Gabriel Vahanian

Wait Without Idols

BY THE AUTHOR OF
The Death of God

To. Father Louis

Wait Without Idols

****

For the gifts of God
which have come through
you, nothing could repay.

Charles Israel
Union College
Barbourville, Ky.

WAIT WITHOUT IDOLS

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GABRIEL VAHANIAN

GEORGE BRAZILLER

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À MA MÈRE
qui m'a appris à lire
ce qu'on peut lire dans tous les livres
et dans aucun

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trast, Christianity is *practically* no longer iconoclastic.

It is necessary, first, to clarify a fundamental divergence between the modern, *i.e.*, Promethean, and the biblical meaning of the term. Briefly, modern iconoclasm is an antidivine manifestation, whereas the biblical form is a deflation of man's natural inclination to deify himself, or his society, or the State, or his culture. In this light, any reader of the Bible will discern the relentless exposing of this manifold, constant proclivity to elevate the finite to the level of the infinite, to give to the transitory the status of the permanent, and to attribute to man qualities that will deceive him into denying his finitude. In short, biblical iconoclasm is directed against any latent or overt self-deification and against "ethnolatry" in any one of its forms: racial, national, cultural. Ethnolatry is the reduction of a particular civilization and the religion identifying it to the characteristics of a race and the idolization of its idiosyncrasy. Biblical iconoclasm is directed against man's most subtle and degenerate idol—himself. Whenever this is overlooked, the particularity of biblical thought is by the same token grievously bypassed.

This particularity can, indeed, be seen from the first to the last book of the Bible. The myths of man's creation in the image of God and of the Last Judgment are misunderstood when they are not grasped as implying a conception of man that is the direct antithesis to all sorts of human apotheoses. Unlike common sense, pretension to deity is equally distributed among men. But the bibli-

cal position is clear: man is not God and, especially, he may not pull divine rank on his fellowmen. For the same reasons, neither nature nor history, which has a beginning and an end, is endowed with divinity.

Similarly, the rejection of ethnolatry is unambiguously stated throughout the Bible. Perhaps the most explicit statement is to be found in the Prophets' exposé of the mass religiosity of their day: from being a chosen people, Israel had now come to the point where it conceived of itself as a nation choosing its own god, forgetting that it was God who chose Israel. The Prophets unmasked and condemned the ethnolatry that had paralyzed Israel (and will paralyze any nation). A similar condemnation of ethnolatry, though it may be implicit rather than explicit, is to be found in the New Testament myth of the incarnation and of the fulfillment of the messianic hope in and through Jesus. National messianism, of the type that, Christians claim, Jesus did not represent, is another variant of ethnolatry. Saint Paul himself was repudiating the last vestiges of ethnolatrous messianism when he contended that in his understanding of the incarnation "there is neither Greek nor Jew." And Paul implemented his opinion by arguing that pagan converts to Christianity need not be first circumcised, in accordance with Jewish law, to become full members of the Christian community.

We find the same anti-idolatrous strain in the works of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas, Luther and Calvin. Varied and even conflicting as their respective posi-

tions may be, they have one thing in common: a loyalty to the principle that biblical faith is monotheistic and demands a correlatively radical opposition to all divinization of symbolic events or institutions as well as of man himself. "When the principle of being is God," writes Richard Niebuhr[6] in *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*, "then He alone is holy and ultimate sacredness must be denied to any special being. No special places, times, persons, or communities are more representative of the One than any others are. No sacred groves or temples, no hallowed kings or priests, no festival days, no chosen communities are particularly representative of Him in whom all things live and move and have their being." Iconoclasm is, for all practical purposes, the essential ingredient of monotheism as understood in the biblical tradition. Without this element, faith in God loses its indispensable character, and can result neither in radical commitment to God nor in an equally radical and iconoclastic involvement in the world.

It was this *sine qua non* of the incipient Christian movement that struck a different note in the religiously saturated atmosphere of the Graeco-Roman world and appealed to those who sought a new allegiance and a new self-understanding. As a matter of fact, the Roman authorities at first declared that Christianity was an illicit religion precisely because, from their point of view, Christianity meant atheism. And the reason the early Christians were charged with atheism was that they obstinately refused to make room for the cult of

the emperor in the order of their religious services (for on this basis alone could any religion be legally recognized). Christianity could not bow down to this decree of imperial deification, which was universally applied with one single exception: Judaism was exempted from honoring it.

Later on, Augustine became the iconoclastic critic of religious isolationism, of Christian ethnolatry. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas' reliance on Aristotle was in the thirteenth century no less than a repudiation of the intellectual isolationism that the Christian tradition was being tempted by. The iconoclasm of the Reformation is better known, for it has been made notorious. But we would be in error if we did not realize that the Reformers' iconoclasm was also and chiefly an instrument of combat against ecclesiastic pretension to deity, or simply to sacredness. And we should not hesitate to apprehend in the same light the better side of the iconoclasm that marks, or perhaps mars, the French Revolution. The latter is a monument to the iconoclastic rebellion against the claim of ecclesiastic sacredness, just as the American Revolution is a monument against the claim of theological sacredness. By the claim of ecclesiastical sacredness is meant the subjugation of cultural and social institutions to the usurpative authority of another institution, the Christian Church. The claim of theological sacredness refers to the authoritarian subordination of all institutions to the letter of a dead body of doctrines. The former is the Catholic (not necessarily

Roman), while the latter is the Protestant temptation of a religious absolutism that is fatal to the tradition of authentic Christian iconoclasm.

What has happened to this iconoclastic tradition? Has it exhausted itself? At any rate, it does not make itself felt and is no longer unambiguously active in the contemporary world. Its strength seems to have been drained, and with an exceptional voice heard now and then, here and there, *in deserto,* the Christian churches seem on the whole incapable of being seized with any kind of iconoclastic witness to the monotheistic faith they claim to profess. How does one explain this lethargy? Let us take an example.

Whatever part of our Western democratic ideals we owe to ancient Greece, our modern understanding of democracy makes no sense if we do not take into account the marks that the Christian tradition has left upon it. Just think of Jefferson's words, which every American knows by heart and which were given new meaning by Mr. Stevenson in the United Nations Security Council: "We hold these truths to be *self-evident,* that all men are *created* equal, that they are endowed by their *Creator* with certain inalienable rights." (Italics added.) Practically no one today sees any connection between such a statement and the meaning of the biblical notion according to which man is created in the image of God. On the contrary, the words "created" and "Creator" hardly shock us. They have lost their iconoclastic value.

Or consider democratic procedures in general. Reinhold Niebuhr, who suggests humility as the political cornerstone of democracy, defines the latter as "a method of finding proximate solutions for insoluble problems," and bases this method on the acknowledgment that "man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."[7] But it was W. H. Auden, a poet and not a theologian, who brought to light the iconoclastic element around which Niebuhr's paradoxes revolved. In his *New Year Letter* for 1940,[8] Auden wrote:

> . . . all that we can say
> Is: true democracy begins
> With free confession of our sins.
> In this alone are all the same,
> All are so weak that none dare claim
> "I have the right to govern," or
> "Behold in me the Moral Law."

Since "art is not life and cannot be / A midwife to society," it is questionable whether theological paradoxes and the Christian tradition can again play the rôle of "a midwife to society" as they once did when they were impelled by the force of their iconoclastic insights. For these insights have now become commonplace notions, not to say platitudes. Besides, what man in the street would ever connect checks and balances with the confessions of our sins? And while it may be

true that no politician would point to himself as personifying the moral law, he most probably would not hesitate to confess the sins of his opponent. The point is this: the iconoclastic faith of the Christian tradition has, as in the time of the Prophets, fallen into an ethnolatric complacency. And the present degeneration of the Christian tradition is to be attributed to this loss of its iconoclastic nerve.

In this respect, our situation is similar to that of the Graeco-Roman world at the time of the birth of Christianity, except for the fact that the position of Christianity vis-à-vis the non-Christian religions has been reversed. The Greek gods had been discredited when the Christian God was ushered into the Western world. But what was true then is also true today: every religion degenerates when it discredits its god. And now as then, the mood is one of longing, such longing as is quenched only by an iconoclastic wind of the spirit. More and more evidently, Christianity is no longer moved by it; and our culture is expropriating Christianity. The Protestant churches—most of which owe their origins to social or ethnic differences—find it difficult to surmount the animosities of their ethnolatrous clannishness. And the Roman Catholics still wait for the Protestants to return and submit to Rome. A truly iconoclastic move would consist in the Protestant churches abdicating their individual infallibilities and in the Catholic Church abdicating its papal infallibility. But this would demand too much boldness from our comfortable, self-righteous, and degenerate religiosities.

The Need for a Cultural Revolution

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OVER a century ago, Kierkegaard wrote in *Sickness Unto Death* that Christianity was "the fundamental misfortune of Christendom."[1] For a correct diagnosis of the contemporary situation, we need, it seems, simply reverse the terms and declare that "Christendom" is the fundamental misfortune of Christianity. Since the time of Kierkegaard the transition to the post-Christian era has, indeed, become an everyday reality, and the "death of God" is now the cultural "event" by which modern man recognizes and admits this change. More precisely, the "death of God" is, today, Western man's "confession" (in the sense of the French *aveu*), just as the triune God was once the symbol that inaugurated and sustained the Christian era of Western culture.

This does not mean, obviously, that God himself no

longer is but that, regardless of whether he is or not, his reality, as the Christian tradition has presented it, has become culturally irrelevant: God is *de trop*, as Sartre would say. Nor do we imply that the previous era was, theologically speaking, Christian and that ours is not. One thing is clear: not even the Christian era (inclusive of the highest stage of its development, wherever our theological preferences may locate it) ever quite fully bloomed into a golden age, or else Kierkegaard would not have come to his conclusion. We must, on the other hand, realize that Christianity did, during that period, body forth into "the historic reality of Christian culture" (to borrow the title of a disappointing book Professor Dawson has written on this subject).

Culturally—and this is the aspect that interests us here—there definitely was a Christian era. It may not have been perfect, especially from the theological point of view. It may even have rested on unsound scientific and philosophical premises. But its culture corresponded to its theology; and, more significantly, this correspondence, this congruence between theology and culture provided man with a system of values and a key to the understanding of his being, as well as giving a motif to his existence, to his work and his art, to his thinking. He understood in order to believe and he believed in order understanding of his being, as well as giving a motif to business of existing was also an act of faith. Not only theologically and philosophically, but culturally as well, the reality of God was taken for granted and was the starting point of both reflection and action.

No doubt it will be objected that this embellishes the past. Perhaps. It may even be that our theological systems are today more accurately biblical than those of scholasticism, whether Catholic or Protestant. To say the least, we have certainly developed a higher esteem of the dignity of man than was the case hitherto. And we have grown more refined—both in our instruments of civilization and in our cruelty. Today we act as if we had domesticated the earth and look forward to annexing the moon. But the crux of the matter lies elsewhere.

Once a no man's land, the world has now become a no God's land.

What this means is that the world has been deprived of its sacramental significance; human existence has lost its transcendental dimension. Shorn of its *sym-bolic* (*i.e.*, covenantal) significance, language still performs a duty as a means of communication, but it has been neutralized; communication does not necessarily entail, or presuppose, communion. In fact, human existence itself has been neutralized. We live in the latest fashion of the third person plural, in the world of the neutral, anonymous crowd. In other words, Christendom (and what else can this mean today but Western culture?) is the great misfortune of Christianity. And the situation would not be quite so ironical, were it not to Christianity itself that we owe this Western culture that has changed our world into a no God's land. Post-Christian man is the child of Christian man.

To avoid any possible misunderstanding, let us clarify

Take another example. When the Renaissance humanists revived Greek culture, it evidently represented to them something other than what it actually was, if only because their world view had been affected by the Christian tradition. Likewise, it is no less certain that the Greek tragedies have a different meaning for us, for the simple reason that our sense of the tragic is not informed by the same beliefs: we do not believe in the Greek gods. That is to say, we do not rely on the same presuppositions, we do not make the same assumption, we do not enter their world with the same world view. Similar observations can no doubt be made about our approach to other ancient religions or to contemporary non-Western religions.

The respective points of view of post-Christian man and Christian man are so radically different that the former, looking at the Christian religion, can neither accept it nor appropriate its values. Not that Christian man was in any way less in need of God's grace than is post-Christian man. As Saint Paul said, in a statement which had theological validity alone, there is neither Jew nor Greek; so also there is neither Christian man nor post-Christian man. But Paul was doubtless aware that between Jew and Greek one could sense a certain cultural difference; it is, we contend, an even greater one that distinguishes the Christian from post-Christian man, between whom lies, like a continental divide, what we call the death of God. The death of God is a cultural phenomenon, expressive of the simplest fact that God

is no longer necessary and that his reality cannot be taken for granted.

The real problem, however, is even more complicated. It is easy to talk about God in a supernatural context, when human nature is understood in terms of a transcendental universe. But how can one speak of a transcendental God when only an immanentist frame of reference is available, and man construes both his situation in the world and the universe in immanentist concepts? It would be like translating the Bible into a language that has no word for God. (Just consider, incidentally, the traditional methods of apologetics. What rôle can apologetics play today in confronting the non-Christian? None, as long as the best we can do is to compare religions, although this perhaps is for the better if it forces Christian theology to become honest again and to content itself simply with being kerygmatic. Otherwise apologetics only helps us to make converts from other Christian denominations.)

At the risk of repeating ourselves, let us state clearly that what separates Christian man from post-Christian man is something of an entirely different nature from what distinguishes medieval man from modern man. We should find a better analogy in reflecting upon what separates pre-Christian man from Christian man. Like the early Christian, the post-Christian is ushering in a new era; but the charge of atheism that was leveled at the former is now welcomed by the latter. Post-Christian man even claims atheism as the only guarantee of a free

and responsible action, as his existential presupposition and the act of his emancipation.

It is important to note that post-Christian man is not necessarily anti-Christian, or even non-Christian, inasmuch as, relatively speaking, he is the heir of the Christian tradition. The prefix "post" implies in the last analysis that any Western man is today post-Christian, even though he may still have faith in the transcending presence of God's reality as manifested in the Christ-event. Or else he is a vestigial Christian, who clings to superannuated forms of belief expressive of the cultural framework with which they once were congruous, even while otherwise sharing in the post-Christian mentality of his contemporaries.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that something has happened in the consciousness of Western man. This event may not have been recorded by theologians. But it has shaken the vision of poets and novelists, of artists and playwrights. On the one hand, the self-invalidation of the Christian tradition has been hailed as at last enabling man to face his condition with its attendant obligation to greatness and, equally, to assume the ambiguities of his self-understanding. On the other, the creative imagination has been frustrated or even betrayed by the secularism that has resulted from the expropriation of the Christian tradition. In the first category, one can cite Camus, Saint-John Perse, Beckett; the second includes Joyce, Eliot, Faulkner.

The following lines from T. S. Eliot's "The Rock"

all conservatives!

quite appropriately describe the general characteristics of this situation:

> But it seems that something has happened that has never happened before: though we know not just when, or why, or how, or where.
> Men have left GOD not for other gods, they say, but for no god; and this has never happened before.
> That men both deny god and worship gods, professing first Reason,
> And then Money, and Power and what they call Life, or Race, or Dialectic.
> The Church disowned, the tower overthrown, the bells upturned, what have we to do
> But stand with empty hands and palms turned upwards
> In an age which advances progressively backwards?[3]

In some ways, the crisis of Western culture is as threatening and alienating as the predicament of the Israelites taken into exile in Babylon. The passage from "The Rock" we have just quoted is an echo of the psalmist's lament:[4]

> By the waters of Babylon,
> there we sat down and wept,
> when we remembered Zion

On the willows there
We hung up our lyres
For there our captors
required of us songs,
And our tormentors, mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How shall we sing the LORD's song
in a foreign land?

The Israelites at least had the advantage of being exiles in a foreign land; we do not. The moment would come when they would return. But we are exiles in our own land; we cannot reverse either time or our tradition. Our alienation is not merely religious; it is also cultural. It has placed us in the same situation as Sartre's when he summed up his judgment of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* by declaring: *"J'aime son art, je ne crois pas à sa métaphysique."*[5] Which amounts to saying that we have severed Western culture from its metaphysical foundations, from its theological roots, from its sacramental significance, although we still like its art and even more its technology (by which we have impressed the whole world from Ghana to China, including India, for whom Western man is synonymous with technological man). The city of Florence still means much to us, even if it has become a drive-in museum. Western culture and its Christian tradition as a whole today resembles a museum, exhibiting this piece or that to attract the post-Christian tourist.

a scientific, technological world view for a mythological one, although this substitution has had something to do with the transition from radical monotheism to radical immanentism. The malaise lies deeper, in the desuetude of the Christian tradition and the consequent revision of the presuppositions on which our self-understanding and our world view were based.

"The trouble of the modern age," writes T. S. Eliot in *On Poetry and Poets*, "is not [...] the inability to believe certain things about God and man which our forefathers believed."[7] Indeed, some of our assumptions are just as preposterous and superstitious, just as irrational and absurd. But the trouble is "the inability to *feel* towards God and man as they did." In other words, the core of the gospel and the Christian symbols are contemporaneous with a definite historical situation. (The Christian way and the Western man's way are synonymous for many an African nationalist.) On the other hand, the inaccessibility of the gospel and the Christian symbols will not diminish if we simply identify with the historical situation into which they were born. (The Lord's Supper thus becomes magic, or merely a "symbol"—in the wrong sense of the term—depending on whether such an identification is intended or not.) The Christian tradition might just as well be labeled the imaginary and oral museum of Christian antiquities. This is precisely what happens in *Waiting for Godot*: Question—"Do you remember the Gospels?" Answer—"I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they

were. Very pretty . . . that's where we'll go for our honeymoon."[8]

If the Christian symbols have thus lost their claim upon man's consciousness and their power to command his mode of being, it is not modern man in his present cultural context who will restore these to them. His inaptitude for the reality of God's transcending presence would prevent him from doing so. Like Weber, who complained about it occasionally, modern man's soul is "*religiös unmusikalisch.*"[9] It is not attuned to the divine. Sign of progress? or of retrogression? The same event can present both aspects. "The evolution of mankind toward the rationality of positive science was for Comte a distinctly progressive development," writes Eric Voegelin in *The New Science of Politics;* but "for Weber it was a process of disenchantment *(Entzauberung)* and de-divinization *(Entgöttlichung)* of the world."[10] Recovering from our disenchantment, there is only one thing for us to do—to "recognize that the world has grown godless" (Jaspers).[11]

Now the significant thing is that this disenchantment has two aspects. On the one hand, it has been a disenchantment with religion or the counterfeit of it: Modern skepticism, Walter Stace[12] has pointed out, was not so much caused by the scientific revolution as by a latent readiness to forsake the Christian tradition. On the other hand, there has also been a disenchantment with science (cf. the chapter on Hawthorne). The signs that point to it are perhaps less obvious, but they become real

in God. Although Christianity is by no means synonymous with, or bound to, the cultural paraphernalia of this religiosity, nevertheless these are typically Western as well as Christian. And, by the same token, they are caducous. Ironically, it is what the Christian tradition has achieved—in a word, Western culture—that has become caducous, especially if it is seen in the light of non-Western religiosities. Christianity is thus known (or misknown) by its culture. But this culture has succeeded in both naturalizing and neutralizing Christianity by finally revealing that its so-called triumph since Constantine was simply a damper put on the ambiguous religiosity that is the lot of every man.

In other words, we have domesticated the universe, or so we think, but we have lost the cipher of its symbols, we have estranged ourselves from it. We have "desacralized" the world, forgetting that ultimately culture is a consecration of the world. Accordingly, a transfiguration of culture is the most urgent task of the present day.

But this is a cultural task; it cannot be the result of any revival. To this task we are all obligated. It is the cultural obligation of post-Christian man, be he a theologian or not, Christian or not. Indeed, Western culture is already groping beyond this devaluation of its symbols for a new dialect, for a new language. *"C'est la même époque,"* writes Paul Ricoeur, *"qui tient en réserve la possibilité de vider le langage, en le formalisant radicalement, et celle de le remplir à nouveau, en se*

remémorant les significations les plus pleines, les plus lourdes, les plus liées par la présence du sacré à l'homme."[13] Or, in the words of the psalmist:

> Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
> Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
> If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!
> If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there![14]

To conclude, the Christian era has bequeathed us the "death of God," but not without teaching us a lesson. God is not necessary; that is to say, he cannot be taken for granted. He cannot be used merely as a hypothesis, whether epistemological, scientific, or existential, unless we should draw the degrading conclusion that "God is reasons." On the other hand, if we can no longer assume that God is, we may once again realize that he *must* be. God is not necessary, but he is inevitable. He is wholly other and wholly present. Faith in him, the conversion of our human reality, both culturally and existentially, is the demand he still makes upon us, the choice he confronts us with. "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"[15]

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE:
The Obsolescence of God

****

MOST of the outstanding works of contemporary literature, like Camus's *The Plague* or *The Stranger*, affirm an atheistic view of man's situation. A rare few, like *Barabbas*, by Pär Lagerkvist, solicit neither theism nor atheism, until, in their agonizingly agnostic ultimacy, they are as exigent as a leap into faith or a refusal of transcendence if accepting transcendence should mean its devaluation. The confrontation between theism and atheism constitutes the theme of yet another category of novels, best exemplified by Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Hawthorne's particularity lies in the fact that he shows how, to put it briefly, theism slips into atheism. It is the special merit of this author to have drawn

our attention to the inevitable degradation of the religio-cultural structures that were meant to incarnate the faith. There can be no faith without an attendant culture; even the purest faith must incarnate itself into forms, institutions, or customs as well as rites, by which it is also betrayed. That event which appears as the greatest hour of faith may the next minute terminate into a superstitious conformism; faith can be crippled by its own purity, as well as by the organs that express it. As a matter of fact, theologians are well aware that those who seek to preserve the purity of faith usually surrender it to the legalistic rigorism of the *regula fidei.*

At once a realist and a good theologian, Hawthorne not only knows that every act of faith presupposes a cultural context in which it necessarily inserts itself and takes root, but also that the purity, the authenticity of faith is least determined, if at all, by the measure in which it excludes itself from the cultural setting. On the other hand, he knows too that the framework of culture is per se neither guaranty nor guardian of the purity of faith. Clothes are no absolute indication of a man's quality. Good shoes are made by a good shoemaker, whether he is a Christian or not. Likewise, cultural patterns, which result from the action of faith, are essentially neutral and when the faith has outgrown them —as it must sooner or later—they tend to petrify or "nationalize" it.

Hawthorne realized both the "dynamics of faith" and

the servitude to which it is bound and upon which it fails. Culture is both the expression of faith and of its degradation: the purity of faith is measured by the extent to which it is embodied in cultural patterns and authenticates them as well as is authenticated by them. But the manna that daily descended upon the Israelites in the wilderness could not be hoarded from one day to the next without being spoiled. The same is true of faith. It cannot be hoarded. No civilization, no society, no church, no creed, can attempt to hoard faith and not degenerate. Such is the background against which many characters of Hawthorne's literary creation manifest their situation.

In Hawthorne's work we are witness to a world that is about to undergo, or is in the process of undergoing, the transition that has most affected the relevance of the Christian tradition to Western culture. Hawthorne shows how, in retrospect, the transcendental conception of the universe has lost its vitality and how the more it becomes crystalized, the more it can paralyze the society in which it fossilizes the faith. When faith thus becomes rigid totalitarian doctrine, religion turns into superstition; and the transcendental vision of man's destiny capitulates before an immanentist conception of the universe.

However, we must also note that Hawthorne is so meticulous in his reconstitution of the Puritan society as to suggest that what now appears to be its servitude was once the occasion for its grandeur. In the world that he

depicts, the rupture with the Christian tradition has not yet been consummated; from his vantage point what good things the Puritan experiment has achieved can still be felt, but they are remote enough to bespeak the latent obsolescence of the Christian tradition. Hawthorne thus anticipates the major dilemma of our century by plainly hinting that Christendom itself gave birth to the post-Christian era.

Where he succeeds in particular is in showing that it is not without some hesitation that man dismisses his God. And yet, in spite of the obvious religious framework that supports the Puritan community and its activities, Hawthorne shows that God has already become an anachronism. Faith in God is a living reality that kills and makes alive. But the religion of the community seeks nothing other than to erect itself as a mausoleum for its mummified God. This happens whenever man's natural inclination to believe in something beyond dispute, or whenever logical consistency, whether of the rational or of the superstitious type, overcomes faith and canonizes the personal and social structures of being this faith has brought about. Within a religious framework, such an attitude both engenders and is born of perfectionism; perfectionism is but the religious disguise of man's pretension to become like God, the self-righteous and perverse hallowing of man's attempt to deify himself.

Perfectionism inevitably turns God into a policeman, or a witch-hunter—a Grand Inquisitor. One need not

exaggerate to suggest that many of Dostoevski's characters have their prototypes in those of Hawthorne: Aylmer and Chillingworth adequately prefigure Ivan Karamazov, while Aminadab announces Smerdyakov, and Dimmesdale's faith is the tragic version of Alyosha's. Ivan's intellectual pride leads him to the assumption that there may be no God. Perfectionism, or the Puritan community's spiritual pride, is but a reluctant disavowal of God's reality and the Christian tradition has already become a dead letter.

The deliquescence of this tradition, Hawthorne aptly observes, does not result from any rationalist or scientific attack upon Christianity. Neither reason, nor science and technology are in themselves inimical to faith. In the beginning of "The Birthmark" Hawthorne, citing electricity and taking note of the recent discoveries of science, remarks how the love of science can rival the love of woman.[1] The reader is tempted to think that, since Aylmer's scientific passion overshadows his love for his wife, he has already exalted his scientific pursuit into some sort of religious quest. But as Hawthorne clearly intimates, Aylmer's problem does not originate in any conflict between science and religion; it stems from his investing science with the attributes of religious perfectionism; which means that just as there can be a pseudoreligion arrogating to itself the prerogatives of science, so also there can be a pseudoscience parading in the vestments of religion.

It is one thing to develop the technical knowledge ac-

On the surface, Aylmer can thus afford or claim to be respectful of the religious point of view. But he cheats us as well as himself when he regards the birthmark as an imperfection caused by human sinfulness, and invites us to stamp out sinfulness by eradicating the birthmark. What he refuses to acknowledge, actually, is that the blemish is the sign of human finitude, that the whole man, body and soul, wears nothing but the imprint of his finitude. For man sins because he is finite. Aylmer, on the contrary, would regard man as finite because he is sinful. And by removing this sign of human sinfulness, he would also transcend man's finitude.

This is precisely the attitude that governs the tendency to deify oneself. By rejecting the creation with its finitude and all the signs that point to it, Aylmer avows himself as one who suffers from that passion of self-deification which, Hawthorne seems to contend, is a murderous passion. Not only does it rob man of his humanity; it also justifies crime. It violates the principal meaning of the concept of finitude, according to which finite existence never is self-authenticating: "... The stain goes as deep as life itself ..." Finitude is that limitation of human existence which is not in man but is a sort of boundary between man and man, the self and the world—the experience of the otherness thanks to which man stands revealed to himself. Not so for Aylmer. Already in his dream, the knife he plans to use to perform the operation sinks as deep as Georgianna's

heart—Aylmer must kill if he is to remove the birthmark successfully.

But he persists in his demiurgic conviction that the birthmark is a sign of earthly imperfection: "I am convinced of the perfect practicability of its removal,"[3] and encourages himself by saying: "I shall have corrected what Nature left imperfect in her fairest work."[4] From here on the false pretenses that nurture his perfectionism begin to show where the flaw lies. Manifestly, either the law of nature is identified with the divine law or it is not. If it is, its violation means contravening the law of God (which Aylmer claims he wishes to uphold). If it is not, the problem simply becomes more complex but not to the extent that it will cover up Aylmer's sedition against God and his rejection of human finitude. For although he protests that the conquest of nature will terminate in a deeper and more reverential knowledge of God's handiwork and mysterious creation, the same can also, ironically enough, be the perfidious tool of man's alienation.

Surely it is neither science nor technology that must be held responsible for this alienation: it might not have happened had not the Christian tradition, by some inner failure, already prepared the ground for such a development. Hawthorne endeavors to make this point quite clear. The heart of the matter is very simple to grasp. From Hawthorne's point of view, man's "control over nature" is such that it cannot free man himself from his ultimate dependence upon it; he can, however, be de-

ceived by the tools with which he has sought to achieve such a goal.

The deception began, we learn from Aylmer's case, as soon as Georgianna's imperfection was slyly regarded only as an earthly one, implying thereby that its removal must of necessity reveal not only Georgianna's physical but also her spiritual perfection. Indeed, we can almost hear Aylmer protesting that he is not a "materialist" or an atheist. His library contains authors, Hawthorne tells us, who "perhaps imagined themselves to have acquired from the investigation of Nature a power above Nature and from physics a sway over the Spiritual world."[5] As for Aylmer himself, he "redeemed himself from materialism by his strong and eager aspiration towards the infinite."[6] Or so he leads Georgianna to believe.

Naïve and innocent, Aylmer's wife continues to believe in his "spiritual" aspirations and is caught even more inextricably in the meretricious web of her husband's quest for perfection. She admires him, even worships him more than ever. Victim of his own deception, Aylmer himself does not protest. He says: "Ah, wait for this one success, then worship me if you will. I shall deem myself hardly unworthy of it."[7]

When at last the operation is about to take place, he has completely won his wife's admiring submissiveness. But it becomes equally certain that she is offering herself as a sacrifice to his pretension to deity. When the operation is performed Aylmer of course thinks it is

successful: "My peerless bride, it is successful! You are perfect." But at what price? The helpless Georgianna has hardly the time to whisper: "Aylmer, dearest Aylmer, I am dying!" And Hawthorne concludes: "The fatal hand had grappled with the mystery of life, and was the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame."[8]

One cannot conquer time or violate nature with impunity, while existence entails contingency and being is but the courage to be "in the frail effulgence of eternity." By not realizing that man's being is the being of that which he is not and that man is not autonomous, Aylmer missed the "profounder wisdom." This wisdom would have consisted in his acceptance of the birthmark not as a sign of imperfection but as a symbol of human finitude, which can be transfigured not by self-deification but only if it is assumed and lived as an act of faith.

Beyond the theme of sin and redemption, which is somewhat limiting, it is the drama of man's inescapable destiny—freely assumed—that more especially constitutes the texture of Hawthorne's world. For him, the notion of natural man can only signify nature-transcending man, man in society or better yet, man's inability to find a home in nature, because nature is essentially indifferent to him. Hawthorne does not view the cosmos as a harmonious whole, if by that is meant a self-asserting, self-evident, self-consistent reality. It was this kind of vision that motivated Aylmer's am-

bition; he sought to achieve it through science until it was made evident to him that science could not remove the existential question about life and death except through death.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, the Puritan community seeks an identical goal and tries to create it by law, until Arthur Dimmesdale's tragedy shows that it does not lie within the possibility of history or of culture, nor within that of religion. Regardless of which usurps the rôle of the other, both science and religion can sacrifice human finitude to quench their thirst for coherence in the universe as they vainly pursue the quest of logical consistency in man's destiny.

The themes of "The Birthmark" are carried and further developed in *The Scarlet Letter*. With this difference, that Aylmer's rôle now devolves both upon the Puritan community and (so to speak) its *alter ego*, Chillingworth, who is at once Aylmer's counterpart and represents the secular version of codified Puritanism. The latter's rigidity is no less expressive of a will to authenticate itself than Aylmer's determination to achieve perfection, or Chillingworth's to vindicate his own, even through destruction. Indeed, both Chillingworth and the community are, like Aylmer, devoured by a drive for perfection—in obvious contrast to Hester and Dimmesdale.

It might help, at this point, to indicate that we diverge radically from those who would judge the latter's adultery simply from the moralistic point of view. The mark

Hester is made to wear on her dress is, like Georgianna's birthmark, but the symbol of human finitude, the violation of which is worse indeed than an infraction of the moral code. Hester knows the difference, which, self-righteously, the community as well as Chillingworth chooses to ignore. Chillingworth asks: " 'But, Hester, the man lives who has wronged us both! Who is he?' 'Ask me not!' replied Hester Prynne firmly, looking firmly into his face. 'That thou shalt never know!' "[9] But he is determined to know, by means of a procedure that will equate Dimmesdale's bodily disease and spiritual ailment, and recall Aylmer's so-called spiritual aspirations. It is Chillingworth who violates, "in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart," as Dimmesdale says to Hester; "Thou and I, Hester, never did so!"[10] Chillingworth is in this enterprise but the executioner of the Puritan community, in whose midst he has taken up residence.

Of remarkable intelligence, this alchemist-like scientist succeeds in becoming Dimmesdale's parishioner and physician at the same time. He is a parasite, but not to a lesser degree than is the religious perfectionism of the community, which perfectionism he now is going to vindicate while at the same time revenging himself. To be sure, there is a difference between the individual and the community: like Aylmer, Chillingworth has set himself above human finitude, whereas the Puritan community simply forgets that it is not exempt from, or immune to, sinfulness. But this difference is incon-

sequential. As Hawthorne declares in the conclusion of *The Scarlet Letter*, "in the view of Infinite Purity we are sinners all alike."[11] And though our sinfulness, like Dimmesdale's, only "burns in secret," no innocence can be worn less sinlessly than Hester's red letter "A." Hester, indeed, looks like a madonna, though "only by contrast." For in her case, "there was the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life, working such effect, that the world was only the darker for this woman's beauty, and the more lost for the infant she had borne."[12] Like Pearl, for whose birth "a great law had been broken," innocence is both our happiness and our torture. ("She is my happiness! She is my torture!" exclaims Hester, "the likeness of the scarlet letter" with which she adorns her finitude.[13])

Thus, the conflict between sin and redemption is but the apparent theme of *The Scarlet Letter*, according to which Dimmesdale's and Hester's suffering brings to light the bond of solidarity that unites all men under a condition of finitude and sinfulness. The deeper theme of Dimmesdale's and Hester's tragedy deals with the incompatibility between the religious-like, Promethean pretensions of perfectionism and the fundamentally utopian character of faith in God. Whereas the latter is prompted by a man-honoring and world-facing motive, and corroborates a type of attitude centered in the paradoxical conviction that God is "human," the former is set in motion by the presumption that man is divine. The former is iconoclastic and, consequently, *for* man,

precisely when it confesses that God is human—which means that God is not what man himself would be if he were God. The latter is idolatrous, because it would re-create man as *man* would like to have created him had *he* been God. It is on an unambiguous recognition of this capital difference between a utopian faith in God and a perfectionistic religiosity that our understanding of *The Scarlet Letter* ultimately hinges.

In this light, Hawthorne's novel raises the question how, within the context of the Puritan experiment, the Christian tradition from iconoclastic became perfectionistic and swerved from its utopian purpose. The answer is, by letting utopianism degenerate into otherworldliness. While the utopian approach to the world may be described as one that is meant to transfigure it in the name of God's transcending presence, otherworldliness implies the denial of this world for the sake of another. Being iconoclastic, utopianism renders to the world what is the world's and to God what is God's, whereas otherworldliness succumbs to its essentially perfectionistic drive and misconstrues the original symbolism of the "other" world into "the other world," and projects it into the future, above and beyond time and space as experienced on this earth. Otherworldliness is therefore often accompanied by legalistic or apocalyptic emphases that predicate almost constantly an attitude of withdrawal from this world on the part of its adherents. In this sense, the Puritan community of *The Scarlet Letter* does belong to another world, a world to which we can

hardly "feel the tie." And of which Aylmer and Chillingworth both represent the secular version.

At the same time, as the Puritan community seems to demonstrate, otherworldliness also seeks to safeguard one spot of ground as the true home of religion, as the promise of some heavenly Jerusalem laid in the afterlife. But the notion of the Kingdom of God, in which the utopianism of the Christian tradition is grounded, refers in biblical thought to a mode of being in the world without being of it, of being at home in it as only a pilgrim. For the Kingdom of God is not merely the continuation of this world's kingdoms; neither is it to be built or inaugurated from on high upon the ruins of this world. The Kingdom of God, here and now, begins with the transfiguration of the cultural structures of each specific human reality in every epochal manifestation of its consciousness. Time and eternity, the absolute and the contingent, the sacred and the secular are felt, experienced, in and through the same human event. This implies not a denigration but a valuation of history and of man's involvement in the world: man can freely assume his God-bound destiny and become that which he is not—the new being, *i.e.*, a reintegrated person, who stands revealed to himself even while he hears God's question to Adam, to every man: Where art thou? As Dimmesdale says to Chillingworth: "Were I worthy to walk there [in heavenly Jerusalem], I could be better content to toil here."[14]

Man can hide himself, or he can overreach himself.

He does not want questions, but answers; not to seek the Kingdom of God but to settle down in the commodities of history, the convenient catalogues of religious and cultural customs. But existence is not a custom. Life is not a habit, enshrined in social or ecclesiastical institutions. And when existence becomes a custom, then it pays the price for the compromises on which institutions, moral codes, and systems of belief must necessarily rest, as Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor makes plain. And always the price is man's dignity. Existence is ambiguous.

Admittedly, it is because of this ambiguity that man, as Baudelaire has said, is a postulation both toward God and toward Satan. And it is this twofold postulation that permits us to see in Aylmer's spiritual aspirations the disguise of his self-glorification, and in the community's morality the mask of its incapacity for God's grace, for the Kingdom of God. Neither angel nor brute, man compromises: both perfectionism or self-deification, as the case may be, are the insatiable measure of his ambiguities, their idolatrous expression. And idolatry, under which come perfectionism and self-deification, constitutes in the last analysis the ultimate negation of the utopian character of religion, as do, because they too are idolatrous, institutions, conventions, beliefs, or moral codes—all of which sacrifice the inner life, the self, which can be adjusted to, or measured by, no evasion of authentic existence.

But religion often evades existence. It withdraws from

the world. Indeed, it can violate the sanctity of the human heart. Even then, however, religion only reveals that which it seeks to hide, namely, man's finitude; "Not a stitch in that embroidered letter but she has felt it in her heart."[15] There is a direct progression from the sanctimonious, holier-than-thou pretension of the Puritan community to Chillingworth's and Aylmer's quest for logical consistency to the metaphysical rebellion of Dostoevski's Ivan or Kirilov. In each case, the motive is the same. Saint Augustine summed it up admirably in his *Confessions* when he wrote: "Subject to change . . . I should rather suppose that thou art mutable than not being myself what thou art."[16] Which in this context means that in his avidity for perfection, or self-sufficiency, man would rather have an imperfect God—an idol that eventually looked like himself—than not be what God is. In other words, religion can be atheistic, just as atheism can be religious.

In biblical thought, perfection means letting God be God and conversely that man must assume his finite condition. It also means that God is not that principle by which man could explain everything and understand himself as he would explain any mechanism regardless of its complexity. For not only existence itself is a question mark raised against man's understanding of it, but also, more importantly, the question of existence is such that it does not lead to God, though it should. Man is therefore left with no other responsibility than assuming the limitations of the human reality, if he wants to

assert its intrinsic worth. But perfectionism seeks to elicit the question of God out of the question of existence by fancying God as the mere continuation of man. Not only, hence, does perfectionism "freeze" God, it also robs man of his nature, it "denatures" him. Also, in the biblical view, man is a sinner, not in himself, but before God: man can stand before God only as a sinner. Perfectionism, by contrast, upsets the dialectic of this relationship between God and man, and would claim for man the possibility of achieving sinlessness, supposedly prior to standing before God. Perfectionism is unaware of the fact that sinlessness would actually make God superfluous: man would be authenticating, or redeeming, himself.

The self-contradiction inherent in such a project is underscored by Hawthorne when he tells us that "infinite purity" is what makes us all sinners alike.[17] We are all finite and incapable of infinitude, except inasmuch as we fail to achieve it. For the letter "A," which apparently means "adulteress" and could also mean "angel," actually stands for "Adam," the creature on whom the letter is "too deeply branded" for him to reveal his "fellow-sinner's and fellow-sufferer's name" and thereby to exonerate himself from the weight of finitude. For the weight of finitude, not the exhibition of world-denying perfectionism, is the true measure of authentic existence.

In the higher Christian tradition, never was the City of God to be realized at the price of the terrestrial city of man: God's design does not destroy man's destiny.

The Kingdom of God is not the estuary of human society, but its constant motivation. Societies come and go and the mantle of their contingent religiosity varies with time and space. They will never result in the Kingdom of God. The complex of human activities, social, political, cultural, or religious, will never approximate such a degree of perfection as to reach ultimately the Kingdom of God. Nor will man be so perfect, so sinless, as to become like God. The failure to acknowledge this was the error of the Puritan community.

The Kingdom of God, which is not a possibility of history, always stands in judgment upon history, upon man's achievements. In other words, the Kingdom of God, or eternity, is the principle of historical self-criticism. The Pilgrim Fathers apparently knew what this entailed. Lest we should overlook this factor in reading *The Scarlet Letter,* Hawthorne draws our attention to it in the very first chapter of his novel. "The founders of a new colony," he writes, "whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery and another portion as the site of a prison."[18] The communion of saints is a communion of sinners. The nearer a man comes to God, the more remote he is from him. The same holds true for societies and for religious institutions or beliefs. A confession of faith is at the same time a confession of sins, of doubt, of man's incapacity for faith.

The founders of New England colonies recognized

this when, in their utopian faith, they allotted "a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery and another portion as the site of a prison." Long before W. H. Auden, they knew that the roots of democracy are more firmly planted when they are in the soil of the confession of sins. This lesson, the Puritan community of *The Scarlet Letter* had forgotten. But by beginning his novel at the site of a prison, Hawthorne reminds us that the fall of man, or human finitude, though it does limit, cannot altogether frustrate man's utopian project toward authentic existence. What falsifies it is rather the perfectionism of religiosity, which, no less than Aylmer or Chillingworth, violates the sanctity of the human heart. Hawthorne's understanding of human nature thus presents some affinity with Dostoevski's, a few of whose novels end, roughly speaking, at the door of a prison or its equivalent.

Hawthorne reveals the gradual dishabilitation by which the Christian tradition will subsequently surrender to the claims of post-Christian man. Unlike "the founders of a new colony," post-Christian man vies with religious perfectionism by agreeing with Ivan Karamazov in postulating his innocence. Atheism, or self-deification, is the form that this postulation of one's innocence has taken in our day. Not insignificantly, in *The Scarlet Letter*, a rosebush has grown on one side of the prison portal.

Flower of Venus, goddess of love, the rose was the symbol of victory, pride, and triumphant love for the

ancient Romans. In the Christian tradition, it symbolizes martyrdom or purity, depending on whether it is red or white. As the symbol of the Virgin Mary, it is represented without thorns.[19]

But there is no need to overburden the rather casual parallelism between Mary and Hester Prynne, who looked like the Madonna "but only by contrast." It is Pearl who interests us, and especially her confrontation with the Governor. The incident takes place at his mansion; Governor Wilson is actually checking on how well the child is being brought up in the Christian faith and asks her who made her. Pearl replies "that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked up by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door."[20] A child's answer to be sure. But a rather telling statement, when one admits that Pearl grew up at a time when the catechism was still the charter of man's destiny, investing daily existence with a sacral intensity. Pearl's reply already contains the seed of the innocence that subsequently Western man will claim for himself in parting with the God of the Christian era.

Hester's and her child's exclusion from the community is motivated, at least externally, by her transgression. Since the offense had taken place and was already expiated when the novel begins, what irks the community is not so much Hester's misconduct as the fact of being frustrated in its spiritual pride because of Hester's silence about the identity of her lover. It is not the sin so much as this reminder of human finitude,

namely, the denial of spiritual perfection, that the community refuses to tolerate. And this seems to be the reason *The Scarlet Letter* does not end with Hester's defeat or Dimmesdale's exposure, for "we are all sinners alike," but with the defeat of a self-righteous Christian community that, having lost the sense of its former utopian vision, had settled down in the self-complacent institutions of absolutism.

When even the catechism seems to be useful only because it hallows these institutions and promotes this absolutism, instead of being a sort of preamble to a declaration of faith in the sovereignty of God, then the transition from radical monotheism to radical immanentism will not be long delayed. Man's commitment to God and his involvement in the world are merely a symbolic indication of the reality of God's sovereign presence. No figure of Yahweh is to be found inside of the Ark of the Covenant: it remains empty and signifies that God's majesty dwells among men, but is not placed under their trusteeship. God cannot be held captive as the Puritan community tries to hold him.

It is no wonder then that the drama of *The Scarlet Letter* is not a moral but a spiritual one. The novel unfolds before us the tragedy of a declining Christian culture: "O Father in heaven," exclaims Hester, "—if Thou art still my Father."[21] Blasphemy?— No. How could it be, since the "Temple" has been occupied by money-changers? Since the word "God" has lost its meaning in the language of the community where Hester

is ostracized. But the innocent Pearl, in whose developing character emancipation from the Puritan community, and through it from the Christian tradition, is being personified, is without excuse when she declares: "I have no heavenly Father."[22]

Of course she still is only a child when she makes this declaration. But the important thing is that it is made not out of malice but out of her spontaneous innocence. And furthermore her sentence rejoins and reinforces, not without correcting it, the prying Chillingworth's spurious statement, which at this point, and only at this point of our analysis, we can endorse: "A bodily disease, which we look upon as a whole and entire within itself, may after all, be but a symptom of some ailment in the spiritual part."[23] And what an ailment! Nothing less than the obsolescence of the Christian idea of God and Western man's disavowal of the Christian tradition. Indeed, the crisis of *The Scarlet Letter* prefigures many of our contemporary dilemmas and among them the essential one, namely our cultural incapacity for a sclerotic religiosity whose word for God is not translatable into our idiom.

can be hid, even with the help of a religion whose claim to truth relies more on topography (as Pascal would have said) than on radical obedience to the God who is the creator of all mankind. No more than the Israelites' solemn assemblies and their ritual sacrifices (through which they congratulated themselves), can Christianity claim to occupy the center of man's spiritual geography. In connection with Queequeg, as in the case of Cyrus, the Persian whom Yahweh calls his "messiah," one has, indeed, the impression of hearing again the complaint of the prophets of ancient Israel scoring the idolatrous comfort and spiritual laziness into which their contemporaries' religiosity had sunk.

By reading *Moby Dick* against the biblical background, not only do we not violate the integrity of the novel, we discover certain elements that prove themselves indispensable to a better understanding of the story. For example, Melville's character Elijah may seem to play an ephemeral rôle, but the significance of Elijah is that he helps us to grasp the existential theme of the narrative. At the outset he upsets the applecart, just as the Prophet Elijah (whose name signifies "Yahweh is my God") was the troubler of Israel, when Captain Ahab's namesake was king. Both the king and the captain are usurpers: the king, by abandoning the cult of Yahweh for the Baal cult of his wife, Jezabel, as well as by grabbing Naboth's vineyard—an action for which the prophet denounces him; the captain (who likewise is ominously warned by Elijah), by sailing out of Nan-

tucket on Christmas Day, that is to say, by his willful inobservance of this holy day on which is celebrated the birth of the Word become flesh, and, as it were, by substituting his word for the Word of God. Nothing will now stop Ahab in his visions of self-aggrandizement. The ensuing drama, which is thus motivated by one man's hubris—Ahab's determination to deify himself—also stresses the strict connection between idolatry and self-deification and brings to light their fundamentally usurpative character: both conceal a similar appropriation of oneself and display a mode of being through which existence leaks and, like a ship, founders and sinks.

Self-deification is an inclination that we follow as naturally as we conceive of God in our image, for behind every worshiper lurks a Narcissus. Unable always to distinguish between appearance and reality, man idolizes himself and turns life into an "ungraspable phantom." But let us read Melville himself: "Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were out of sight of land? Why did the Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the

ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all."[5] Self-apotheosis is, indeed, a mystique, a form of mysticism in which man considers himself the meaning-giving center of the universe—thanks to an optical illusion. Once at sea, for example, it is as if one could never reach the rim of the circle of which one occupies the center. But the circle is without circumference, an appearance without reality. Suffering from a similar illusion, self-deification is in the last analysis like being thrown into the middle of things that have no reality other than their appearance.

But appearance is only what seems to break the kinship between things and beings; it distinguishes them without separating them; it points to and stresses that otherness by which things and beings are what they are. Ultimately, appearance is what preserves the integrity of the intrinsic reality of every thing and being, of the world, and prevents the self from usurping that reality even while being related to it. The sea is the symbol of that ungraspable aspect of reality and, like appearance, it expresses the ultimate impossibility of totally alienating the self by usurping the inalienable reality of things and beings—by usurping oneself. The sea besets us before and behind, all around, like a god. And like a god it reflects one's own image. That is to say, it reflects one's image as only something wholly other than oneself can reflect it. What, then, Captain Ahab rejects is precisely this appearance or rather this otherness by virtue of which man is distinguished from other

things and beings, as well as from the Wholly Other, while at the same time, perceiving the reality of his majestic frailty. And, thus alienating himself, Ahab betrays his own reality: he wrecks it.

The relation between the self and the world signifies, when it is properly understood, that man can transcend the world only insofar as he depends on it. Ahab does not grasp this, nor does he realize that man's independence of the world is but the corollary of his dependence on it, and that man's mastery over nature only stresses the irreducible otherness that causes man and nature to be what they are in their interdependence. In his megalomania Ahab imagines, furthermore, that transcendence can result simply from a technical victory over the world, over nature, over Moby Dick—as well as over his own reality.

Ahab has, in other terms, reduced existence to *Dasein*, that is, to the dimensions of a difficult but not impossible technical problem, like the skillful pursuit of a whale. He neglects the fact that existence may be as "ungraspable"—we could even say, "as technically unknowable"—after the most successful whaling trip as it was before, and that man is "other" than all the objective information gathered about him on an IBM card. The conquest of nature is not necessarily a sign of self-transcendence, still less when such a conquest means, as it does for Ahab, the domestication of nature, of the irreducible otherness between things and beings, between man and the world, between man and God, the

Wholly Other. He who seeks to domesticate nature has been enslaved to it; Moby Dick is not, nor ever can be, domesticated. Nor can Ahab, enslaved as he is by this "sickness unto death," domesticate death, become "like gods," and rest in the consummation of his self-deification.

Had Ahab gone into the Whalemen's Chapel, he might have read the inscriptions honoring the memory of those dead in the fulfillment of their human vocation. For there is death in the business of existing: "Yes there is death in this business of whaling—a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of man into Eternity. But what then? Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death."[6] Like Ahab, we often mistake this matter of appearance and reality, of self-transcendence and man's dependence on the world; and, reducing existence to the sum total of its objective manifestations, we lower it to a fact among other facts. On the contrary, "take my body who will, take it [Father Mapple declares in stronger terms than we would], it is not me"[7]; rather than a fact, existence is an invocation of hope rooted in "faith [which] like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these dead doubts . . . gathers her most vital hope."[8] In this respect, Father Mapple's sermon represents the opposite point of view to that of Captain Ahab.

It is relevant to note that Father Mapple is a former sailor and harpooner and that the Chapel, in which he delivers his sermon on Jonah, has a ship's atmosphere,

In contrast to them, Father Mapple points out in his sermon that, as the antithesis of self-deification, self-transcendence implies of necessity the idea of man's dependence on the world. "Mortal or immortal, here I die. I have striven to be Thine, more than to be this world's, or mine own. Yet this is nothing; I leave eternity to Thee; for what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God?"[11] Or, "I will have no man in my boat, who is not afraid of a whale," as Starbuck puts it, who would rather catch whales and leave eternity to God (perhaps because he would not know what to do with it) and who definitely seems to consider rashness, or self-glorification, a far greater danger than cowardice. And Starbuck probably is right, at least by Aristotelian standards, in distinguishing courage from rashness when it is a matter of whaling. But that is not the whole problem, and Starbuck altogether misses the point by looking the other way, to the ancillary problem of whaling. Indeed, if we faced the real issues (and it is Ahab's behavior that gives us the clue to it), we would realize that more important than the question of whaling is the question of existing. And from this angle, Ahab's behavior no doubt compels us to regard his furious chase after the whale as nothing other than, like Jonah's cowardice, an attempt to evade the responsibility of a dependent existence, the only freedom that can be his.

Just as the business of a whaling ship is to catch whales, so it is the business of a human being to be. But there are as many whales as there are ways of catching

them, and Moby Dick is a different whale to the different crewmen. Apart from ostensibly being the monster of Ahab's hatred it is as if in reality Moby Dick put a different question to different people. In particular he is the kind of question mark which Ahab will not or cannot face. Moby Dick thus limits Ahab's hubris as much as he arouses it: there is no escape from finitude, except that which leads to a dead end. This amounts to saying that the reality of the objective world is such that it limits us to ourselves while at the same time inviting us to look beyond ourselves; it questions us, puts us into question, and, at the same time, affirms us. This given and necessary relationship between the self and the world, on the one hand, both confines us and sets us free and, on the other, never obliterates the inscrutability that prevents either element from sublimating the other. Moby Dick's inscrutable malice is Ahab's.

But quite aside from this matter of malice, which is incidental and contingent, what actually is inscrutable is the mystery of Moby Dick's "whaleness" or the mystery of Ahab's being. Hawthorne referred to this inscrutability in a different way. He called it "the sanctity of a human heart," that is to say, the inviolability of every thing and being, of the self, of every "Thou." Blake and Auden after him have said: "Every thing that lives is holy." It does not matter what expression is used, for in the reality that all of these phrases try to grasp it is a question of the mystery of being, of the fact that existence is a mystery and not a problem.

It soon becomes evident, however, that Captain Ahab approaches Moby Dick's and, by the same token, his own inscrutability as a logistic problem. He is interested not so much in whaling as in pursuing a vendetta, the vendetta of a desperately defiant man. But as Kierkegaard has shown in *Sickness Unto Death*, the despair of defiance stems from the weakness of one's will to accept oneself. It is the despair of the suicide or of the blasphemer, the despair of the idolater, the man whose faith is a torment to him, whose existence is a reluctant or rash business, a spiritual suicide. Ahab is the image of that man, though doubtless he is likable, too, as are all men who are vulnerable. "He ain't sick; but . . . he isn't well either. . . . He is a queer man . . . but a good one . . . not a pious good man like Bildad, but a swearing good man—something like me," Peleg says, adding, "only there's a good deal more of him."[12]

His arrogance and evil madness notwithstanding, Ahab wins our affection, and becomes even more likable if we consider him from the standpoint of an average man's ambiguous goodness. After an altercation with Ahab, Stubb has a dream in which he considers it an honor to be kicked by him; our affection still goes to the audacious adventurer even after comparing him with the English captain who lost one arm to Moby Dick and does not want to lose the other. All the same, Ahab is vulnerable, and he knows it when he brags the most—unlike that owner of the "Pequod" who is a "Quaker with a vengeance," and whose description we should find

amusing and innocuous, were it not for the fact that it unmasks certain forms of so-called Christian behavior, especially if we remember that beside this Quaker with a vengeance, Starbuck cuts a figure of the Quaker by descent.

Just as it is impossible to be a Christian with a vengeance or a Christian by descent, so also it is impossible for man to be authentic with a vengeance or by descent. The situation on the high seas, which equalizes Christians and pagans, the rash and the cowardly, gradually confronts us with this truth, while prohibiting any escape from it. Bounded as well as unbounded by the sea, man experiences his vulnerability, that is, that existence incurs the threat of nonbeing, incessantly. Defying it will be of no help, and vengeance is a loss of courage in accepting oneself, because authentic existence can only be a matter of faith, of vocation. By lacking faith, Ahab lacks himself, while Starbuck fails his vocation; after all, despite his many condemnations of Ahab's conduct of the ship, Starbuck does not live up to them, being only a Quaker by descent. He forfeits his authenticity. "Even Christians could be both miserable and wicked,"[13] says Queequeg as he draws the inevitable conclusion: "It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians."[14] Not that Queequeg wishes to deny the supremacy of the Christian religion, which does not seem to affect him one way or the other, nor that Melville is slyly registering the dissolution of Christianity and its hegemony. The important

thing is that faith in God is not concerned with what makes us Christians or pagans, because existence is ultimately "but a draught—nay, but the draught of a draught."

With or without God, existence is not a perfectible system; it is as unfinished as the cetological arrangement with which Melville ostensibly distracts us. Not without irony, it is through a fanciful classification of whales that he offers us some essential insights into his conception of human existence.

Like existence itself, he says, cetology is an uncertain science, not merely because it is not systematic enough, but because "in some quarters it still remains a moot point whether a whale be a fish." There is nothing in the classification that Melville proposes that might arouse one's feeling that Moby Dick stands for the evil to be destroyed. Ahab's need for vengeance even becomes the inexplicable expression of a pusillanimous nature. The more one delves into the complexities of cetological classification, the more one is tempted to draw the comparative lessons regarding human existence: it is a moot point whether a man be this or that; depending on the norm, he may be classified in this or that category; and all the statistical data he can gather about himself will not suffice to help him understand himself. What we find most significant in all this is, moreover, that Melville's remarks about man's condition are precisely in agreement with those made by the Christian tradition. The image of God in which man is

between Christianity and Western culture. There is no redemptive issue to such a situation, unless a cultural revolution were to stop the decay of Yoknapatawpha County and its spiritual decolonization take place at the same time.

Faulkner's art is characterized by something other than mere technique. The four chapters of *The Sound and the Fury* are four moments of existence: innocence, or prelapsarian sinlessness; the forbidden fruit, or the fall; paradise lost; and redemption. These are rendered without thought for ordinary logical or chronological continuity. Existence is not reducible to a chronological development; making it conform to such a continuity would distort and give a false idea of what in man can never become a measurable quantity.

Faulkner guards against this distortion. Just as behind their apparent regionalism, his novels deploy a universal significance, so is time in Yoknapatawpha County not indicated by chronology, but—whether directly or indirectly—by the fullness of time, the presence of eternity. If Faulkner had, indeed, satisfied himself with one of those traditional devices that would have permitted him to weave the sequences of *The Sound and the Fury* in a chronological development, he would have been merely a *christian* novelist—neither really a novelist nor a Christian. As it is, he proves himself a great novelist—and a theologian, too, without seeming so and without the antiquated apparatus of a forgotten language.

It is not the style of the book that is complex, it is the

Compsons; just as it is not the presence of eternity that is elusive, but time in its chronological infrangibility. Nor is it redemption that is a pipe dream, a crutch, and a pie-in-the-sky, but rather the sound and the fury of existence. It is existence, not destiny, that is missing at the roll call. (Doubtless existence often is like missing an appointment with destiny.)

The absence of chronological sequence serves to corroborate this kind of frustration, just as fate, though under an opposite aspect, strangely plays the same rôle, at least in relation to genealogy if not in relation to chronology. For example, Maury fates Benjy, albeit unsuccessfully since Benjy's name was altered in order not to offend the manes of Maury his namesake. Likewise, Quentin fates his niece Quentin: "I knew the minute they named her Quentin this would happen, Mrs. Compson said. . . . It's in the blood. Like uncle, like niece. Or mother."[1]

The more fatefulness seems to yoke the Compsons to one another, the more purposeless their lives become. Freedom is, in the last analysis, incompatible with purposelessness or with chance, as well as with fate. But neither can there be any freedom without destiny. If destiny is the path of freedom, freedom is the wings of destiny. It is obvious that everything hangs together: fate and emptiness, freedom and destiny, chronology as meaningless mechanical time and time as the presence of eternity, the fullness of time, regardless of any meridian, of the Compsons and the others alike. The

absence of chronology allows a greater insistence upon the meaning of man's destiny, just as definitely as Faulkner's outrageous regionalism is the expression of another region, that of the human heart, whatever its longitude and its latitude.

Faulkner's technique is thus the handmaid of his vocation. This supereminent quality he does not share with any other novelist, even though one can detect similarities between him and others. For example, the chronological flashback is a cinematographic invention that others have used. But with Faulkner it acquires another intensity, which we shall discuss presently, just as on a different level, it presents affinities with Joyce's fragmented language. For the time being, let us state that the significant thing is that Faulkner's technique is like the mask of the Japanese noh actor; smaller than the actor's face, the mask is meant not to conceal but to reveal states of the soul. Faulkner's chronological and linguistic flashbacks are the mask through which man stands revealed in the complex of his simplicity. Reality eludes him, but *only the real* can elude him.

What is reality? It is something the structure of which is not self-evident. Beyond the original and unique confrontation between the self and the world, nothing can be said that has any validity. Places are a construction of the mind, and so are the past and the future.

Here and now, that is the only reality. Reality is the fullness of time, the present—but an evanescent present that is related to the chronological constructions of past,

present, and future in the same way as my real self is related to the faces I put on. Add or subtract these faces, my real self is something other than their succession. And the novel of a torn conscience, of a fragmented human reality is also something other than what a mere conventional, chronological narration can evoke. If indeed, like a North African river, the narrative appears and disappears it is not simply because the human condition is grasped as a subjective reality only, but because the geographic and objective coordinates of this reality must respond to the notion that one can be a stranger in one's own country. Similarly, if the conventional, chronological structure of time has lost all meaning, Faulkner does not intend to show how man is fettered, weighed upon, fated, by his own past, but rather how, despite everything, the future still remains the virgin soil of constantly new possibilities, of fresh choices, of indefatigable acts of freedom. It is therefore improper to claim that Faulkner suggests man "*vit à reculons*," that existence is like moving backward.

Consequently, to declare, as André Malraux does in his preface to *Sanctuaire*,[2] that "*l'homme n'existe qu' écrasé*" is only partially true. Otherwise, this would amount to the total elimination of contingency for the sake of a thoroughgoing fatalism on the one hand, and, on the other, of freedom and hope, of the future. For hope depends on contingency as well as on the sense of destiny; this is exactly what the intermittent narrative, the chronological or, even, teleological suspension of time, in the last analysis, bring into evidence.

This effect of Faulkner's style is, I think, indisputable. His is not a universe of despair. On the contrary, hope springs forth constantly, even if at times the heartbeats of the human reality are not sufficient to sustain it. Hope is affirmed even against hope—which is, for us human beings, the way it usually is—despite such passages as: "Of course," Father said. "Bad health is the primary reason for all life. Created by disease, within putrefaction, into decay . . ."[3] Hope is like a clearing through time, as Gabriel Marcel contends in *Homo Viator*,[4] while despair is a sort of consciousness of being walled in by time, *i.e.*, chronological time. For this reason, Marcel adds, hope evinces a prophetic character, not so much by predicting what will happen as by accepting the present and apprehending it as a possibility of the future. We may extend these lines of thought by remarking that, if despair is chronological existence, hope means eschatological existense, that is, an existence that is lived not as a *datum* but as a *mandatum*.

A quick description of some members of the Compson family will reinforce this contention. Let us begin with Caddy. She "doesn't want to be saved" and besides she "hasn't anything anymore worth being saved" for she has "nothing worth being lost that she can lose."[5] She was already two months pregnant when, in 1910, she married a young man from Indiana she had met the summer before at French Lick. Divorced in 1911, she is married again in 1920 to a minor Hollywood magnate. By mutual agreement, they obtain a Mexican divorce

five years later. In 1940, Paris is under German occupation. There she vanishes. She reappears at last back home in 1943. About her, Faulkner writes: "Doomed and knew it, accepted the doom without seeking it or fleeing it."[6] She has a daughter, Quentin, whom she has abandoned in care of Jason (who uses her to blackmail Caddy), and who finally climbs down the rain pipe and runs away on the eve of Easter, not without having stolen Jason's money. But it is the date of Easter that is the important thing, as we shall see later on.

Even Jason is not as hopelessly bad as the reader would be inclined to think. A selfish blackmailer, he hates Jews and foreigners, he is cruel to the point of burning circus tickets rather than giving them to the young Luster: "thinking nothing whatever of God one way or the other and simply considering the police"[7] or, which amounts to the same thing morally, simply considering the stock market. He has substituted determinism and probabilism for freedom and destiny, traffic regulation and ticker tape for moral obligation. Faulkner's own judgment is a masterpiece of compactness, filled with irony and harshness, as caustic as it is ambiguous; he presents Jason as "the first sane Compson since Culloden and (a childless bachelor) hence the last."[8] Such is the man who "never had time to be," much like the brother of the prodigal son in the parable told by Jesus. "I never had time to go to Harvard like Quentin or drink myself into the ground like Father. . . ."[9]

One way or the other, the Compson family is doomed.

"The clock tick-tocked, solemn and profound. It might have been the dry pulse of the decaying house itself."[10] But the doom is both apocalypse and revelation, an instrumental description of the hopelessness of time and of hope clearing through time. It is a vindication, namely, that all things are made new again, and a new heaven and a new earth are dawning. To grasp this clearly, we must focus on Benjy and Dilsey.

Benjy, the gelded idiot who is finally sent to the state asylum in 1933, is, together with Dilsey, one of the rare creations of Faulkner's talent, for which he remains unequaled by any other novelist. Time, which is constantly running out on all the other characters, does not affect Benjy. Nor has he substituted a policeman for God, or prefabricated life for authentic existence. Whether structured or divested of all structure, chronological time cannot affect him. What time is it when, having witnessed many deaths, you see a corpse on a movie screen and you smell the odor of death? Benjy smells things. Reliving the past, he smells the presence of past events and people. To him, Caddy smells like apple trees. And through him the absence of chronology shows its real purpose, by indicating that no illusory self-authentication can ultimately destroy the reality of our dependent being and no escape is possible from the ground of being, just as the present cannot be robbed of its concrete actuality in which time is transfigured, redeemed, because the fullness of time is a possibility here and now.

It has been suggested that Benjy is a Christ-figure.

Even if we must at the same time underline the irony of such a parallel in a post-Christian age, the suggestion may be worth considering. What is it based on? As Christ was sacrificed for the sake of Barabbas, so is Benjy sacrificed for the sake of Quentin: "We have sold Benjy's *He lay on the ground under the window, bellowing. We have sold Benjy's pasture so that Quentin may go to Harvard* a brother to you Your little brother."[11] Like Christ, he is thirty-three years old. He typifies innocence because, like Christ again, he is not affected by time, unlike others who run against time or whose time is measured: thus, Quentin's suicide has already taken place while the story of what is leading to it is being told; Jason's chase to recover his money is frustrated by time. By contrast, neither the day nor the hour, if it means withdrawing oneself from full commitment to the present, has any way of altering Benjy's destiny.

It would be possible, of course, to extend the parallelism between Benjy and Christ still further, but sooner or later we must come to this point: since Dostoevski, but doubtless in spite of him, one critic or another has been all too prone to identify with Christ every allegorical idiot in literature. As if being an idiot were all it took to be a Christ-figure! But if one can so easily extend the attributes of Christ, then, indeed, the Christ-event has become meaningless and Christianity has really run out of breath. Unless, of course, those who choose to see in Benjy a Christ-figure also concede that

what they mean is a sublimated or subconscious nostalgia for the Christian era. It seems to us that such an interpretation of Benjy is as sterile as it is seemingly original, and does not so much emanate from the integrity of the work itself as from the theological malformation of certain critics. What these critics need are not grandiloquent occasions for Christ-figures, but some simpler kind of truth, something not so farfetched but closer to the dimension of man, and perhaps not so unlike what Dilsey has in mind: "Huh," Dilsey said, "What dey needs is a man kin put de fear of God into dese here triflin young niggers."[12] Nor is the possibility excluded, by the way, that those who, like Dilsey, still believe in God are capable of common sense. In fact, one must turn to Dilsey for a richer understanding of *The Sound and the Fury*.

Undoubtedly, Dilsey is a bridge. She is a bridge between Yoknapatawpha County and the rest of the world; between the Compsons and the rest of mankind, their mediator, so to speak. And she is also a bridge between the Christian past and the present post-Christian age of Western culture, perhaps the very epitome of a Christian in this post-Christian era. She does not reject the Compsons, and God knows she has good reasons to do so. Unlike Ivan Karamazov, she does not give her ticket back, though it is plain that she, too, would have made Yoknapatawpha County differently. Nor does she rebel against the aspect of the Christian tradition which has fashioned Yoknapatawpha County and

brought the Compsons to their present predicament. In this respect, not Dilsey, but Jason more accurately typifies many contemporaries for whom Western culture has definitely aborted and who see no exit but toward the asylum or the museum or the hinterland or folklore.

What a difference between the logic of Dilsey's existence and that of Jason's! She could not possibly subscribe to the latter's declaration, when he says: "I went on to the street, but they were out of sight. And there I was, without any hat, looking like I was crazy too. Like a man would naturally think, one of them is crazy and another one drowned himself and the other one was turned out into the street by her husband, what's the reason the rest of them are not crazy too. All the time I could see them watching me like a hawk, waiting for a chance to say Well I'm not surprised I expected it all the time the whole family is crazy."[13]

By contrast with this contrived, reluctant declaration of solidarity among men, Dilsey's is equally realistic but without the tone of unconditional surrender. For her, the task of existence is fulfilled neither through resignation nor through defiance, without implying that her mode of being is therefore an edulcorated one. On the contrary, while it is true that it stems from her Christian conviction, one must also acknowledge that objectively it embodies a simpler and, hence, a fuller insight into the human condition: we are doomed neither to solidarity nor by it, though we are all in the same boat.

"Reckin so," Luster said, "Dese is funny folks. Glad I aint none of em."

"Aint none of who?" Dilsey said. "Lemme tell you somethin, nigger boy, you got jes es much Compson devilment in you es any of em. . . ."[14]

In and through Dilsey, beyond the sound and the fury, beyond the disfigurement of the human race, beyond the consumption and collapse of the Christian tradition, slowly but firmly rises a presence against which no human vicissitude can prevail and for which no human sorrow is too vile or decadent to bear and transfigure. A transparent rock of faith, Dilsey is the incarnation of human dignity and solicitude, almost tangibly there and yet unobtrusively available to all. In the world but not of the world. "Death is behind" her.

His name's Benjy now, Caddy said.

How come it is, Dilsey said. He aint wore out the name he was born with yet, is he.

Benjamin came out of the bible, Caddy said. It's a better name for him than Maury was.

How come it is, Dilsey said.

Huh, Dilsey said. Name aint going to help him. Hurt him, neither. Folks dont have no luck, changing names. My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me.

How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said.

It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said. Writ out.

Can you read it, Caddy said.

Wont have to, Dilsey said. They'll read it for me. All I got to do is say Ise here."[15]

Here at the end, because she is here at the beginning, from first to last. One cannot help, against the background of decay and irresponsibility, from stressing the full force of Dilsey's statement, "Ise here." Indeed, with a minimum of emphasis on Faulkner's part, the ultimate significance of these words is corroborated, and the uniqueness of Dilsey's presence indicated as a cipher of the novel by the fact that for her there is no "obituary" in the appendix. Rather, her name is followed by the words, "They endured," typographically set in such a way that the reader would apply them to the Negroes and possibly the Compsons, all of them ultimately redeemed by Dilsey's mediatory presence.

Naturally, it is possible to center *The Sound and the Fury* on characters other than Dilsey or on various other themes. Faulkner himself has said that it is the story of what happens to Caddy and Quentin. Besides Benjy as a Christ-figure, one can also read the novel, as Claude-Edmonde Magny[16] suggests, along the theme of a pre-redemption hope—from a pre-Christian perspective, as it were, rather than from a post-Christian one, as we are suggesting. Or more simply, but also more narrowly, one can reduce everything to the much used and abused theme of original sin.

Sartre[17] was quite bold and original in his short essay on *The Sound and the Fury*, when he declared that time was the hero. Reflections about the meaning of time doubtless abound in a great number of passages, in the Quentin section, in particular. But quite aside from Sartre's interpretation and its compelling rigor, the problem of time in *The Sound and the Fury* must be considered, if only because of the magnificent quality of Faulkner's insights into the temporal nature of man. "Father said a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said. A gull on an invisible wire attached through space dragged."[18] And these words by Quentin bridging, across the ages, Saint Augustine and Sartre's existentialism: "A quarter hour yet. And then I'll not be. The peacefullest words. *Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum.* Somewhere I heard bells once. Mississippi or Massachusetts. I was. I am not . . . I am . . . I was not."[19]

Man is that being which becomes neither that which he is nor that which he ought to be, but that which he is not. He is, as Sartre was to write later in *Being and Nothingness*,[20] that which he is not and is not that which he is. And time itself is not until it was. But the business of time is precisely to postpone time until it was, to postpone the time when it is not, quite like the way in which Kierkegaard describes the irremediable nature of the "sickness unto death" that is despair. Faulkner himself writes, "there is nothing else in the world its not despair until time its not even time until it was."[21]

Time will not redeem man from his misfortune, nor will it redeem itself in becoming man's misfortune. In other words, existence is not self-authenticating. Is this not what Faulkner implies, when most of this novel's characters run against time, run out of time in a desperate effort to assert and authenticate themselves? Obviously, Quentin did not heed the words his grandfather told him when he gave him the watch: "I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools."[22] Doubtless, time is man's misfortune.

But there is time and time, so that the impression of resignation and bondage to time scored by this exhortation calls for a correction; we must not confuse temporality and chronology. Does not Faulkner himself all too plainly warn us against that, if only by the absence of chronological sequence so emphatically characteristic of the novel? Not time so much as its facsimile, the timetable, is man's misfortune—routine, automated existence. When time looks like a schedule, then temporal existence surely does become a curse from which to flee without ever winning the victory even through suicide. Quentin realizes this when he says: "Because Father said clocks slay time. He said time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the

clock stops does time come to life."[23] Which amounts to saying that being, the new being, is when time has come to life. But how does time come to life?

Easter is how the clock stops and time comes to life. Admittedly, it is difficult for modern man to realize this; our incapacity for such a reality is almost insuperable, above all because of our subjection, our blind submissiveness to the modern technological world view. But if Joshua could stop the sun, was it not because in his contemporaries' world view the universe was not a self-winding clock? The important thing is not whether Joshua actually stopped the sun, but the human stance that such an image evokes. But we are no longer capable of grasping the human reality from any similar vantage point. The substitution of an immanentist world view for a transcendental one and the atrophy of the sacral dimension of existence have resulted in the conception of time as deterministic routine, or of life as "governed" by luck.

It is because time and "luck cant do him no harm"[24] that Benjy can live out time come to life. And his life is not measured by the clicking away of seconds, of minutes, hours, and days. His chronological, "man-made" clock has stopped; past and present are mixed up, at least in appearance. What Benjy lives is the fullness of time. He does not merely recollect but smells past events, and all around him the present participates in the significance of a past event, much in the same sense, one might add, as the symbol participates in the reality

of that which is symbolized. Past events are not merely recollected; through Benjy, they are also re-presented, made present again.

To borrow the German distinction, what we perceive in the case of Benjy is the unfolding of time into *Geschichte* rather than into *Historie*. As a series of facts from birth to death, the human reality belongs to *Historie*. As existing reality, however, man belongs to *Geschichte*. From the standpoint of *Historie* man appears as a chronological, or even statistical, reality. But from the standpoint of *Geschichte*, he evinces the full dimension of his temporality; he is all the facts of his life, the quantitative sum total of what took place between his birth and his death and *something more* that, being qualitative, remains irreducible.

All men are mortal—differently. If I am what I am because I remain faithful to an original decision, still each subsequent choice and the decision that follows is also a unique and original event. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner's technique makes the past present again, not in order to suggest any kind of bondage to it but to stress, as Benjy and the Easter sermon make plain, that the present always contains a new possibility, that it always offers a new choice, that it calls us to a new decision, because it opens on the future. Man, in other words, is a transcendental being. Time can be redeemed even from the routine that holds it in leash or from the chronic waste that leads to a dead end.

Not time, but eternity is the subject of *The Sound and*

the Fury. In this novel, we do not attend the disintegration of empirical existence, the cankerous corruption of generations fated to an ineluctable impasse. We attend a mystery, the mystery of being, something that transcends the clicking of seconds, the bondage of time and space, so that in the saga of Yoknapatawpha County we discern a history of the "City of God" in modern dress. What Augustine did for the Roman Empire, Faulkner does for the collapse of Constantinian Christendom, which is perceptibly giving way to a post-Christian culture. And if Faulkner's vision seems to us more tragic, it is because it originates in the death of God—in the death of one Christian cultural conception of God among others—whereas Augustine's presupposed the death of the Graeco-Roman pantheon.

The sermon, or more precisely, the Negro service is the capital event that helps us to substantiate this claim. To many readers, the sermon probably sounds like one more recapitulation of a once popular legend. Legend it is, but it plays in *The Sound and the Fury* the same rôle as the legend of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov*. And, furthermore, it is a legend in the etymological sense of the term. That is to say, it tells us the meaning of the various signs and symbols as on a geographical map; it tells us how to read the drama, how to interpret the characters of the plot that has been unfolding before us. And even as, in the New Testament, Easter is the legend of Good Friday, so is the sermon the legend of *The Sound*

and the Fury. As Easter comes after Good Friday, so does the sermon, an Easter sermon, come after the final dereliction of the Compsons, when man's attempts to save himself, to authenticate himself have foundered, irretrievably. And just as Good Friday reveals its meaning only in the light of Easter, so also the folly and the doom of those who attempt to conquer time, in the light of the sermon, take an another meaning.

Is it then all simply a question of perspective? Of course, it is. What existential adventure isn't? But the question is to find the perspective that best fits the destiny of man; this implies, in other words, that the meaning of existence lies outside existence, or that existence is not self-authenticating and that the fullness of time is a possibility even within time. Eternity does not "begin" after time; it happens within time. The resurrection does not take place after one's physical death; it is the only experience by which here and now the human reality can be transfigured, by which man can become that which he is not; it is the possibility of authentic existence. "I sees . . . I sees hit . . ." the minister says. "I sees de doom crack en hears de golden horns shoutin down the glory, en de arisen dead whut got de blood en de ricklickshun of the Lamb."[25] All in the present tense, that of the presence of eternity, when the clock stops and time comes to life, when all things are made new again and existence ceases to be a problem and becomes again a mystery, that is to say, a sacrament, a miracle (the Latin *sacramentum* is the translation of the Greek *mysterion*).

Existence remains a mystery even when everything has been disclosed from beginning to end. "I've seed de first en de last," Dilsey said. "I seed de biginnin en now I seed de endin."[26] What Dilsey sees is the "smashing of all human standards and evaluations"[27] by which we abdicate existence and end where the Compsons have ended. What she sees is that existence cannot be construed as "a terminated occurrence but that it is what it is only by constantly occurring anew,"[28] just like revelation and the act of faith by which revelation is grasped. Dilsey is the real iconoclast, not the Compsons, because she is the only one for whom life is an act of faith and bursts through the convenient standards and values of morality or the lack of it.

We are doubtless somewhat shocked by these declarations, if we are not in fact ready to dismiss them right off. No doubt, they sound unbelievable, much as the visiting minister did when he began to preach sounding like a white man, and Frony whispers: "En dey brung dat all de way fum Saint Looey."[29] Justifiable as her skepticism might have been, it still reminds us of Nathanael's, who exclaims: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" to which Philip replies: "Come and see."[30] Dilsey herself, likewise, hastens to remark to Frony: "I've knowed de Lawd to use cuiser tools dan dat."[31] She knows that no sinner is too destitute to be saved, that no human being is so despicable as to deny by himself his fundamental humanity. She knows, also, that God's intervention in history is not necessarily accompanied by apocalyptic suspensions of the normal

course of nature, of time; that the transcendental presence of God in the immanence of the human reality does not violate the latter's independence but manifests itself in and through it. This is why Kierkegaard identified the Christ-event, the manifestation of God's presence in Christ, as the incognito of God. On the other hand, human existence remains a mystery even while it stands revealed to itself.

It is in this light that one must listen to the sermon. Slowly, it becomes the eschatological manifestation it was meant to be. The man from Saint Looey is the herald of a new reality transfiguring the old aeon: the clock stops and God's judgment is the instrument of his mercy. And time is the time of God's patience, of God's mercy. To quote Dilsey again, speaking now to Quentin: "Dont you be skeered, honey, I'se right here."[32] All the time she has been right here. Everywhere is for her the right place. All time is for her the right time, because it is God's own time.

How can we know this?

> "You'll know in the Lawd's own time." . . .
>
> "When is the Lawd's own time, Dilsey." Caddy said.
>
> "It's Sunday." Quentin said.[33]

It's Sunday, the day of man's rendez-vous with existence: he can miss it, but God does not; man can miss his destiny and time run out on him, but he will not miss

God, nor does the day of God's patience run out on man. Sunday is the day on which Easter is commemorated, the day of rest when the groaning of the creation ceases and man here and now becomes a new creature. It is the first and the last of the week, the beginning and the end; the birthday of man, when the old man dies and becomes a new man.

The Sound and the Fury, or foolishness to the Greeks and a scandal to the Jews, is a novel the action of which takes place in the framework of Eastertide. Without the climax it reaches in the Easter service, it is a novel about the degradation and rottenness of man. In the light of the sermon, re-enacting, re-presenting God's vindication of man's destiny, *The Sound and the Fury* affirms the possibility of a new beginning, even when the end of the rope seems to have been reached, when there seems to be no exit. Hell is other people, Sartre declares. Hell is god, Lagerkvist seems to insinuate. From Faulkner's vantage point, hell is oneself. That is to say, hell is god or other people only when they are sought as crutches. And hell is oneself, when one becomes a pair of blind crutches trying to help another across life, in vain. No pair of crutches is a good substitute for an act of faith.

How can we know this, and verify it? To be sure, we do not know this kind of reality as we know objective facts, as we acquire objective, measurable certainties. Nor is Faulkner inviting us to commit ourselves to any blind faith. History is too human both to yield any kind of certainty and to justify any kind of blind, fatalistic,

or superstitious belief. Faulkner is more cautious than Camus, who wrote in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "Between history and the eternal I have chosen history because I like certainties." [34]

Certainties may be indulged in only if it is claimed that one's knowledge is established beyond doubt, beyond any dispute. Against such allegations, Faulkner raises one question: "How can a man be expected to know even enough to doubt?" [35]

Land ushered in a new quest in literature for the meaning of existence and destiny. Unwaveringly, Eliot's poem called into question the former patterns of poetic inspiration. With the sense of an impending doom, it screened the beliefs of a literary tradition that had complacently separated itself from God and betrayed man. Reacting against this, Eliot's poetry set down the energetic framework for a new evaluation of man's condition and a new exploration of the human reality. After an age that had romantically delighted in the "unbelief" of man's natural goodness, Eliot, and others with him, reached the conclusion that the one thing common to all men was original sin.

A few years earlier, Karl Barth,[2] accomplishing a similar revolution in religious thought, had recovered, at least for Protestant theology, the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith. Eliot's rediscovery of all men's solidarity in sin attempted a bold intrusion of religion into literature in order to overcome their discord. It was a pity, however, that this had to be done by means of the dogma of original sin. That dogma is not so essential to biblical thought as is the affirmation of the ineffaceable if corruptible goodness of God's creation. Even in the depths of human depravity, biblical thought starts with this affirmation instead of that dogma. Its initial statement concerns man's original goodness and not his original sin. Hence, not man's dereliction, but man's preservation is what gives biblical thought its distinctiveness and authenticates its insight into the nature of created reality.

GOD is man's failure. Never does this become so manifest as in periods of transition, like ours, which are essentially periods of spiritual *interregnum*. Throughout the ages, Christian or not, pre-Christian and post-Christian, God has been man's failure. And in the death of his gods, man both fails and overcomes his failure.

It is not sacrilegious to speak of the death of God, or of God as the chief failure of man. After all, the concept of God is a cultural—not to say ethnolatrous—concept, and God often is nothing other than some sort of constant accessory of culture. Concepts can be valid only so long as they spearhead the spontaneous expression of a particular human experience; they can live only as long as their cultural framework lasts. But a

culture is also materialized by institutions, and these tend to overwhelm and atrophy the human experience, until they have invalidated it. By thus defrauding the concept, institutions objectify and ultimately transform into an empirical datum the human reality they are supposed to incarnate.

In the gospel of John, the incarnation means the constantly unique event through which destiny is improvised once and for all, and not its objectification. Human existence, because it can never be rehearsed, is not an institution but a necessary improvisation of destiny. Admittedly, institutions too are born of the necessity of improvisation, but they freeze it, they codify it, just as dogmas and religion betray faith by codifying the acts of faith—through which they are improvised—forgetting that existence itself, as a spontaneous act of faith, is an impertinent improvisation on the theme of God's reality, of the presentness of God.

Unfortunately, organized religion with its variegated paraphernalia, by trying to show how pertinent faith is, blunts it and mummifies it. No improvisation thus lasts beyond the moment when it is conceived, and the concept that results from it leads finally to the institutionalization of religion, or to the cultural annexation of God, or the deliquescence of faith into religiosity. To cite Karl Barth, man can only formulate concepts that are not identical with God; there is no adequacy between God and our concepts of God.[2] Religion and its gods are, consequently, so many screens, so many obstacles between the living God and man. No wonder, according

to biblical thought, God in whose image man is created is imageless. And we may, quite appropriately, paraphrase Faulkner's sentence when he writes in *The Sound and the Fury*, "it was men invented virginity, not women,"[3] by saying: it was men invented religion, not God. It was men invented the God that dies.

Indeed, men take pleasure in inventing religions, if not quite to the point of patenting them, at least to that of "incorporating" them. This stricture is not directed against certain American denominations only; every Christian confession is similarly reprehensible whether it is established officially as territorial or unofficially as cultural church, or whether it is incorporated in Vatican State. Christianity itself, as a whole, comes under this judgment insofar as it has *de facto* become the trademark of Western culture.

To speak of the death of God means, then, that finally at the end of the Christian phase of Western culture, the reality of the living God is freed from the cultural concepts and other institutions that attempt to objectify and domesticate it. The death of God marks the end of Christian culture and, especially, of its attempt to assimilate *the other God*, the living God of whom our religion as well as our diffuse religiosity is a desperate caricature. This means that, man being a religious animal, we are groping for a new concept of God and a new attitude, a mode of being congruous with it; that a new religiosity is dawning. And a new era begins when a new religiosity appears, rises from the empty tomb of the dead God.

masking of the latent, diffuse religiosity to which man is, by nature, inclined. It may well be, therefore, as Mircea Eliade remarks, that the present period will go down in history as the first to have rediscovered "diffuse religious experiences," to have recovered the relevance of raw diffuse religiosity, once overcome by the triumph of Christianity.[4]

But this post-Christian religiosity may also force Christianity out of its Western cage, enable it to break through the walls of Occidentalism and develop into a new historic reality and into a new possibility as individual existence. Doubtless, there are concrete obstacles hindering such expectations for the survival of Christianity. And what if the Christian tradition were checkmated by these obstacles? Such an eventuality is not impossible: it is becoming more and more evident if not absolutely inescapable.

Nonetheless, everything still depends on the ultimate effect of the transition from radical monotheism to radical immanentism and of the leveling down of transcendental values to immanental ones. Either this effect will consist in the recovery of our classic, transcendental categories, according to which God is distinct from, wholly other than his creation. Or else, God has been, so to speak, *renaturalized*, into an immanental force, animating the compulsory ideology of the classless society, at one end of the spectrum, and our most democratic pretensions to deity at the other end. Either way, one thing is clear: man is not an atheist, except by contrast with an established theism, whether it be mono-

theism or polytheism. As Jean Guitton has said, man is essentially an idolater or an "iconoclast," but not an atheist.[5] But this aspect of the problem cannot concern us at this point, except insofar as it helps us to stress the iconoclastic element peculiarly inherent in the biblical view of existence, or the iconoclastic nature of man's obligation to God.

Our present crisis stems from the fact that we have changed the biblical iconoclasm of the Christian tradition into the idolatrous post-Christian religiosity of our cultural institutions, be they social, political, economic, or ecclesiastical.

And let us not pretend that Christianity has never been *really* tried. It is dishonest to do so after nearly twenty centuries of Christian apologetics, intellectually or ethically, religiously or institutionally as well as culturally. Besides, that same claim could be made for all the dead religions that are now preserved in the religious wax museum of mankind. To pretend that Christianity has never been really tried can only imply, not that its ideals have been much too difficult and demanding for mortal men to realize, but that we are seeking dubious excuses to conceal the fact (as Teilhard de Chardin has rightly observed) that, because Christianity is neither pure nor demanding enough, it can command our allegiance no longer. The death of God is, after all, not a divine failure but the failure of Christian man, like other human failures in history.[6] "Splendid results attained by Christendom!" exclaimed Kierkegaard as he remarked that unfaith, the impossibility

or "inability to believe" was now "the sign of a deeper nature."[7]

The repudiation of Christianity does not, of course, entail the repudiation of religion. It does imply, however, that mythological Christianity has given way to a technological religiosity; or that, in Berdyaev's terms, religion used to play a *symbolic* rôle in the shaping of Western culture, but has now become pragmatic and utilitarian. Technological religiosity simply corroborates the increasing irrelevance of Christianity now become the syndrome of the death of God. In plain words, Christianity was regressing even while it brought about the cultural development that presided over the birth of our technological society.

And yet the de-divinization of nature (as necessitated by biblical thought) need not have resulted in the "de-consecration" or secularization of the world. Secularity, or involvement in the world for the sake of God's glory, need not have slipped into secularism. Fostered by Christianity, secularism has been the best expression of the immanentist religiosity that has succeeded the radical monotheism of classical Christianity, when nature, de-divinized, was still conceived of as made for grace. Man's preeminence over the creation was an act of faith. His conquest of the universe is today a technological act of prowess if not simply a technical problem. This deterioration had already set in when in the modern period "reason was cultivated at the expense of spirit."[8] No wonder, then, that today we cultivate religiosity at the expense of faith in God. That is why we can reverse

Kierkegaard's statement and claim that Western culture is the misfortune of Christianity. And that is also why Christianity has remained a Western if not a strictly European phenomenon.

At this point, the question becomes: Can Christianity disentangle itself from the present crisis of Western culture? In other words, is Christianity regressing or developing?

It must be borne in mind that any development of Christianity is by necessity a matter of faith. Unlike economic goals, it will not be achieved through any sort of five-year plan. Insofar as one can distinguish Christianity from its religious and cultural institutions, it is not an empirical datum but the expression of an act of faith. In order to develop, Christianity must, accordingly, dissociate itself from those institutions of Western culture that are catalyzing the present spiritual crisis. And by doing this Christianity would be truly iconoclastic, smashing its own golden calf. To paraphrase St. Vincent of Lerins, the task is to say all things in a new way without proclaiming insidious novelties. The time has come to proclaim the gospel in a new, bold manner, yet without proclaiming a new gospel. Never easy, this kind of task is still more difficult today, and the future quite precarious, what with all the newfangled ideologies that compete with Christianity—and not always unsuccessfully—both at home and abroad.

As we have said, Christianity has until now been almost exclusively a European or Western phenomenon. But the realities of the present world have forced Europe

some hope," claiming as does Martin Marty that "we already possess the institutions we need to undertake the religious task set before" us.[10] Possibly, a certain degree of hopefulness is permissible, but we should not neglect to use caution, lest these institutions be like the lips with which we honor God while our hearts are far from him. To cite Isaiah again: "because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me . . . the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hid."[11]

Peter Berger reminds us that the Church is an article of faith, not an empirical datum. He writes: "Now, it is certainly true that no human culture is so designed as to facilitate conversion. The Jewish culture of Jesus' own time was not so designed. Neither was the Graeco-Roman into which the Christian message was carried by Paul. In other words, the Christian faith will always be in tension with the world. What is characteristic of our situation is that the religious establishment itself obscures this tension and produces the illusion that what tension there is can be understood as growing pains."[12]

Indeed, to be less iconoclastic than those outside the Church would be the greatest treason of Christianity. Nor can one force happiness down other people's throats, let alone faith; and yet this is exactly what our institutions have generally attempted to do. Or over and over again they keep fighting old battles not only in theological matters but also in the spheres of politics and economics—if a battle is engaged in at all. For example,

it is doubtful whether the separation of Church and State is a valid theological issue of our time. Our ecclesiastical factions waste their energy, it seems, either when they argue radically in favor of it, or when, casuistically, they defend the principle while at the same time they seek, if they do not actually draw, support from the State for various purposes, such as education. The real problem is what the principle of Church-and-State separation has come to mean today; the fact is that the State no longer needs the Church, being itself a sort of clerical organization that has taken over many responsibilities that used to be ecclesiastical.

Incidentally, let us make it clear, if we must, that none of this is meant to minimize the importance of the Ecumenical Movement or of the worldwide council that is being held at the Vatican. Whether they are any indication that the Christian tradition may yet enjoy a new lease on life depends, of course, on whether they are dominated by the institutionalism of the various Christian confessions they represent. Are they not in fact part of the process toward gigantism so characteristic of our age? To be sure, there is nothing intrinsically evil about gigantism, whether or not it is a necessity of the modern world. But when Christianity sanctions this particular trend, the danger is that it may be doing so for merely social and institutional reasons, for the sake of maintaining its status. Should this be the case, not only the Christian ecumenical concern would be misplaced or misguided; it would serve to accelerate the petrifying grip of institutionalism and sanction the definitive surrender of the Christian tradition.

It is more likely, however, that the leaders of both the World Council of Churches and the Vatican Council have sensed the danger that faces the Christian tradition. In this case, they should also realize that the divisions of Christianity rest, in the last analysis, on a conception of faith and existence that is descriptive of, and dependent on, the world view of the so-called Christian era. That is to say, even granting that these divisions were at one time valid for theological reasons, today they have become purely social and institutional: they have lost their theological justification. Nothing less than a radical about-face, such as, for example, an adjustment of dogmas to the realities of our post-Christian era, would convince us of an unsuspected vitality on the part of the Christian tradition. In a post-Christian era, the sociological divisions of Christianity make no sense. They should not be sanctified, but denounced. True iconoclasm begins with oneself, with the smashing of one's own idols, *i.e.*, of one's superannuated conception of God, of faith and religious allegiance.

We come now to the third aspect of Christianity as an empirical datum, the cultural. Actually, all that has been said so far has been largely determined by this aspect. Instead, then, of a repetitious elaboration, we shall rather try to sharpen our focus, and for that we must be ready for paradoxes.

On the one hand, our cultural incapacity for God stems from the radical immanentism that informs human experience today. On the other hand, we are no less religious today than those of the previous era. Religiosity, in other words, has set in, sometimes merely

less than a cultural renovation of Christian institutions—and that means a radically new approach to the question of Christianity's cultural embodiment—is necessarily prescribed if any theological renascence is to have some effect outside the walls of the Church as well as within.

That is why, as we have already underlined, an iconoclastic reconversion, a cultural revolution is sorely needed, and all the more urgently because neither institutions nor cultural patterns in general are so "designed as to facilitate conversion" to Christianity, if they are not, as they seem to be today, so designed as to make it altogether superfluous. By comparison, a much easier task, indeed, confronted the early Christians. To begin with, they were not immobilized nor was their vision obscured by already existing institutions, not to mention the fact that the non-Christian institutions were not only religious but also sacral, at least supernatural in their significance, while our culture has lost its sacral dimension. It follows, therefore, that the survival of the Christian tradition is handicapped rather than helped by the existence of cultural structures that are Christian in name only. It was doubtless easier to make the conversion from pre-Christian to Christian than it is from post-Christian to Christian, and the reasons for this are obviously not merely chronological, as we have attempted to show in the preceding theological essays on literature.

The conclusions we have reached may be summarized in the following manner:

First, in its deepest recesses, Western culture is prac-

tically immunized against Christianity. Conversely, there has occurred what we might call a cultural neutralization of the Christian tradition. This means that the once powerful and culturally pregnant symbols of the God-man, of the real presence of God's transcendent immediacy, of communion, are now become words of a forgotten language. Our customs still exhale a Christian flavor, but our hearts are not Christian.[13]

Second, assuming that it was Christianity that began to kill the pagan gods of nature, by de-divinizing nature, until modern science simply confirmed their death, it is possible that, in the last analysis, the death of God means the death of those pagan deities that had somehow survived in the Christian cultural conception of God. Accordingly, the absence of God, as the only divine reality that can be experienced today, may yet enable Christianity further to clarify the biblical concept of God as the Wholly Other, because he is the Creator and not a natural force.

Third, the era of Western religious narcissism is gone, and this certainly, is a significant contribution of our post-Christian era to the Christian tradition. The national egotism of emergent countries will perhaps force Christianity to become more kerygmatic at home as well as abroad, that is to say, to help bring about or to awaken us to the need for a cultural renovation by becoming iconoclastic again and, thus, relevant to the culture of the West.

Fourth, the exposing of religious obscurantism and

the absence of supernatural crutches may equally force us to formulate what Berdyaev refers to as our "cultural will," whether as Christians or not, but certainly not as pseudo-Christian Westerners or as pseudo-Western Christians.

Our final point will be made by way of a question borrowed from Saint Augustine: "How could the City of God," he asked, ". . . either take a beginning or be developed, or attain its proper destiny, if the life of the saints were not a social life?"[14] How can the Christian tradition survive or develop without a concomitant, congruous, cultural reality manifest in all realms of the spirit from theology to art and literature as well as on all levels of life from morality to economics and politics?

In short, the Christian tradition has been regressing insofar as it has not been relevant to the present crisis of our cultural situation. On the other hand, Christian thought has been developing, but it is no longer relevant to the situation of our post-Christian age and its cultural postulates—nor will it be relevant as long as it is tied down by its institutions and by the dogmas of a forgotten language. And should Christianity perchance survive the dishabilitation of its institutions, the least that still must be said is that Western culture is not "ready" for it, as the pre-Christian world once was ready for the Christian gospel.