on pp. 3-20. Neil Postman (1931-2003) was an American author, media theorist, cultural critic, and chair of the Department of Culture and Communications at New York University.

suppose that any technological innovation has a one-sided effect. Every technology is both a burden and a blessing; not either-or, but this-and-that.

Nothing could be more obvious, of course, especially to those who have given more than two minutes of thought to the matter. Nonetheless, we are currently surrounded by throngs of zealous Theuths, one-eyed prophets who see only what new technologies can do and are incapable of imagining what they will *undo*. We might call such people Technophiles. They gaze on technology as a lover does on his beloved, seeing it as without blemish and entertaining no apprehension for the future. They are therefore dangerous and are to be approached cautiously. On the other hand, some one-eyed prophets, such as I (or so I am accused), are inclined to speak only of burdens (in the manner of Thamus) and are silent about the opportunities that new technologies make possible. The Technophiles must speak for themselves, and do so all over the place. My defense is that a dissenting voice is sometimes needed to moderate the din made by the enthusiastic multitudes. If one is to err, it is better to err on the side of Thamusian skepticism. But it is an error nonetheless. And I might note that, with the exception of his judgment on writing, Thamus

. . . it is a mistake to suppose that any technological innovation has a one-sided effect. Every technology is both a burden and a blessing; not either-or, but this-and-that. . . . we are currently surrounded by throngs of zealous Theuths, one-eyed prophets who see only what new technologies can do and are incapable of imagining what they will undo. We might call such people Technophiles. They gaze on technology as a lover does on his beloved, seeing it as without blemish and entertaining no apprehensions for the future. They are therefore dangerous and to be approached cautiously.

does not repeat this error. You might notice on rereading the legend that he gives arguments *for* and *against* each of Theuth's inventions. For it is inescapable that every culture must negotiate with technology, whether it does so intelligently or not. A bargain is struck in which technology giveth and technology taketh away. The wise know this well, and are rarely impressed by dramatic technological changes, and never overjoyed. Here, for example, is Freud on the matter, from his doleful *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

> One would like to ask: is there, then, no positive gain in pleasure, no unequivocal increase in my feeling of happiness, if I can, as often as I please, hear the voice of a child of mine who is living hundreds of miles away or if I can learn in the shortest possible time after a friend has reached his destination that he has come through the long and difficult voyage unharmed? Does it mean nothing that medicine has succeeded in enormously reducing infant mortality and the danger of infection for women in childbirth, and, indeed, in considerably lengthening the average life of a civilized man?

Freud knew full well that technical and scientific advances are not to be taken lightly, which is why he begins this passage by acknowledging them. But he ends it by reminding us of what they have undone:

> If there had been no railway to conquer distances, my child would never have left his native town and I should need no telephone to hear his voice; if travelling across the ocean by ship had not been introduced, my friend would not have embarked on his sea-voyage and I should not need a cable to relieve my anxiety about him. What is the use of reducing infantile mortality when it is precisely that reduction which imposes the greatest restraint on us in the begetting of children, so that, taken all round, we nevertheless rear no more children than in the days before the reign of hygiene, while at the same time we have created difficult conditions for our sexual life in marriage. . . . And, finally, what good to us is a long life if it is difficult and barren of joys,

> and if it is so full of misery that we can only welcome death as deliverer.[1]

In tabulating the cost of technological progress, Freud takes a rather depressing line, that of a man who agrees with Thoreau's remark that our inventions are but improved means to an unimproved end. The Technophile would surely answer Freud by saying that life has always been barren of joys and full of misery but that the telephone, ocean liners, and especially the reign of hygiene have not only lengthened life but made it a more agreeable proposition. That is certainly an argument I would make (thus proving I am no one-eyed Technophobe), but it is not necessary at this point to pursue it. I have brought Freud into the conversation only to show that a wise man – even one of such a woeful countenance – must begin his critique of technology by acknowledging its successes. Had King Thamus been as wise as reputed, he would not have forgotten to include in his judgment a prophecy about the powers that writing would enlarge. There is a calculus of technological change that requires a measure of even-handedness.

So much for Thamus' error of omission. There is another omission worthy of note, but it is no error. Thamus simply takes for granted – and therefore does not feel it necessary to say – that writing is not a neutral technology whose good or harm depends on the uses made of it. He knows that the uses made of any technology are largely determined by the structure of the technology itself – that is, that its functions follow from its form. This is why Thamus is concerned not with *what* people will write; he is concerned *that* people will write. It is absurd to imagine Thamus advising, in the manner of today's standard-brand Technophiles, that, if only writing would be used for the production of certain kinds of texts and not others (let us say, for dramatic literature but not for history or philosophy), its disruptions would be minimized. He would regard such counsel as extreme naïveté. He would allow, I imagine, that a technology may be barred entry to a culture. But we may learn from Thamus the following: once a technology is admitted, it plays out its hand; it does what it is designed to do. Our task is to understand

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[1] Freud, pp. 38-39.

what that design is – that is to say, when we admit a new technology to the culture, we must do so with our eyes wide open. [. . .]

[I]n cultures that have a democratic ethos, relatively weak traditions, and a high receptivity to new technologies, everyone is inclined to be enthusiastic about technological change, believing that its benefits will eventually spread evenly among the entire population. Especially in the United States, where the lust for what is new has no bounds, do we find this childlike conviction most widely held. Indeed, in America, social change of any kind is rarely seen as resulting in winners and losers, a condition that stems in part from Americans' much-documented optimism. As for change brought on by technology, this native optimism is exploited by entrepreneurs, who work hard to infuse the population with a unity of improbable hope, for they know that it is economically unwise to reveal the price to be paid for technological change. One might say, then, that, if there is a conspiracy of any kind, it is that of a culture conspiring aginst itself.

In addition to this, and more important, it is not always clear, at least in the early stages of a technology's intrusion into a culture, who will gain most by it and who will lose most. This is because the changes wrought by technology are subtle if not downright mysterious, one might even say wildly unpredictable. Among the most unpredictable are those that might be labeled ideological. This is the sort of change Thamus had in mind when he warned that writers will come to rely on external signs instead of their own internal resources, and that they will receive quantities of information without proper instruction. He meant that new technologies change what we mean by "knowing" and "truth"; they alter those deeply embedded habits of thought which give to a culture its sense of what the world is like – a sense of what is the natural order of things, of what is reasonable, of what is necessary, of what is inevitable, of what is real. [. . .] Here, I should like to give only one example of how technology creates new conceptions of what is real and, in the process, undermines older conceptions. I refer to the seemingly harmless practice of assigning marks or grades to the answers students give on examinations. This procedure seems so natural to most of us that we are hardly aware of its significance. We may even find it difficult to imagine that the number or

letter is a tool or, if you will, a technology; still less that, when we use such a technology to judge someone's behavior, we have done something peculiar. In point of fact, the first instance of grading students' papers occurred at Cambridge University in 1792 at the suggestion of a tutor named William Farish.[2] No one knows much about William Farish; not more than a handful have ever heard of him. And yet his idea that a quantitative value should be assigned to human thoughts was a major step toward constructing a mathematical concept of reality. If a number can be given to the quality of a thought, then a number can be given to the qualities of mercy, love, hate, beauty, creativity, intelligence, even sanity itself. When Galileo said that the language of nature is written in mathematics, he did not mean to include human feeling or accomplishment or insight. But most of us are now inclined to make these inclusions. Our psychologists, sociologists, and educators find it quite impossible to do their work without numbers. They believe that without numbers they cannot acquire or express authentic knowledge.

I shall not argue here that this is a stupid or dangerous idea, only that it is peculiar. What is even more peculiar is that so many of us do not find the idea peculiar. To say that someone should be doing better work because he has an IQ of 134, or that someone is a 7.2 on a sensitivity scale, or that this man's essay on the rise of capitalism is an A - and that man's is a C + would have sounded

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[2] This fact is documented in Keith Hoskin's "The Examination, Disciplinary Power and Rational Schooling," in *History of Education*, vol. VIII, no. 2 (1979), pp. 135-46.

like gibberish to Galileo or Shakespeare or Thomas Jefferson. If it makes sense to us, that is because our minds have been conditioned by the technology of numbers so that we see the world differently than they did. Our understanding of what is real is different. Which is another way of saying that embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another.

This is what Marshall McLuhan meant by his famous aphorism "The medium is the message." This is what Marx meant when he said, "Technology discloses man's mode of dealing with nature" and creates the "conditions of intercourse" by which we relate to each other. It is what Wittgenstein meant when, in referring to our most fundamental technology, he said that language is not merely a vehicle of thought but also the driver. And it is what Thamus wished the inventor Theuth to see. This is, in short, an ancient and persistent piece of wisdom, perhaps most simply expressed in the old adage that, to a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Without being too literal, we may extend the truism: To a man with a pencil, everything looks like a list. To a man with a camera, everything looks like an image. To a man with a computer, everything looks like data. And to a man with a grade sheet, everything looks like a number.

But such prejudices are not always apparent at the start of a technology's journey, which is why no one can safely conspire to be a winner in technological change. Who would have imagined, for example, whose interests and what world-view would be ultimately advanced by the invention of the mechanical clock? The clock had its origin in the Benedictine monasteries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The impetus behind the invention was to provide a more or less precisely regularity to the routines of the monasteries, which required, among other things, seven periods of devotion during the course of the day. The bells of the monastery were to be rung to signal the canonical hours; the mechanical clock was the technology that could provide precision to these rituals of devotion. And indeed it did. But what the monks did not foresee was that the clock is a means not merely of keeping track of the hours but also of synchronizing and controlling the actions of men.

And thus, by the middle of the fourteenth century, the clock had moved outside the walls of the monastery, and brought a new and precise regularity to the life of the workman and the merchant. "The mechanical clock," as Lewis Mumford wrote, "made possible the idea of regular production, regular working hours and a standardized product." In short, without the clock, capitalism would have been quite impossible.[3] The paradox, the surprise, and the wonder are that the clock was invented by men who wanted to devote themselves more rigorously to God; it ended as the technology of greatest use to men who wished to devote themselves to the accumulation of money. In the eternal struggle between God and Mammon, the clock quite unpredictably favored the latter.

Unforeseen consequences stand in the way of all those who think they see clearly the direction in which a new technology will take us. Not even those who invent a technology can be assumed to be reliable prophets, as Thamus warned. Gutenberg, for example, was by all accounts a devout Catholic who would have been horrified to hear that accursed heretic Luther describe printing as "God's highest act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven foward." Luther understood, as Gutenberg did not, that the mass-produced book, by placing the Word of God on every kitchen ta-

Luther understood, as Gutenberg did not, that the mass-produced book, by placing the Word of God on every kitchen table, makes each Christian his own theologian – one might even say his own priest, or better, from Luther's point of view, his own pope. In the struggle between unity and diversity of religious belief, the press favoured the latter, and we can assume that this possibility never occurred to Gutenberg.

[3] For a detailed exposition of Mumford's position on the impact of the mechanical clock, see his *Technics and Civilization*.

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Thamus understood well the limitations of inventors in grasping the social and psychological – that is, ideological – bias of their own inventions. We can imagine him addressing Gutenberg in the following way: "Gutenberg, my paragon of inventors, the discoverer of an art is not the best judge of the good or harm which will accrue to those who practice it. So it is in this; you, who are the father of printing, have out of fondness for your off-spring come to believe it will advance the cause of the Holy Roman See, whereas in fact it will sow discord among believers; it will damage the authenticity of your beloved Church and destroy its monopoly."

We can imagine that Thamus would also have pointed out to Gutenberg, as he did to Theuth, that the new invention would create a vast population of readers who "will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction . . . [who will be] filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom"; that reading, in other words, will compete with older forms of learning. This is yet another principle of technological change we may infer from the judgment of Thamus: new techologies compete with old ones – for time, for attention, for money, for prestige, but mostly for dominance of their world-view. This competition is implicit once we acknowledge that a medium contains an ideological bias. And it is a fierce competition, as only ideological competitions can be. It is not merely a matter of tool against tool – the alphabet attacking ideographic writing, the printing press attacking the illuminated manuscript, the photograph attacking the art of painting, television attacking the printed word. When media make war against each other, it is a case of world-views in collision.

In the United States, we can see such collisions everywhere – in politics, in religion, in commerce – but we see them most clearly in the schools, where two great technologies confront each other in uncompromising aspect for the control of students' minds. On the one hand, there is the world of the printed word with its emphasis on logic, sequence, history, exposition, objectivity, detachment,

and discipline. On the other, there is the world of television with its emphasis on imagery, narrative, presentness, simultaneity, intimacy, immediate gratification, and quick emotional response. Children come to school having been deeply conditioned by the biases of television. There, they encounter the world of the printed word. A sort of psychic battle takes place, and there are many casualties – children who can't learn to read or won't, children who cannot organize their thought into logical structure even in a simple paragraph, children who cannot attend to lectures or oral explanations for more than a few minutes at a time. They are failures, but not because they are stupid. They are failures because there is a media war going on, and they are on the wrong side – at least for the moment. Who knows what schools will be like twenty-five years from now? Or fifty? In time, the type of student who is currently a failure may be considered a success. The type who is now successful may be regarded as a handicapped learner – slow to respond, far too detached, lacking in emotion, inadequate in creating mental pictures of reality. Consider: what Thamus called the "conceit of wisdom" – the unreal knowledge acquired through the written word – eventually became the pre-eminent form of knowledge valued by the schools. There is no reason to suppose that such a form of knowledge must always remain so highly valued.

To take another example: In introducing the personal computer to the classroom, we shall be breaking a four-hundred-year-old truce between the gregariousness and openness fostered by orality and the introspection and isolation fostered by the printed word. Orality stresses group learning, cooperation, and a sense of social responsibility, which is the context within which Thamus believed proper instruction and real knowledge must be communicated. Print stresses individualized learning, competition, and personal autonomy. Over four centuries, teachers, while emphasizing print, have allowed orality its place in the classroom, and have therefore achieved a kind of pedagogical peace between these two forms of learning, so that what is valuable in each can be maximized. Now comes the computer, carrying anew the banner of private learning and individual problem-solving. Will the widespread use of computers in the classroom defeat once and for all the claims of com-

munal speech? Will the computer raise egocentrism to the status of a virtue?

These are the kinds of questions that technological change brings to mind when one grasps, as Thamus did, that technological competition ignites total war, which means it is not possible to contain the effects of a new technology to a limited sphere of human activity. If this metaphor puts the matter too brutally, we may try a gentler, kinder one: Technological change is neither additive nor subtractive. It is ecological. I mean "ecological" in the same sense as the word is used by environmental scientists. One significant change generates total change. If you remove the caterpillars from a given habitat, you are not left with the same environment minus caterpillars: you have a new environment, and you have reconstituted the conditions of survival; the same is true if you add caterpillars to an environment that has had none. This is how the ecology of media works as well. A new technology does not add or subtract something. It changes everything. In the year 1500, fifty years after the printing press was invented, we did not have old Europe plus the printing press. We had a different Europe. After television, the United States was not America plus television; television gave a new coloration to every political campaign, to every home, to every school, to every church, to every industry. And that is why the competition among media is so fierce. Surrounding every technology are institutions whose organization – not to mention their reason for being – reflects the world-view promoted by the technology. Therefore, when an old technology is assaulted by a new one, institutions are threatened. When institutions are threatened, a culture finds itself in crisis. This is serious business, which is why we learn nothing when educators ask, Will students learn mathematics better by computers than by textbooks? Or when businessmen ask, Through which medium can we sell more products? Or when preachers ask, Can we reach more people through television than radio? Or when politicians ask, How effective are messages sent through different media? Such questions have an immediate, practical value to those who ask them, but they are diversionary. They direct our attention away from the serious social, intellectual, and institutional crises that new media foster.

Perhaps an analogy here will help to underline the point. In speaking of the meaning of a poem, T. S. Eliot remarked that the chief use of the overt content of poetry is "to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him: much as the imaginary burglar is always provided with a bit of nice meat for the house-dog." In other words, in asking their practical questions, educators, entrepreneurs, preachers, and politicians are like the house-dog munching peacefully on the meat while the house is looted. Perhaps some of them know this and do not especially care. After all, a nice piece of meat, offered graciously, does take care of the problem of where the next meal will come from. But for the rest of us, it cannot be acceptable to have the house invaded without protest or at least awareness.

What we need to consider about the computer has nothing to do with its efficiency as a teaching tool. We need to know in what ways it is altering our conception of learning, and how, in conjunction with television, it undermines the old idea of school. Who cares how many boxes of cereal can be sold via television? We need to know if television changes our conception of reality, the relationship of the rich to the poor, the idea of happiness itself. A preacher who confines himself to consider how a medium can increase his audience will miss the significant question: In what sense do new media alter what is meant by religion, by church, even by God? And if the politician cannot think beyond the next election, then *we* must wonder about what new media do to the idea of political organization and to the conception of citizenship.

To help us do this, we have the judgment of Thamus, who, in the way of legends, teaches us what Harold Innis, in his way, tried to. New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think about. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think with. And they alter the nature of community: the arena in which thoughts develop. As Thamus spoke to Innis across the centuries, it is essential that we listen to their conversation, join in it, revitalize it. For something has happened in America that is strange and dangerous, and there is only a dull and even stupid awareness of what it is – in part because it has no name. I call it Technopoly.

AND the PIXEL WAS MADE FLESH

Gregory Wolfe

THE ADVENT OF THE new telecommunications technologies – including the Internet and its primary manifestation, the World Wide Web – has generated a torrent of hype and hyperbole. But even if we were to discount all the euphoric statements that have been made about the wonders of the "electronic global village," the fact remains: we have, willy-nilly, entered the Digital Age. Our most astute cultural observers, whether they are friends or foes of these technologies, agree that the medium of the printed word is giving way to the faster-paced, point-and-click realm of Net-surfing, hypertext, and video-on-demand.

Of course, Marshall McLuhan's prophetic voice told us thirty years ago that "the medium is the message" – that reading, a deeply private and internal experience, was soon to be superseded by the public, in-your-face, immersive experiences of television and computers. Over the years, McLuhan has received his own share of hype (and knew how to generate his own) – but he was

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"And the Pixel Was Made Flesh" originally appeared in *Image*, Issue #15, Fall 1996 (www.imagejournal.com). Reprinted with permission. Gregory Wolfe is an American author, founder and editor of *Image*, and Writer in Residence at Seattle Pacific University, where he teaches English literature and creative writing and where he founded and directs the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing.

essentially right. The medium does have a substantial impact on the message.

What are the implications of this shift from books to digital technology for the future of the Judeo-Christian tradition? If the religious inheritance of the West is centered on the primacy of the sacred books, and if Christianity understands its savior as the divine *Word*, how will the digitally-reared generations come to perceive God, grace, and the biblical narrative?

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I cannot pretend that I have any answers to these questions. On the one hand I have a variety of concerns and fears, while on the other I have a strong instinct not to respond like a Luddite with my head firmly stuck in the sand.

The last major paradigm shift in communications took place in the fifteenth century, with Gutenberg's printing press and the transition from oral culture to literary culture. Both cultures, however, sprang from the spoken word, even if in books the "presence" of the speaking voice was indirect.

In the Greek, *logos* means not only "word" but also the cosmic "reason" that orders the universe. The *logos* emerges out of silence and is spoken into the silence of our hearts and minds, where it continues its ordering work. In the Western tradition, reading demands an arduous act of imaginative response. The critic Sven Birkerts has spoken of reading as putting us in "deep time" – an austere, one-on-one encounter with the mind of the author.

By contrast, the Internet is like a huge bulletin board or public mural that we can skim across, occasionally dipping in to follow a thought or download an image or sound file. Though it might

seem reasonable to say that "text is always text," whether in ink or in the colored pixels of a computer screen, I wonder if that is really so. On the Web the use of "hypertext" links to other subjects is a constant temptation to fly off on tangents. My experience of trying to follow Internet trails is that there are rare occasions when I make significant discoveries but countless episodes where I end up in thickets and cul-de-sacs, wondering how I got there in the first place. Significantly, the piece of software one needs to explore the Web is known as a "browser."

If we lose the mental, emotional, and imaginative discipline of reading, shorten our attention spans even further, fill our minds with trivia, and become adept at manipulating surface images, how prepared will our hearts be to recognize the quiet intimacies of grace? Words are certainly not immutable, but they have more stability than pixels, those infinitely shifting points of light.

Then there is the issue of personal presence and identity. Imagine a computer-generated world of "virtual reality" where you appear to others not as yourself, but as a movie star, or a member of the opposite sex, or Roger Rabbit. Netheads glorify this infinite regression of role-playing, but does this type of posturing offer us more than face-to-face encounters? Meeting "f2f," as the computer generation puts it, is hardly a guarantee of a significant encounter. But with the experience of physical presence – an arch of the eyebrow, a gesticulating hand, a sudden change in the timbre of a voice – we have the opportunity to share ourselves honestly and meaningfully. In reading literature, we focus on the very same details that express individuality and character.

Postmodernists love the Internet because they delight in endless role-playing. Christians, however, are supposed to spend an entire lifetime learning how to take off the many masks we wear in order to meet, and love, a Person.

Postmodernists love the Internet because they delight in endless role-playing. Christians, however, are supposed to spend an entire lifetime learning how to take off the many masks we wear in order to meet, and love, a Person.

When a new and powerful technology comes along, the proper response, I feel, is not to deny its existence, but to hedge it around with moral and cultural restraints. We continue to live in the midst of huge arsenals of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons, but we have dramatized the insanity of their potential use so often that the Bomb no longer looms large in our collective fears. At the risk of sounding like Luddites, we must be willing to utter dire prophecies and sketch out worst-case scenarios. Only then will we be able to inoculate ourselves against the most dangerous tendencies of a new technology.

Devices of the Soul : Battling for Our Selves in an Age of Machines *by Steve Talbott*

Steve Talbott identifies the peril of self-forgetfulness as "the danger that we will descend to the level of the computational devices we have engineered." A software programmer turned researcher and editor for The Nature Institute, Talbott challenges us to see technology in a new and perhaps unfamiliar light. The "miracle" of technology stems not from the machine itself but from the human spirit that created it. The brilliance of our creation ultimately confronts us with choices and responsibilities that once lay in the domain of the gods – from nuclear weapons and genetic engineering to the promise of life-saving technologies. Within the human soul reside liberating devices "that stand opposite the inner automatisms now resonating so powerfully with the external machinery of our lives." Talbott looks at how technical devices can play a positive role in human transformation and also lull us toward unconsciousness. Because technological prostheses seem irresistible when faced with our own limitations, Talbott juxtaposes technological thinking with the inner worlds of a blind man, a Down syndrome family, and a community for the mentally handicapped. He examines the natural world as an educational resource and reports on the effect of computers, video games, and Internet content on the physical and mental development of children. It's not the glitches and failures of these tools that concerns him so much as their smooth-running, alluring efficiency. Ultimately, Talbott perceptively defends the wholeness of life, taking into account technology's part within it.

281 pp. paper $22.99

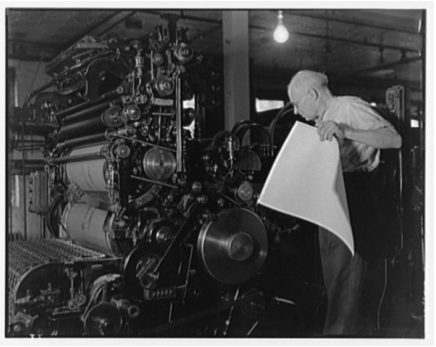
Digital Barbarism : A Writer's Manifesto *by Mark Helprin*

Novelist Mark Helprin takes deadly aim at the dark side of the digital age, arguing that it's not simply our attention spans, literary standards, and morality that are at stake in an Internet-driven world, but the future of culture itself. The springboard for his tirade is a seemingly minor issue (extending the terms of copyright law) that, at first glance, pits two individual "freedoms" against each other: the right to freely access mate-

rial controlled by corporations vs. the right to protect the fruits of one's creative labors. Part memoir, part account of his battles with anonymous internet foes (and thus a harsh critique of cyberspace's assult on civil discourse), Helprin, author of *A Soldier of the Great War*, eloquently calls upon our love for T. S. Eliot's "permanent things." "By insistence upon unhindered access without regard for rights and incentives that have been carefully balanced over centuries, the hurried new order will diminish the substance over which it demands sovereignty. It will have its access, but, as time passes, to less and less, and eventually perhaps to almost nothing. . . . The past may be brilliantly cataloged and made accessible as never before, but at the cost of making the culture of the present relatively barren." Well said, and well worth reading by every skeptic of that new order.

281 pp. paper $15.95

Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word *by Walter Ong, S. J.*



One can scarcely exaggerate how profoundly the introduction of writing changed all facets of human existence. Ong lucidly documents those changes and then projects his conclusions into the age of mass electronic communications. As we leave behind (courtesy of radios, telephones, and computers) our predominantly chirographic culture to enter uncharted territory, Ong is a prophetic guide, offering philosophical, social, and theological implications.

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A Guide for the Perplexed *by E. F. Schumacher*

Think of this book as an expansion of the Appendix to *The Abolition of Man*, in which C. S. Lewis brings together excerpts from the great religious traditions to underline the universality of "the Tao," the common moral sense indelibly implanted in all humankind. Schumacher extends this methodology in a withering critique of scientific materialism and a description of an ontologically multilayered universe in which the invisible is vastly more significant than the empirical. Quoting Victor Frankl: "The true nihilism of today is reductionism. . . . Contemporary nihilism no longer brandishes the word *nothingness*, today nihilism is camouflaged as *nothing-but-ness*." One could easily lump Schumacher together with numerous "traditionalist" thinkers such as P. D. Ouspensky,

Aldous Huxley, or Rene Guenon – he quotes heavily from them and inhabits the same thought-world – but his is a more commonsense approach. (It is relevant to relate that Schumacher was received into the Catholic Church a few years before this book was published.) Don't mistake *Guide for the Perplexed* as an apologetic for Christianity; it is rather a powerful apologetic against the reigning reductionism of our age and the reality of a rich and reigning transcendent realm of Being, drawing us to itself.

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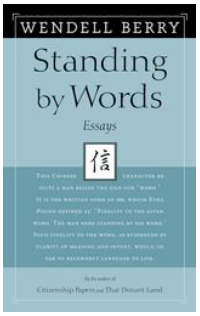
The Abolition of Man : How Education Develops Man's Sense of Morality *by C. S. Lewis*

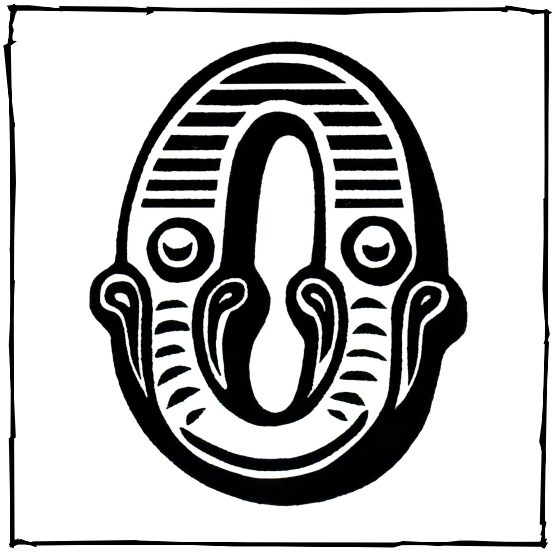
113 pp. paper $11.99

Standing by Words *by Wendell Berry*



Possibly the most cohesive collection of Berry's essays, *Standing by Words* encompasses and weaves together the subjects of poetry, place, agriculture, marriage, and community through its firm grounding in and discussion of human relationship. This acknowledges, to quote Berry, "that we not only have problems but are problems." Berry advocates an art that presses hard against experience – art that acts, be it through the narrative of poetry or the union of marriage. "The work of poetic form," he writes, "is coherence, joining things that need to be joined, as marriage joins them – in words by which a man or a woman can stand, words confirmable in acts." He is concerned with a knowledge which implies and imposes limits "understood to belong necessarily to the definition of a human being." To commit ourselves fully to anything requires a forsaking of other possibilities that Berry finds essential for disciplining the imagination. The disciplined imagination moves us away from specialization and professionalism and toward works of interest to entire communities. "Forms join the diverse things that they contain," Berry proclaims, advocating the essentially organic nature of structure. "They join us to themselves; they join us to each other; they join writers and readers; they join the generations together, the young and the old, the living and the dead."

218 pp. paper $15.95



AFTER WORDS

A good book is always on tap; it may be decanted and drunk a hundred times, and it is still there for another imbibement.

Holbrook Jackson

WHY I AM NOT GOING TO BUY a COMPUTER

Wendell Berry

LIKE ALMOST EVERYBODY else, I am hooked to the energy corporations, which I do not admire. I hope to become less hooked to them. In my work, I try to be as little hooked to them as possible. As a farmer, I do almost all of my work with horses. As a writer, I work with a pencil or a pen and a piece of paper.

My wife types my work on a Royal standard typewriter bought new in 1956 and as good now as it was then. As she types, she sees things that are wrong and marks them with small checks in the margins. She is my best critic because she is the one most familiar with my habitual errors and weaknesses. She also understands, sometimes better than I do, what *ought* to be said. We have, I think, a literary cottage industry that works well and pleasantly. I do not see anything wrong with it.

A number of people, by now, have told me that I could greatly improve things by buying a computer. My answer is that I am not going to do it. I have several reasons, and they are good ones.

The first is the one I mentioned at the beginning. I would hate to think that my work as a writer could not be done without a direct dependence on strip-mined coal. How could I write conscientiously against the rape of nature if I were, in the act of writing, implicated in the rape? For the same reason, it matters to me that my writing is done in the daytime, without electric light.

I do not admire the computer manufacturers a great deal more than I admire the energy industries. I have seen their advertisements, attempting to seduce struggling or failing farmers into the belief that they can solve their problems by buying yet another piece of expensive equipment. I am familiar with their propaganda campaigns that have put computers into public schools in need of books. That computers are expected to become as common as TV sets in "the future" does not impress me or matter to me. I do not own a TV set. I do not see that computers are bringing us one step nearer to anything that does matter to me: peace, economic justice, ecological health, political honesty, family and community stability, good work.

What would a computer cost me? More money, for one thing, than I can afford, and more than I wish to pay to people whom I do not admire. But the cost would not be just monetary. It is well understood that technological innovation always requires the discarding of the "old model" – the "old model" in this case being not just our old Royal standard, but my wife, my critic, my closest reader, my fellow worker. Thus (and I think this is typical of present-day technological innovation), what would be superseded would be not only something, but somebody. In order to be technologically up-to-date as a writer, I would have to sacrifice an association that I am dependent upon and that I treasure.

My final and perhaps my best reason for not owning a computer is that I do not wish to fool myself. I disbelieve, and therefore strongly resent, the assertion that I or anybody else could write better or more easily with a computer than with a pencil. I do not see why I should not be as scientific about this as the next fellow: when somebody has used a computer to write work that is demonstrably better than Dante's, and when this better is demonstrably attributable to the use of a computer, then I will speak of computers with a more respectful tone of voice, though I still will not buy one.

To make myself as plain as I can, I should give my standards for technological innovation in my own work. They are as follows:

1. The new tool should be cheaper than the one it replaces.

2. It should be at least as small in scale as the one it replaces.

3. It should do work that is clearly and demonstrably better than the one it replaces.

4. It should use less energy than the one it replaces.

5. If possible, it should use some form of solar energy, such as that of the body.

6. It should be repairable by a person of ordinary intelligence, provided that he or she has the necessary tools.

7. It should be purchasable and repairable as near to home as possible

8. It should come from a small, privately owned shop or store that will take it back for maintenance and repair.

9. It should not replace or disrupt anything good that already exists, and this includes family and community relationships.

LISTENING TO THE WORD of GOD

St. Macarius the Great

KNOWING AS YOU DO that you rejoice in the voice of the Lord, listen to it not only to listen but in order to learn to obey it, for whoever listens to the word of God with all his ability learns to obey it. A multitude have heard the word of God but have not heard it with the power of God and with gladness; therefore they have not made progress. Our Lord Jesus Christ speaks about people like this, crying out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear." If they had not all stopped listening, he would not have spoken like this: "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear." For our Lord Jesus Christ knows that the nature of the Devil is to fight against the souls in order to stop them from hearing the word of God and be saved. Therefore he said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear," since those who listen make progress and are victorious over all the passions of the soul and the body.

But if the Devil stops the soul from hearing the word of God with power, she does not advance nor find a way to fight against the passions of the body because the word of God does not reside in her. If the Enemy uses force against her, she does not find the

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 This "desert word" appears on pp. 144-146. St. Macarius (A.D. 295-392) was an influential Desert Father in Egypt and a disciple of St. Antony the Great. His feast day is celebrated by Orthodox on Jan. 19 and by Catholics on Jan. 15.

means to cast away from her any of the evil passions at all, but the soul that possesses the word is good at chasing the passions away from herself and casts out Satan, who flees from her, covered with shame, for so it is written in the apostle: "The word of God pierces more than any two-edged sword and will enter into the divisions of the soul and the joints and the marrow."

We can see how if a person is allowed to hear the word of God, he drives away the passions, but if he is not allowed to hear, the soul becomes like lead, driving away none of the evil thoughts. Therefore the Devil despises people like this; even if people like this have spent their whole life in monasticism and virginity, they have progressed in nothing; moreover they have not known the sweetness of God, which is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb; moreover, they have not known the power of God, which is more powerful than anything and strengthens and empowers and encourages the soul day after day, for it is written, "The heart of the righteous person is more courageous than that of a lion."

Do you see, my children, how the heart of the righteous person is courageous? Why is it courageous? Because it allows him to receive spiritual nourishment, that is, the word of God. For this reason his soul is courageous, like a person who allows himself to take bodily nourishment because it gives him strength from day to day. Therefore, if he does not allow himself to eat and take nourishment, his body loses strength. If his enemies fight him, they will quickly defeat him. Now, then, my beloved, train yourselves also to eat food like this, which is the word of God, in order to be victorious over your enemies, for there are large numbers of monks and virgins who have lived their whole lives without the demons allowing them to eat spiritual food so they might find the strength and courage to defeat their enemies. Why have some not allowed themselves to eat? Because their heart is not straight nor do they resist the heart's desires because their heart is defiled and they lack the least knowledge of God. On account of this, the demons do not allow them to take holy nourishment so they may strengthen their souls. For this reason, they have spent their whole lives in cowardice and stupefaction and affliction, blaming themselves and one another their whole life. Protect yourselves, therefore, from this evil fruit, my beloved, that you may live and be counted partakers of God in Christ Jesus our Savior.

When Abba Macarius was returning from the marsh to his cell one day carrying some palm-leaves, he met the devil on the road with a scythe. The latter struck at him as much as he pleased, but in vain, and he said to him, "What is your power, Macarius, that makes me powerless against you? All that you do, I do, too; you fast, so do I; you keep vigil, and I do not sleep at all; in one thing only do you beat me." Abba Macarius asked what that was. He said, "Your humility. Because of that I can do nothing against you."

Abba Paphnutius, the disciple of Abba Macarius, said, "I asked my Father to say a word to me and he replied, 'Do no evil to anyone, and do not judge anyone. Observe this and you will be saved.'"

- Sayings of the Desert Fathers

PRESERVING CIVILIZATION ONE STUDENT AT A TIME

Northfield School of the Liberal Arts

MORTIMER ADLER and Robert Hutchins began publishing *The Great Books of the Western World* while teaching at the University of Chicago in the 1950s. Their efforts signaled an invitation from the academic world to the working world: the common ground of western civilization must be preserved.

The keys to cultural preservation, they suggested, were to be found in fifty-four great texts. Their intention was not to drag people back to school, but to offer each mind the heroic task of entering the Great Conversation of history – the dialogue of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Today, unfortunately, that Great Conversation has been replaced with a headlong rush toward "progress" at a velocity that leaves the future of civilization at risk.

Hutchins once wrote, "Imagine the younger generation studying great books and learning the liberal arts. Imagine an adult population continuing to turn to the same sources of strength, inspiration and communication. We could talk to one another then." Northfield School of the Liberal Arts was founded to extend this invitation to both parents and students.

We have the privilege of watching young peoples' minds flourish on a regular basis under the influence of the Great Books. "Here at Northfield," wrote a recent graduate, "we find ourselves seeking truth in every aspect of our lives. In the classroom, we are continuously challenged to think for ourselves, to find the truth."

In a presentation speech at a New York City gala for the release of the first complete set of the *Great Books*, Hutchins explained its essence: "This is more than a set of books, and more than a liberal education. *Great Books of the Western World* is an act of piety. Here are the sources of our being." For the sake of our western civilization, we at Northfield invite you to join us in our pious quest for the sources of our being through a lifetime of reading in the Great Books.

Good books and the conversations they spawn help us recover our identity.

Richard Gunderman

Northfield School of the Liberal Arts is a private, non-profit middle- and high-school operated by Phillip and Becky Elder in Wichita, KS. Their emphasis on the Seven Liberal Arts and the Great Books makes their motto become a living reality daily in the lives of students, teachers, and parents: *Nascantur in Admiratione. Let them Be Born in Wonder.*

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"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field ..."
Matthew 13

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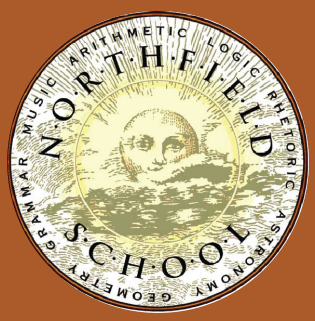
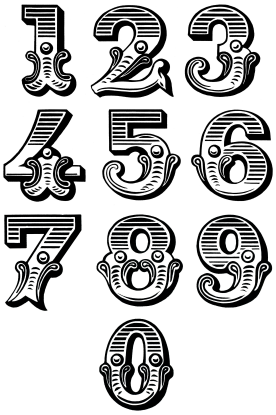
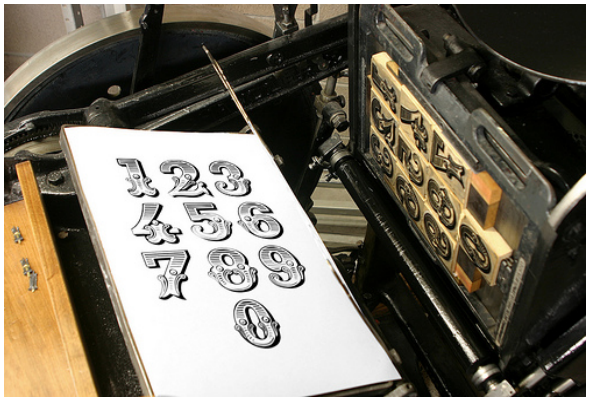


Bound Staff Press

Numbers for each chapter in this issue of Synaxis have been hand-cut from linoleum and letterpress printed by Justin Miller of Bound Staff Press in La Junta, CO.





See more of Justin's work at boundstaffpress.blogspot.com

Eighth Day Institute is an educational 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. Our mission is "renewing culture through faith and learning." We believe properly crafted educational opportunities play a pivotal role in the fulfillment of this mission. Hence, all of our endeavors seek to be:

1) CLASSICAL, because timeless classics shed light on ultimate questions that help us better understand ourselves, our world, and God;

2) LIBERAL (in the classical sense of that term), because the liberal arts seek to liberate humans from the unexamined life, i.e., from sinful passions that hinder a fully human life;

3) INTEGRATIVE, because the whole person – body and soul – needs to be reintegrated as originally created by God;

4) SMALL & LOCAL, because we hope to provide a model that can be duplicated in other venues; and

5) CHRISTIAN, because we believe historic Christianity as revealed in its scriptures, confessed in its creeds, prayed in its liturgies, defended by its ecumenical councils, and interpreted by its "great cloud of witnesses" is the key to a vibrant culture.

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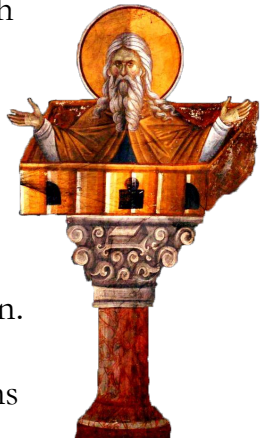
CRISIS n. a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger; a time when an important decision must be made.

Christians have forgotten their heritage.



You are all too familiar with the cost of our historical amnesia. For over one thousand years Christians stood together around a common Nicene faith. Today that common heritage is no longer a given. Christians are divided into thousands of denominations and our culture is clearly in its death throes.

Western culture is in decay.

Utter decay has set in as Western culture has turned its back on its own traditional values, which were forged by the early Church. Some of the ideals we've rejected, to name just a few, include:

- a sacramental view of the world
- a passion for the true, the good, and the beautiful
- fostering a sense of wonder
- venerating heroes of old instead of idolizing celebrities of today
- following seasons of fasting and feasting
- nurturing virtue and community

Modern man is rootless and lack community.

Constantly distracted by screens and messages, isolated by individualism and around-the-clock work schedules, disconnected from the rich heritage of the common Christian Tradition of the first millenium, and almost impossible to remain immune from the negative influences of popular culture, modern man is desperate for deep roots and intimate friendships.

WORK n. activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result.

HALL OF MEN
remembering the heroes of old

SISTERS OF SOPHIA
walking with women of wisdom

EIGHTH DAY SYMPOSIUM
a mere christian gathering to renew heart & mind

INKLINGS OKTOBERFEST
celebrating culture with the pencil, the pipe & the pint

FLOROVSKY-NEWMAN WEEK
returning to the sources for christian unity

ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS AWARD
honoring exemplars of cultural renewal

FEASTS
commemorating christ & his saints

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a gathering of essays, reviews & words of salvation

MONTHLY MOOT
essays & reviews for reading & thinking together

PODVIG
monthly challenges to renew soul & city

LOGOI
monthly message from the director's desk

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video and audio recordings of eighth day events

EIGHTH DAY BLOGS
essays, patristic word & book reviews

PREMIUM EIGHTH DAY BLOGS
florovsky archives & the new moot

THE ACADEMY
a vision for classical, catechetical & ecumenical education

This edition of

SYNAXIS

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Glory be
to the Father,
to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit
for all things.
Amen.

SYNAXIS
contributors