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ÊTRE CHRÉTIEN
AU
QUÉBEC

A publication of the theological community of the Faculty of Religious Studies of McGill University, its affiliated Colleges (Anglican, Presbyterian and United Church) and the Montreal Institute for Ministry.

EDITORIAL

CANADA: SEPARATE STAIRWAYS

In his fine study, *The French Canadian Outlook**, Mason Wade reminds us of a metaphor of francophone/anglophone alienation which predates Professor MacLennan's "two solitudes" and may be more apt as well. Pierre Chauveau, the first premier of Québec after Confederation, "likened Canada to the famous staircase of the Château de Chambord, so constructed that two persons could ascend it without meeting and without seeing each other except at intervals." As Chauveau himself puts it,

'English and French, we climb by a double flight of stairs towards the destinies reserved for us on this continent, without knowing each other, without meeting each other, and without even seeing each other except on the landing of politics. In social and literary terms, we are far more foreign to each other than the English and French of Europe.'

This statement was made more than a hundred years ago. The extent to which it is still brilliantly applicable to our situation is deeply disturbing to all who care about Canada. This is not to deny the noble and often painful efforts that have been made, both by government and by private persons, to overcome our mutual "foreign-ness". French Canadians have for long *had* to understand us anglophones--sufficiently, at least, to secure a place for themselves in what has been essentially *our* castle. Without trespassing on our part of the staircase, they nevertheless kept a close watch on us through whatever windows were accessible on the curious double staircase we tread. And in these latter days, some of us have tried (for honourable or other reasons) to catch a glimpse of them. These attempts have not been without merit.

Yet I cannot escape the impression that the situation Chauveau's metaphor describes still pertains. An atmosphere of resignation, moreover, surrounds us which Chauveau's age might not have understood. Not the resignation which comes out of great despair, but a pragmatic fatalism which functions to bolster the tacit decision not to change. Language is the special symbol of this resignation--especially in the anglophone community.

The majority of anglophones having never had to learn another language, we assume that "it can't be done"--not by adults anyway. Since this "can't" always buttressed with a hidden or open "won't!", it is extremely effective. The impossibility of learning the French language thus becomes a convenient symbol of our determination to maintain the *status quo*. The "separate staircases" will remain--until the French, from their side, learn our language *and* our rules of ascent and descent!

The language symbol is reinforced by some anglophones who *have* learned "their" language, and who are heard frequently to say that in spite of these brave

* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1946), pp. 1 - 2

efforts "they" won't even speak to them in French, or can't be found to converse with, or can't be understood because of their strange accent and nuances, etc.

But language is only one aspect of the partition that separates our two stairways. To be sure, it is an important aspect; but it is not nearly so important as we, in our need to sustain the *status quo*, make it. The fact is, neither knowing nor not knowing French guarantees anything by way of communication and real dialogue. Some of the most entrenched WASPS I know are perfectly bilingual! It is interesting that Chauveau's statement makes no *direct* reference to language. What keeps us farther apart from each other than are the French and English of Europe, he says, is our failure to be open to the hopes and longings, the fears, ambitions, and values of the other--"in social and literary terms".

There are other ways for English-speaking people to achieve the beginning of that openness than by learning the language of the French Canadian people, not that I want to discourage the latter! An anglophone without a word of French (except maybe 'Merci!') can discover a great deal about the people on the other staircase. What is needed more than a sophisticated knowledge of their language is, first, a little humility. That may be hard for us to acquire, since we've assumed all along that it is our castle; but it can, in a measure, be learnt.

Secondly, I would recommend the reading of French Canadian imaginative literature (novels, plays, poetry), much of which has been translated into English. I found the word "literary" in Chauveau's statement very suggestive in this respect. Many of the most astute student of human culture advise that the best place to turn for a deeper awareness of any people is to their Art. Marshall McLuhan called the arts the DEW-Line (Distant Early Warning) of a society. Another image compares Art with the white rabbits that were taken down in submarines in earlier days: when the oxygen began to give out, the rabbits would faint, thus warning the human beings to get to the surface. In short, the artists are the most sensitive to life and what threatens it. Sir Kenneth Clark put it nicely when he remarked in the opening chapter of his famous "Civilisation" series: "If I had to say which was telling the truth about society, a speech by a Minister of Housing or the actual buildings put up in his time, I should believe the buildings."*

The Art of French Canada is rich and great. To speak only of imaginative literature, it is an astonishing source of the knowledge of French Canada at the level of profound cultural aspirations. For a long time, the writers of Quebec and other French communities in Canada have been telling us about themselves--who they are, what they hope for, what they despise, what they admire, etc. From *Maria Chapdelaine* to Langevin's *Dust Over The City* and

* (*Civilisation: A Personal View*, London, British Broadcasting Corp. and John Murray, 1969) p. 1

more recent works, it has all been there for us to read and experience, if we were willing. It isn't necessary to wait until your French is sophisticated enough to discern the deeper issues of this culture.

It may even be that the discoveries to be made through that kind of exposure to French Canada are highly significant for us as Christians, not only as Canadians. To be concrete: according to Ronald Sutherland, there has been a typical Canadian protagonist, to be found in both English and French Canadian literature. What is typical about this Canadian "hero" is that, unlike the protagonists of most other modern peoples, he is prone to put the blame on himself:

French protagonists, German, British, Americans like Captain Ahab or Ken Kesey's McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* will confidently defy the system, whatever the consequences. It does not occur to them that they may be wrong, or if it does they do not worry about it. The typical Canadian character, by contrast, engages in a struggle with what he supposes to be his own deficiencies. He has a Calvinist-Jansenist sense of his own insignificance.*

That in itself is a suggestive assessment of the Canadian mentality. What Sutherland goes on to propose in a more recent study is even more provocative for all who try to think theologically about the Canadian reality. Sutherland believes that the Calvinist-Jansenist "hero" has been supplanted by a new Canadian type. He says that both French and English Canadian literature of the 1970s "present heroes for whom the traditional values mean nothing at all. They are not sorry about their inability to adapt, nor are they intent upon making an accommodation. These characters begin at zero; they have no values, and they are searching for some kind of *raison d'être*."*

If Sutherland's analysis is correct, it could mean that for all their "foreignness" one to another, the two nations treading their separate stairways may be labouring under a common image of man. A theological community sufficiently sensitive to that image, and sufficiently alive to the vision of human nature and destiny in its own better traditions, could make a difference in such a situation.

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* In the "Introduction" to Andre Langevin, *Dust Over The City* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., New Canadian Library No. 113, 1974), p.iii. Sutherland develops this thesis more fully in his *Second Image* (Toronto, General Publishing, 1971).

* *The New Hero: Essays in Comparative Quebec/Canadian Literature* (Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1977), p. 7

SELECTED READINGS: BIBLIOGRAPHY

LITERATURE OF FRENCH CANADA IN ENGLISH

Hubert Aquin, *Prochain Episode*

G rard Bessette, *Not For Every Eye*

--- *Incubation*

Marie-Claire Blais, *Mad Shadows*

--- *A Season In The Life of Emmanuel*

--- *The Manuscripts of Pauline Archange*

--- *The Wolf*

Roch Carrier, *La Guerre, Yes Sir!*

--- *Floralie, Where Are You?*

--- *Is It The Sun, Philibert?*

Robert Elie, *Farewell, My Dreams*

Jacques Ferron, *Dr. Cotnoir*

Gratien Gelinas, *Bousille and the Just*

--- *Yesterday The Children Were Dancing*

Jacques Godbout, *Knife on the Table*

Germaine Gu vremont, *The Outlander*

Anne H bert, *The Torrent*

--- *The Silent Rooms*

--- *Kamouraska*

Louis H mon, *Maria Chapdelaine*

Claude Jasmin, *Ethel and the Terrorist*

Roger Lemelin, *The Town Below*

--- *The Plouffe Family*

--- *In Quest of Splendour*

Andr  Langevin, *Dust Over The City*

Claire Martin, *In An Iron Glove*

Ringuet (Philippe Panneton), *Thirty Acres*

Gabrielle Roy, *The Tin Flute*

--- *Where Nests the Water Hen*

--- *Streets of Riches*

--- *The Road Past Altamont*

--- *The Hidden Mountain*

F lix Antoine Savard, *Boss of the River*

Yves Th riault, *Agasuk*

--- *Ashini*

- Note: (a) An interesting new commentary on most of this literature can be a useful aid in its interpretation; it gives as well some background material on most of the authors listed here: Jeanette Urbas, *From Thirty Acres to Modern Times: The Story of French Canadian Literature* (Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1976)
- (b) For a more complete list of French-Canadian literature in English translation see Ronald Sutherland, *The New Hero* (Op. cit.), pp. 110 ff.

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WORKSHOP - "ETRE CHRETIEN AU QUEBEC"

The title of a workshop. But far more: a call to live toward a fuller realization of what it means to be human. For four and a half days and four evenings we struggled to discover how we anglophones in a French province might live our Christian convictions. Along the way, I, for one, became acutely aware of how my convictions themselves have been shaped by my culture and historical situation. (But more of that later.)

A DIVERSE CROSS-SECTION

There were about 60 of us in the daytime sessions. Anglophone clergy from various parts of Québec (including a few in Montreal). Final (In-Ministry) year students. And each evening 30 to 50 lay people from city congregations. But most importantly there were francophones - Protestant and Catholic. Professors from University of Montreal and University of Quebec joined those from McGill and the Institute with Phyllis Smyth of Dominion-Douglas United Church in Montreal as chairperson. The pastors of French Protestant churches in Montreal and Quebec City and the Catholic bishop of St. Jean also played leading roles.

The settings for this mid March workshop were The Presbyterian College from 9:30 to 4:00 p.m. and Le Grand Séminaire in the evenings.

Most of the language of communication was English but when some of the francophone participants really wanted to make a point, it had to be in French! It took us several days to appreciate what it cost these participants to work in English. No, not the cost of using a second language, but the pain of speaking someone else's tongue in their own country.

THE AIM AND FOCUS

The aim of the workshop was to discover a responsible Christian stance for the churches in the midst of the emerging "New Quebec". This was to be pursued by focusing on historical, economic, political and social developments in the province. This, in turn, included exploring again our biblical and theological perspectives.

BIBLICAL STUDIES

Pierre Goldberger (pasteur, Eglise S. Jean, Montreal) Donna Runnalls (Faculty of Religious Studies) and André Myre (University of Montreal) raised the hermeneutical questions and prepared biblical studies on Old and New Testament passages. It became very evident that both our selection of texts and their interpretation have been largely influenced by our cultural/historical position. Pierre talked about the prophets having a "*Déjà là*," a given tradition about covenant. But Isaiah and Jeremiah, living in two very

different historical moments, declared opposite messages. Isaiah assured the people that Jerusalem would not fall before the might of the Assyrian army because God would keep his covenant with David. Jeremiah, however, predicted the imminent fall of Jerusalem two centuries later when the Babylonians were the aggressors. Jeremiah claimed that the people of Judah had broken the covenant and placed a false security in the royal Zion theology. We were called to discern "The web of our solidarity out of which we interpret". What does the text do to us? Affirm? Challenge?

So we tried to identify the "oppressed" in the credo of Deuteronomy 26 or the "enemy" in Sermon on the Mount. It became clear that we can easily use "our texts" as ways of supporting our pre-conceptions rather than allowing the biblical tradition to provide a "way of thinking or acting" by which we judge our own attitudes and behaviours. André observed that Jesus' response to the disciples request in Mark 10 was "yes" for suffering. "No" for power; and Donna, connecting Isaiah 58 with the Day of Atonement, clarified the inseparable link between cultic action (e.g. fasting) and social action (e.g. concern for one's neighbour - especially the poor).

These few comments, however, hardly begin to indicate the significant shifts in my own approach to interpretation of biblical tradition. I already believed that interpretation must be (and inevitably is) contextual. But, in the context of this workshop, with significant input from leading francophone thinkers, the implications of my beliefs were surprising. Let me try to explain by first describing more of the format of the week.

GENERAL FORMAT

Day one began with the hermeneutical presuppositions and then moved to a study of either a liberation passage (Deuteronomy 26) or reconciliation passage (Matthew 5:43-48). The afternoon and evening sessions centered on "*la question nationale*" - how do we speak of nationalism and why? Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings took up the themes of the responsible exercise of power *vis-à-vis* economics (Monseigneur Bernard Hubert, Bishop of St. Jean), politics (Pierre Goldberger) and social classes (Louis Rousseau, Université of Québec à Montréal).

ECONOMICS AND RESPONSIBILITY

Monseigneur Hubert described the significant involvement of the Church in the Tricofil Knitting Mill in St. Jerome and the difficulties such a self-managed operation has in surviving in our North American capitalist system of economics. He spoke boldly about the right of people to work and to work in their own community. He also emphasized the Church's responsibility to identify with the poor and the oppressed. He questioned the measuring of human values purely, or even mainly, in terms of economic growth. He criticized capitalism for setting economic growth as its only goal. He pointed to countries like the Philippines where the Church is not afraid to conflict and confrontation. He

spoke of the test of Christian credibility: a people willing to witness to their faith in the daily life of the world. Finally, he claimed that it would be the *poor* who will bring liberation - if they can be organized and supported.

It was after this presentation and a lengthy discussion of economics that the small work group that I was in turned to the parable of the vineyard in Mark 12. Why, in this story did the tenants reject the owner's messengers who came to collect the rent? How do we view economic issues in the light of this passage? These and other questions gradually made me realize that I haven't wanted to be one of God's *tenants*. I have wanted to be an *owner*. Anglophones and francophones *both* want to claim this land as their *own*. But as a Christian I am called to be a tenant and that, inevitably, changes my attitude toward land-possession rights.

POLITICAL REALITIES AND A NEW VISION

This whole issue of economic values took on a further dimension on Wednesday afternoon. We had been discussing how we would vote, if there were an election today, and for what reason: my first reaction was the sad admission that I would want to vote for economic stability - my economic stability! Of course, this ran counter to my religious convictions which are urging a vote for the party that would work hardest for a more human community, especially a more human community for the oppressed.

But there was another major issue that began to emerge for me by Wednesday afternoon. Pierre had offered an analysis earlier in the day of a correlation between the Church's style and the kind of society in which it exists. In a conservative society like the Duplessis era, the church emphasized: individual, benevolent help; maintenance of a society as it is; private spiritual life; the offer of faith as a solution to life's problems; the harmony of biblical texts; and the guarding of unity. In a moderate social democracy (including the Lesage, Bourassa and Levesque government styles) the Church tends to stress: small groups; involvement in community organizations; reformist demands for better conditions; interpersonal sharing; the recognition that faith involves engagement; the celebration of daily life; the choice of biblical texts that call for a change of attitude; and the search for reconciliation.

But then Pierre developed a paradigm for an Advanced Democracy (still a future hope). On this model the Church would be far more radically involved in society with a more global outlook. It would strive to get to the root problems of corporate ills and militate for change (e.g. attacking the whole profit system). It would work not just for reform but for transformation. It would not just speak for some to hear, or share for some to deal with attitudes and feelings, but act to change class positions where there has been injustice. Biblical Tradition would be interpreted with risk in the dialectical interplay between the context in which the text was written and the present context of the reader.

Now all of this seemed too much, too radical, too far to the left! Wasn't the teaching and style of Jesus in the middle? Frankly, I had to admit that Jesus followed the prophets and was every bit as revolutionary in his unrelenting quest for justice and righteousness as this paradigm suggested.

How easily I have been tempted to modify the plain thrust of the text in order to placate the "good citizens" who make up my congregation? My preaching is neither very disturbing nor truly liberating in so far as I have failed to articulate the obvious demands of the Word of God. Does this call for a whole new approach to preaching today?

TWO OPPOSING APPROACHES TO CHANGE

Louis helped me clarify this further when, on Thursday morning he presented two approaches to change. On the one hand, there was the view that rapid, radical change is a necessity even if this upsets the status quo. The other view is that change is alright as long as equilibrium is maintained and whatever changes occur need to be balanced to maintain equilibrium. One of the main differences between the francophone and anglophone communities in Quebec relate to these two approaches to change. Anglophones want to maintain equilibrium. Many francophones also want to maintain equilibrium, but those francophones who most feel oppressed (because of language, culture, massive unemployment, job discrimination) have been demanding for more change at a more rapid pace.

The *human* response to all this, is to say: "Look at all the gains made since 1960 and especially in the last five years. Isn't this enough?" Then we turned in our small group to the passage in Matthew 25 about the Last Judgment. There the image of a separation of sheep from goats and a scenario of service to the needy became a call for the Church in the present to be a servant community and not just an institution intent on its own survival. This was not an institutional equilibrium but for giving one's self away in concern for the humanity of others. There is no room for anglophone congregations intent primarily on trying to survive. The Gospel seems to be saying that the *nature of the human condition* should determine both the extent and rapidity of change. Nor is there the possibility of the Church confining itself to "spiritual matters" and being neutral on economic, political and social issues. Already on Monday, Guy Bourgeault (University of Montreal) had pointed this out in a simple, but disturbing analogy. When two people are in a fight and one is much bigger and stronger than the other, an onlooker cannot say "I am neutral". To do nothing would be to take the side of the stronger. Our worship, preaching, institutional policies indicate a position. We either encourage change (or the acceptance of change) or support resistance to change (and, hence, equilibrium).

THE CBC'S "CANADA'S NEW QUEBEC"

Another avenue toward developing a perspective on change was history. This was ably presented in the CBC's outstanding film "Canada's New Quebec" (now available through The National Film Board). As the historical eras unfolded, as francophones spoke about jobs and rate of change, and as singers expressed with deep fervor the feelings of their people, one could not help but be moved to view the current developments in our province in a new way. Here was a glimpse at least of "how it looks" from the other side.

CHANGE AND THE FUTURE

But the issue of dealing with change and the future was the specific subject of the final two evening sessions led by Guy Bourgeault and Donna Runnalls (Wednesday) and Monseigneur Hubert (Thursday). Guy clarified that there was no "theology of change" without changing theology. Theology is conditioned by social situations (e.g. natural law and a rural society, reformed theology and industrial society). What is needed is a new theology of liberation which is not concocted by theologians alone, but developed out of the believing community involved in the problems and issues of daily living. Donna spoke of the necessity of identifying God's promise for the future. That promise is centered on a fully human society. Changes in this province have to be examined in terms of promise understood in truly human terms. Taking promise as our starting point, we can and should live with hope - the hope that God gives meaning to our future through changing circumstances. Promise and hope may not change external reality but they can radically affect how we make sense of, and respond to, change. This, it seems to me, could be a major difference between those who do not. Christian churches can share this kind of perspective with Quebecers today and make a significant contribution to people's ability to adjust creatively to the social upheaval of these days.

It seemed to me that the Bishop of St. Jean was in line with all this when he called on the Church today to announce the Kingdom of God by following Jesus in his confrontation of all forms of oppression. He called for more involvement at the grass roots for social change. This will, he said, require our going out in real faith and accepting the responsible stewardship of our resources. He emphasized that Christian communities need to encounter the Word of God, celebrate the faith and be involved in the development of daily life based on solidarity. Finally, he likened the present to a time when the flood waters are rushing forward. We can either build a dam against the rush or go surfing! His conviction was that the call of Jesus is to surf.

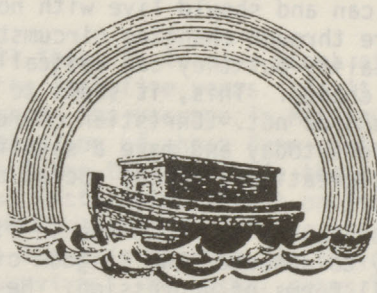
FOLLOW THROUGH AND EUCHARIST

The week closed on the Friday morning with the participants determined to follow through and, therefore, requesting from John Lee (Dialogue Centre, Montreal) and from The Montreal Institute for Ministry support and structures

of accountability (e.g. perhaps a gathering every few months and other such events in various regions of the province - certainly another workshop next year). Then we celebrated the eucharist together. After receiving the bread and wine, André Myre led us in a prayer for the future which ended with the words

"(Lord) recognize in us the traits of that man,
severe and gentle, driven and patient,
who was both scandal and scandalized,
whom you would love and find again in us-
even Jesus Christ your Son."

Arthur Van Seters
The Montreal Institute for Ministry



The work done on the Friday morning with the participants departed to follow through and therefore requesting from John Lee (Toronto Centre, Montreal) and from the Montreal Institute for Ministry support and structures

HERMENEUTICS AND IDEOLOGY

Often we hear someone assert: "The Bible says ..." But, really, what *does* the Bible say?

It seems to depend on who is reading it.

I turn on the television on a Sunday morning. The Bible, as mediated through a succession of television evangelists, speaks of a very conservative God. The Bible, it would seem, is in favor of punishment (both capital and corporal), patriotism (of a uniquely American variety), respect for authority (at least on this side of the Iron Curtain), and the subordination of women. One gets the distinct impression that God, if he had a vote, would cast it for Ronald Reagan.

I pick up a copy of my denominational magazine and turn to the devotional section. The Bible suddenly becomes a rather liberal book. It speaks of a benign God who loves all his children, the divine Father before whom all are equal as brothers and sisters. Rich or poor, oppressor or oppressed - all are equal in the sight of God.

I read some "liberation theology". The Bible is speaking with a different accent. The Bible here speaks of a God who identifies himself with the underdog. All people are not equal before God. God is partial to the poor.

So what does the Bible *really* say?

It is quite obvious that each of the readings is ideological. The quasi-fascism of the American right wing can be discerned in the biblical interpretation of the television evangelist. The devotional section of the denominational magazine is saturated with the spirit of the main line liberalism of the North American continent. The theology of liberation is quite open in its political preference for the left-wing.

The fact that the Bible is read ideologically confronts me - as it must confront any preacher or theologian - with a whole series of problems: There is no such thing as an interpretation of the Bible which is free of the ideology of the interpreter. But don't I - as a preacher and as a theologian - have a responsibility *not* to impose my prejudices on the text? How, then, do I cope with my prejudices in the reading of a text? Having read the text, how do I share what I have found with fellow Christians who may not share my prejudices? Is there, perhaps, an ideology of the Bible which might mediate between the conflicting ideologies of the contemporary world? How can the Bible be heard above the clamor of our prejudices?

The problem of the ideological captivity of the Bible is an updated version of some of the problems raised by the Reformation. It is the question of private interpretation in a new guise. Tridentine Catholicism solved the

problem of conflicting interpretations by defining one interpretation, that of the *magisterium*, as normative. Protestantism, by and large, based its confidence in the unity of the Spirit's witness to the Word which was clothed in the words.

But that was before the nineteenth century. The masters of suspicion - Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud - have made the old answers, for all their value, something less than adequate. We are now all too sensitive to how easy it was - and is - to bend the old answers, together with the Bible, to our ideological and institutional self-interest.

If we face the old question of private interpretation in the new guise of the ideological captivity of the Bible, we must ask whether we can speak of the "liberation" of the Bible. This is a question I have attempted to discuss in a recent book entitled *The Liberation of the Bible* (Student Christian Movement of Canada, 1977). Let me try to summarize my argument under two headings: (1) some observations of the problem; (2) some principles of responsible hermeneutics.

IDEOLOGICAL READINGS OF THE BIBLE: SOME OBSERVATIONS

1. *There can be no "objective" interpretation of the Bible.*

Theology has tended to speak as if there were an objective message of the Bible which could be elaborated if only interpreters could suppress their subjective approach. This expectation of biblical interpretation is not surprising, given our intellectual history. The architects of modern epistemology, from Descartes to Kant, posited a knowable objective world. The proper method, if it could be found, would lead to an objective knowledge which was not corrupted by the subjectivity of the knower.

This naive faith in the attainability of objective knowledge has been undermined by the experience of the last two centuries. Kierkegaard argued powerfully that objectivity as an ideal was not all neutral. Objectivity, for Kierkegaard, typified a whole way of life which was fundamentally inconsistent with Christian faith. Marx unmasked the ideological dimension of ideals like objectivity. He showed how ideas, apparently neutral and objective, worked to further certain class interests over against others. Freud undercut the confidence that a purely "rational" kind of knowledge was possible. Self-interest, represented by the *id*, and historical experience, as represented by the *super-ego*, could not ultimately be divorced from the rational functioning of the *ego*.

The objective ideal was important in the development of scholarly method, in the humanities as well as in the sciences. To question the objective ideal is not to plead for a kind of irrationalism that would undo what scholarship has accomplished under its inspiration. Rather it is to point to the fact that we can no longer be confident about the finality and neutrality of the

results to which our methods lead us. Any expression of knowledge represents not only the state of the external world, but also a reflection of the point of view of the knower. A point of view, or prejudice, appears now not as a liability, but as a pre-condition of having any knowledge at all.

There can be no objective interpretation of the Bible. What we hear from the text will always reflect where we are when we do our listening.

2. *There is no "ideology of the Bible".*

This should be self-evident. Yet much theological argument and much preaching proceeds as if contemporary ideological conflict could be resolved by enlisting the Bible on one side or another.

Ideological conflict takes place within the context of a given social and cultural situation. In other words, our ideological options are those of twentieth-century North American society. They are not the options of the Roman Empire of the first century nor are they the options of Israel in the seventh century B.C.

To see the Bible as of one ideological piece is to deny its historicity. If a given text is understood within the context of its own ideological options, it will become clear that (a) those options are not constant from 1000 B.C. through 100 A.D. and (b) different ideological interests are represented in the text. (This latter point can be clearly seen in a comparison of the "Saul source" with the "Samuel source" in 1 Samuel 8-11.)

This is not to say that the Bible is ideologically neutral. Amos, for example, is passionately committed. The conflict between Amos and Amaziah is both spiritual and ideological. Ezra and Nehemiah are committed too. The text does take sides ideologically. Yet to attempt to conflate the ideological commitment of Amos with that of Ezra and Nehemiah is not only an historical mistake. It is an impossible task.

SOME PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBLE INTERPRETATION

We seem to be caught in an impossible dilemma. On the one side lurks an intolerable subjectivism which makes the Bible say whatever we choose for it to say. On the other side we find an ideal for objectivity which is impossible to practice and ultimately leads us to subjectivism and infidelity of a different kind. Given the fact that our interpretation of the Bible will inevitably reflect our prejudice, how do we go about the hermeneutical task with a measure of responsibility to the integrity of the text?

1. *The historical-critical approach to the Bible must be affirmed.*

There are, as we all know, problems with the historical-critical approach. Many of these problems arise from the fact that too much is expected from the

method. There is a kind of historicism which leaves the word of Scripture so completely in the past that the Bible becomes an archaic and irrelevant document. A theological interpretation of the Bible cannot be content with leaving the text in the past.

Granting these difficulties, the fact remains that the integrity of the text must be discovered, in the first instance, in its own historical, cultural and literary context. The historical-critical method is fundamentally a search for the literal meaning of a text, its meaning in its own context. Any responsible reading of the Bible must begin by allowing the text to speak in its own context.

The historical critical approach is our attempt to enter into the world of the text. That is also its limitation. It does not bring the text into the world of the interpreter.

2. The strangeness of the world of the text must be acknowledged.

The process of the ideological captivity of the Bible is aided if we can declare, quite arbitrarily, that the world of the text is identical in all relevant respects to our own world or, conversely, that the worlds are altogether different. Thus the male chauvinist, arguing from the New Testament for the continuing subordination of women, treats as quite irrelevant the obvious differences between the social context of the first-century Church and the social context of the twentieth century. The same interpreter, arguing against a charismatic interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12-14, may declare that the situation of the first-century Church was unique and that speaking in tongues was a genuine spiritual gift only in the first century.

What is objectionable here is the arbitrariness of the procedure. The world of the Bible is a different, even strange world when compared to the world in which we are at home. Between our world and the world of the text there are similarities and differences. Unless the interpreter is willing to struggle with the difficulties posed by the strangeness of the world of the Bible, the text can do nothing more than confirm the prejudices of the interpreter.

3. The application of a text is the responsibility of the interpreter.

It is tempting to justify our theological *praxis* by hiding behind the Bible. "Homosexuals should not have equal rights because the Bible says ..." "Murderers should be put to death because the Bible says ..." "Abortion should not be legalized because the Bible says ..." "Liberation movements should be supported because the Bible says ..." The responsibility for our practice as Christians is somehow avoided under the cover of biblical authority.

The fact is that the Bible does not, indeed cannot, determine how Christian faith is to be practiced in the twentieth century. To be sure, our practice needs to be faithful to our hearing, but that does not remove the responsibility of the interpreter. The Bible can inform us as we make our choices. The Bible does not make our choices for us.

This conclusion, that the responsibility for the application of a text is that of the interpreter, may seem to lead us right back to the problem of private judgment. If the Bible does not impose its own application, it would seem that the interpreter is free to tailor the interpretation to suit his or her own ideological interest.

Two observations are relevant to this objection. It is true that an interpreter can keep his or her ideological prejudices intact while granting the historical integrity of the text. This can be done, however, only by refusing to budge when the clear thrust of a text moves contrary to the prejudices of the interpreter.

To take an example: The story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21) might be studied in relation to the controversy surrounding the development and exploitation of resources in Northern Canada. The text does not, of course, direct us on the issue with which we are dealing. It doesn't resolve the question of Northern development. Nevertheless, the interpreter is free to apply this text in the favor of pipeline companies only by moving against the attitude concerning land ownership and expropriation which is clearly evident in the text. The text should at least give capitalistic Christians pause in their rush to alienate native peoples from their traditional hunting grounds.

The second observation is more basic. We have a "problem" of private interpretation because we see hermeneutics as a primarily individualistic activity. Under the impact of the dominant liberal ideology of Western society, the insistence of the reformers on the freedom of conscience of the interpreter has led to a view of hermeneutics in which an interpretation is a matter of opinion of the individual and in which one opinion is as good as another.

Against this we need to insist that interpretation is not a matter of "opinion" but of *praxis*. Interpretation does not end when we draw the "moral" of a text, but when we act upon it. Secondly the *praxis* which is the end of interpretation is not individual but corporate. In the last analysis, it is the involvement of the interpreter in a community of interpretation, in a community of *praxis*, which makes interpretation a meaningful activity. A hermeneutic whose only fruit is "opinions" may be an enjoyable activity. It is not a meaningful one. Such a hermeneutic has no theological significance.

There is, in conclusion, no method for the ideological liberation of the Bible. Any authentic interpretation of Scripture is, as we have always known, the work of the Holy Spirit. In concrete terms this means that hermeneutical liberation is something which happens when the community of interpretation,

the Church, is genuinely and self-consciously involved in the real world of ideological conflict. From a position of involvement, and being attentive to the word of Scripture, liberated and liberative interpretation becomes a quality of the Church's life.

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Dr. Lochhead is under appointment to the Vancouver School of Theology. The above article is reprinted, by permission, from The Ecumenist (Vol.15, No.6/ Sept.-Oct., 1977) - ed.



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NOTES FROM THE DEAN

It's Carnival season as I write this ... a modest ice palace on the lower campus, resembling a typical Montreal structure - out of funds before the roof is on. Students today are supposed to be *apathetic*, but the Carnival hi-jinks sound quite familiar, and reassuring (where there's Carnival there's Life). I suppose the apathy is a contrast to the *activism* of a decade ago. But whether it was activist or merely active remains unclear. If students are again concerned with studies and careers, such pragmatism is nicely balanced by those who "take a year off" for travel. If Religious Studies doesn't inspire pilgrims, who will?

One significant development relating to our students is their recent involvement in the annual Canadian Theological Students' Conference. Owing much to the enthusiasm and work of student president *Roger Robillard*, the 1977 conference was hosted by our own society, as will the 1979. This year a delegation of eight attended the conference in Winnipeg.

Elsewhere in these pages you will find information about the Birks Lectures in October, ushering in our Thirtieth Anniversary year. We will be contacting Alumni regarding ways of celebrating this event. Although the time is difficult in Quebec for anglophone institutions, our own Faculty-Colleges-MIM cluster is in good heart, in fact trying to announce the good news in and through the political events of the moment. In June we will mount a seminar at the Association of Theological Schools biennial on 'Theological Education in Quebec Today', a project headed by *Doug Hall* and *Art Van Seters*. Meanwhile, the student-faculty Forum has speakers (including *Jacques Grand'Maison* and *Guy Deschamps*) and discussions on 'Context Québec'.

Visiting Lecturers are always newsworthy ... one of McGill's Cummings Lecturers this term is a famous theologian who will spend a week within our Faculty. *Thomas F. Torrance*, Professor of Christian Dogmatics, U. of Edinburgh, is internationally known as author and lecturer. His earlier writings on historical theology (the Fathers, Calvin, Barth among others) have given way to a trilogy on the relationship between theology and modern science (*Theological Science; Space, Time and Incarnation; Space, Time and Resurrection*). His most recent work is *Theology in Reconciliation*, reflecting his commitment to historical and ecumenical theological reasoning. During the week of March 13 he will address various seminars and groups on such topics as Creation and Science, Natural Theology, The Nature and Scope of Theology, Dogmatics and Axiomatics, Myth and Truth.

Paul Minear, noted N.T. and ecumenical theologian, is the Anderson Lecturer at Presbyterian College in February, on "Paul as Liberation Theologian", with lectures on Philemon, Galatians and II Corinthians.

Another Edinburgh theologian, *John McIntyre*, will visit us briefly while he is at Princeton. In early April he will share my seminar in Philosophy of Religion and be available for discussion. He too is a well-known lecturer and author, with works on Christology, Barth and philosophical theology.

This Spring I hope to meet with Alumni Executive members to plan an Alumni Newsletter. It would help to hear from you all as to your present work and interests. Also suggestions for the format of the "Birks Event", the content of ARC future issues, or other matters.

J.C. McLelland



1978 SUMMER SESSION COURSES

The following courses will be offered by the Faculty of Religious Studies in the 1978 Summer Session. All are open to undergraduate students. Classes are held daily from Monday to Friday on the dates and times specified.

Elementary New Testament Greek

Course 260-280L (6 credits) Instructor: G. Harper
May 8 - June 20; 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. Room 106 Birks Building

Intermediate Arabic

Course 397-200L (Undergraduate) Course 397-622L (Graduate)
(6 credits) Instructor: D.P. Little
May 8 - June 20; 3:00 - 6:00 p.m. Room 210 Leacock Building

Topics in Christian Ethics: History of Ethics

Course 260-373L (3 credits) Instructor: D. Lage
May 8 - May 29; 10:30 - 12:30 p.m. Room 111 Birks Building

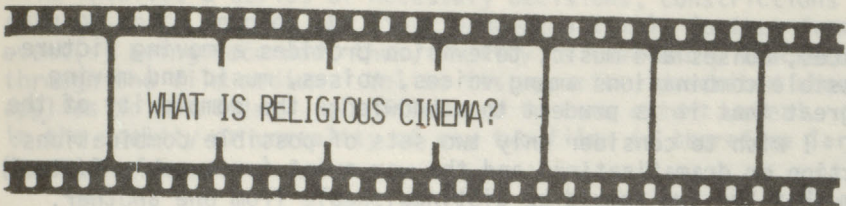
Topics in Religion and the Arts: Religious Cinema

Course 260-347L (3 credits) Instructor: M. Benfey
May 31 - June 20; 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. Room 111 Birks Building

Topics in Philosophy of Religion: Mythologies and Stories

Course 260-343C (3 credits) Instructor: M. Joy
July 4 - July 29; 10:30 - 12:30 p.m. Room 111 Birks Building

Summer Session Catalogue and application forms will be available at a later date through the Summer Session office, Room 105, F. Cyril James Building, 845 Sherbrooke Street, West, Montreal, Quebec H3A 2T5. Please register in good time.



WHAT IS RELIGIOUS CINEMA?

Film, radio and television are unquestionably the dominant media within the developed countries today. Indeed, radio and television have penetrated almost every home and have established themselves as wardens of our leisure hours. What, then, is the effect of their presence? Are they merely sources of information and entertainment? Or do they influence our lives in a deeper and more thorough manner?

No doubt we are all aware of the potential of these media as propaganda tools. This applies not only behind the Iron Curtain, but also in the West. Eastern propaganda is often too blatant to attract serious attention. We in the West have refined the art of propaganda to the point where it is commonly accepted as an attractive statement of a necessary position: the so-called "American Way of Life." Propaganda is most effective when it is not recognised as propaganda.

Yet it is not in their role as propaganda tools that I wish to examine the film, radio and television media. Propaganda remains largely a function of *content*. I wish to suggest that the "deeper and more thorough manner" in which these media influence our lives is a function of their very *form*. As the title of this essay suggests, my aim is to examine the film medium. I shall include a brief discussion of radio and television as examples of "related" media, though each must be recognised as a separate entity with particular problems.

First, radio and television. Radio offers us voices, noises and music; we shall ignore the latter two. What is the primary characteristic of the voices which emanate from radios? They are disembodied. Though their original source is human, their immediate source is the speaker of the radio; and that speaker is an artifact. So we are presented with the paradox of human voices emerging from some inanimate source. This remains a paradox only as long as we remain ignorant of the ultimate source of the voices; once we become aware of their source, the paradox is transformed into a novelty (which soon wears off). Already, however, we are entitled to make an important observation: the phenomenon of voices emanating from radios teaches the educated listener (the one who has resolved the paradox) that reality is not always what it seems to be: people in a room are not necessarily an indication of the presence of human beings. (This observation may sound trite--may even be considered a cliché; yet it is nonetheless true; it was untrue one hundred years ago.) Thus, radio represents a distortion of reality--or, at least, a distortion of the reality of the nineteenth and earlier centuries. Let us call this distortion the "Disembodied Voice."

In addition to voices, noises and music, television provides a moving picture. The variety of possible combinations among voices, noises, music and moving picture(s) is so great that it is prudent to acknowledge the complexity of the television medium. I wish to consider only two sets of possible combinations: the war story (fiction or dramatisation) and the war event (presumably factual). Now, it would seem that the two should be distinguishable from one another. Given the proper context (movie hour versus news hour, etc.), they usually are. Small segments of each, however, are not; and both are inevitably divided into such small segments via the commercial "break." Thus, one may imagine the following sequence: commercial ... war scene ... commercial. The commercials lend an aura of unreality to the war scene, whether or not the latter is factual. In effect, they "package" reality. And this package has an additional wrapping: the on/off switch: turn the television off, and the war disappears! On, and it reappears! On, off, on, off: war, peace, war, peace (assuming that all is quiet on the home front!): Thus, television, too, distorts reality. Let us call this distortion "Packaged Reality."

With these comments on radio and television in mind, let us turn to cinema. (I shall use the terms "cinema" and "film medium" interchangeably, though not all film theorists do so.) Our focus will be the relation between film and reality. We shall examine this relation first in general, then with respect to "religious" cinema.

Film theorists may be divided tentatively into two groups: those who hold that film *re*-presents reality and those who hold that it does not. This simplifies a complex problem, but will suffice within the context of this essay. Now, those who say that film *re*-presents reality would not say that this principle applies to all films equally, but is a general characteristic: film is uniquely endowed with the *potential* for recording events accurately and projecting them onto a screen with a minimum of distortion. Films which do not live up to this potential (for example: abstract films) are therefore doubly dangerous: they distort reality and reduce the viewer's confidence in the film medium.

Lest we imagine that only "anti-establishment" films are considered dangerous --since such films are very often abstract (perhaps "different" or "unorthodox" are better terms)--it should be noted that "establishment" films can be equally so; witness the propaganda films of the Nazi movement in Germany after Hitler's rise to power, or the military films of almost any country today. In fact, "dangerous" is itself a loaded term when used with respect to a medium of expression: it implies a prior decision on the part of a dominant body concerning the nature of reality. Thus, "dangerous" refers often, not to an attempt to subvert reality, but to an implicit threat to the power of the dominant body. Films produced by the "establishment" may therefore be considered dangerous when, as in the case of Nazi propaganda and modern military films, they threaten the "world order."

The second group of film theorists holds that film does not *re*-present reality. Their position may be more clearly defined as follows: the production of any

film involves a series of necessary decisions, constrictions and expansions, each of which removes the final product a little further from the original event(s) being recorded; thus, reality is inevitably bracketed and distorted through the film medium. Unlike its opposite, described above, this position applies to *all* films. *All* films are to some extent unreal. The difference in the reality or unreality of any two films is therefore largely one of degree.

Now, in most films, especially those in which only very mundane events are depicted and through which only very limited information is expressed (for example: "man opens door" or "woman paints wall"), the degree of distortion is very slight. There is more likely to be a high degree of distortion in films which attempt to enforce a particular interpretation of events.

Nor should one assume that the non-realist position is unwilling to label certain films dangerous. In fact, depending upon the focus of vested interests, this approach equally, perhaps even more, recognises the threat to the "world order" of those films mentioned earlier. Yet for a different reason. It would, of course, admit that the films distort reality; but it would assert that it is the *direction* of distortion, rather than the distortion as such, which constitutes the danger. And, with respect to the viewer's confidence in the film medium as a result of having seen such films, it would suggest that it could neither decrease nor increase; rather, the films should educate the viewer, so that the latter recognises the potential of the film medium as a whole.

Given the above, it is possible to suggest that the non-realist position, unlike the realist, *liberates* the cinema: it grants films the freedom to record and interpret events from a multitude of perspectives without condemning them as uncinematic. Naturally this freedom is dangerous, for it follows that some films may make "statements" which would be deemed highly objectionable by many. And, given the degree of control which films can exert over an audience, objections to certain films may be drowned out in a flood of enthusiasm. Only equally or more attractive films, representing the views of those who raised the objections to the other films, would cause the audience to "see things differently." (One envisions the birth of a series of "film wars.")

But is this not in fact a depiction of things as they actually are? Take *The Exorcist*, for example: were not those who objected to that film in a very weak position--with respect to the ability to persuade--from which to counteract the film's control over its audience? As well, would not the events depicted in the film be susceptible to other interpretations, even within the sphere of religion? And would not all these interpretations (including the one represented by *The Exorcist*) be to some extent unreal, a distortion of reality, a bracketing out of certain aspects of the original events (assuming that the latter did, as is claimed, actually occur)? Nor must one forget that the film is a *dramatisation*: no "real" exorcism ever takes place on the screen; rather, the actors and actresses act *as if* it does. This "as if" becomes very important when one examines so-called "religious" films.

Why the hesitation--the quotation marks--in referring to "religious" cinema? First, since religious cinema is the subject to be defined, it is prudent to employ the term carefully until the final definition has been given. Second, religious cinema usually denotes only those films which deal with religious topics; as I shall attempt to demonstrate below, such an understanding of the term is unnecessarily restrictive.

Now let us examine a specific and accepted example of religious cinema: the Gospel film. Though a fair number of Gospel films have been produced to date, space does not allow me to devote more than a few remarks to three of them. The most well-known and ambitious to date must surely be Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*. (Though most readers will be familiar with this film via the televised version, the original was filmed (versus video-taped), is available as a feature-length film, and may, therefore, be considered as an example of religious cinema.) In spite of the fact that Zeffirelli's epic has been justifiably criticised as inaccurate in terms of its historic detail (see, for example: Hyam Maccoby, "Jesus on the Small Screen: Theology in Technicolour." *Encounter* 49/1: 42-7.), it may be classified as an example of "realist" cinema for two reasons. First, it claims to be a realistic representation of the Gospel narratives (and the average viewer will probably be unable to find fault with this claim). Second, it makes no attempt to alter significantly our way of reading the Gospel narratives, but tries to adhere very closely to the images which those narratives have traditionally evoked within the minds of ordinary Christians (the deliberate choice of an actor who comes across as a "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" is but one example of Zeffirelli's unwillingness to break new ground).

This contrasts with Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, of which Thomas Merton was able to write (in: *Opening the Bible*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1970.):

Many Christians who saw the film criticized it, not because it was unfaithful to the Gospel, but because it presented a picture of Christ that frightened them. The Christ of Pasolini, young, dark, splendidly aloof, dreadfully serious, was obviously not the sweet, indulgent Jesus of late nineteenth-century Christian art. (30)

Yet Pasolini's film, too, is situated within the "realist" tradition.

To find a break with this tradition, we must turn to our last film: *Jesus Christ Superstar*. This film may be criticised for its obeisance to Hollywood's ideal of the spectacular; but one must not forget that the film is also a very *obvious interpretation* of the Gospels, a re-positioning of the latter in a modern, even abstract environment; thus, it is a re-contextualisation and re-interpretation of the actual events of which the Gospels themselves are mere (though canonical) interpretations. In other words, *Jesus Christ Superstar* is an example of abstract film: it fulfils the criteria established by the non-realist school of film theorists.

Now, which of these three films best represents film as film; that is to say: which one manifests the greatest degree of awareness of the nature of the film medium? Given the realist perspective, one would have to choose *Jesus of Nazareth*; but, as suggested above, the realist perspective is less credible, less able to take in and account for the entire range of cinematic data than the non-realist one. Hence, our final choice must be *Jesus Christ Superstar*:

Who would deny that both *Jesus of Nazareth* and *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* are but *interpretations* of the Gospels? Yet the latter film makes this explicit only by presenting images which are disturbingly unfamiliar, and the former does not make it explicit *at all*. May we not, then, look upon both films--especially the former--as lies, as interpretations masquerading as reality? Indeed, does not *Jesus of Nazareth* masquerade so successfully as the "real thing" that it becomes difficult to challenge its authority without arousing the ire of hundreds of thousands of gullible viewers?

I spoke earlier of the dangerous quality of *certain* films, as seen from both the realist and non-realist perspectives. Has not now the realist position itself been revealed as dangerous? Film can never offer more than the illusion of reality: film presents an "as if" situation: people places and events are presented "as if" they were real. But they are not. Even documentary films distort their material, though most do so unconsciously. And Gospel films can never be more than "pseudo-documentaries": the actors and actresses must act "as if" they were those persons whom they have been chosen to represent. The danger lies in their success.

Now, I do not wish to imply that *Jesus Christ Superstar* is a better *interpretation of the Gospels* than the other two films; rather, *Jesus Christ Superstar* is *better cinema*. Naturally my approach is to some extent a simplification of a more complex problem: aesthetic judgement, the nature of filmic reality, and the relation of the latter to the "external" world. Yet even this simplification will shed much light on some of the misconceptions which plague most discussions of religious cinema. In fact, we are now in a position to define the latter in a new way. We may begin this definition by suggesting the following: religious cinema is not only a term designating films dealing with religious topics; rather it refers to films which deal with reality itself in a certain way. We need not deliberate over the first half of this statement; remove the word "not," and one is left with the traditional definition of religious cinema. Instead let us focus our attention on the second half of the statement; if it can be proven valid, then the validity of the first half of the statement may be assumed. But first let us examine the nature of the religious outlook.

What are two primary characteristics of a religious outlook? First, that there is more to life than material existence; the material world is but one aspect of reality. Second, that the non-material or spiritual aspect of reality is both more illusive and ultimately more important than the material. And how may we describe the cinematic experience (from the non-realist

perspective)? May we not say that to view a film is to some extent to experience the material world in an illusory manner, and thus to find our understanding of the primacy of the material world disturbed, even shattered? At the very least, then, the cinematic experience opens up, for the viewer, the *possibility* of recognising the existence of the non-material or spiritual aspect of reality.

Now it is clear that most films will not take the viewer very far toward this recognition. Indeed, many films will call the material world into question, but substitute nothing; they will, in a sense, create a void, into which anything may fall; this, too, is dangerous. Thus, while all films--indeed, while the film medium in general calls the equation of "reality" with "material world" into question, we must be more specific in our approach to the cinema if we are to find a positive or religious outlook; such an outlook creates, not a void, but a new and fuller world in which both the material and the spiritual aspects of reality are represented. In other words, while all films deal with the material world in a "negative" (but not necessarily derogatory) way, only certain films deal *at all* with the spiritual world; such films may present that world as an "agreeable" or "disagreeable" one; thus, *The Seventh Seal* warms us (provided we are able to identify with Jof), whereas *The Exorcist* frightens us.

Returning to the statement made three paragraphs earlier, we may say that its validity has been demonstrated: religious cinema may be defined as referring to films which deal with reality itself in a certain way; this "certain way" concerns the representation of a non-material or spiritual outlook. Religious cinema is therefore not simply a phenomenon associated with content, but also and more fully one associated with form.

This conception frees us to include such elements of film production as "style" in a discussion of religious cinema. For example, some directors treat the face in such a way as to ensure our identification with the human rather than the inhuman in their characters. Unfortunately, most films seem to support the supremacy of the inhuman; in effect, they fill the void which they create (see above) with hatred; in the absence of a respect for even the material world, this hatred becomes exceptionally virulent. The need for a mature religious cinema to counteract the force of such films is therefore particularly great.

Since we have now established the nature of religious cinema as a medium which expands our conception of reality, we may return briefly to radio and television, and consider their role in this task. Radio, I would suggest, is a somewhat innocuous medium, perhaps even a "healthy" one. It functions almost as did the burning bush which Moses encountered. It permits us to separate humanity from physicality. And since its primary function today is as a medium for the transmission of music, it is already somewhat removed from the conceptual sphere. Naturally it remains susceptible to mischievous, even dangerous misuse. Yet our society seems to have developed such a reliance

upon the visual (through the medium of print, and especially through television and film), that I would question the ability of radio to effect a strong influence.

This ability to influence belongs, rather, to television. I find television to be anything but innocuous. Indeed, I would suggest that television, unlike both film and radio, engenders within the viewer a form of schizophrenia: the constant flow from fact to fiction and back again, through news programs, dramatisations, commercials, talk shows, etc., can only produce confusion and lead to an inability to separate reality in any form from pure unreality. This is not necessarily intrinsic to the television medium; it may be merely a function of the use to which television has been put in North America. However, if there is such a thing as an antithesis to religious cinema, then I would nominate North American television programming as such an antithesis.

We may conclude by returning to the questions raised in the first paragraph. What is the effect of the presence of the three modern media? Are they merely sources of information and entertainment, or do they influence our lives in a deeper and more thorough manner? From our present perspective, we may answer these questions as follows. The presence of the media exerts a strong influence on the contemporary way of life. This influence is felt not only in the area of material existence, but also among contemporary conceptual and imaginative frameworks; in essence: the media cause us to think of and imagine reality in new ways; they cause "reality" itself to become an illusory component of our outlook. Religious cinema reinforces this effect, but adds new and (from the perspective of the believer) positive dimensions to reality, such that the latter is transformed from the "material world" into a "new and richer way of looking at things, events and persons."

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EARLY CHRISTIAN ART IN THE FAR WEST

I

For the three summer months of 1977 the University awarded me a small research grant to continue my work in Christian Art. This enabled me, with my wife, to spend time usefully in Southern England, Berlin, Milan, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. It should be said that the visits to West and East Berlin were a bonus for attending the Kirchentag of the German Evangelical Church (E.K.I.D.) and let me see them for the first time since 1937. It was rewarding to visit the Dahlem and Charlottenburg museums in West Berlin and the Pergamon museum in East Berlin, mostly for Byzantine material. Again, I went to Milan for various reasons, partly to find if possible the whereabouts of the famous lipsanoteca (a priceless ivory box of the mid fourth century) in Brescia: we found it in the city art gallery! We had great joy in the lovely new museum within the Cathedral of Monza, just outside Milan, with its remarkable collection of early ampullae (water and perfume bottles, pilgrim flasks), and much satisfaction at getting access to see an ivory diptych of the emperor Honorius dated A.D. 406 in the sacristy of the Cathedral of Aosta. In Milan itself we were able to supplement the work of previous visits; e.g. viewing the fourth century foundations of the baptistery where St Ambrose baptized Augustine, with water channels, pavements and a fragment of fresco decoration; many precious ivories, mosaics and sarcophagi. In Scotland we spent a few days on field trips to see carved stones at Crail, Mains of Crossan (St Orland's), Eassie, Brechin and Aberlemno; and had a day in the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh. The prime targets of the summer, however, were in England and Ireland.

II

The origins of Christianity in Roman Britain are obscure, but it must have arrived by the late second century. Alban of St Albans was martyred perhaps in A.D. 209 (earlier scholarship dated him about a century later); and there were bishops at the Council of Arles in 314 from London, York and Lincoln. Now there is some evidence that there may also have been sees at Cirencester and Carlisle. By the late fourth century all Roman citizens in Britain had to be Christian, and we have evidence of new churches, some in private villas. An old problem has been the question whether the Church lived on through the Germanic tribal invasions from the fifth to the seventh centuries: in some areas it did, but not only in the west and far north where the "British" had fled for security. Survival may have been possible even in south-east Kent.

In February 1975 an amateur archaeologist discovered a great treasure of Christian silver at Water Newton in Huntingdonshire, and it appears to be liturgical and not domestic. It must be fourth century in date and is now the earliest known Christian silver of the Roman period anywhere! We saw this, together with much else, at a magnificent British Museum exhibition of *The Wealth of the Roman World: Silver and Gold*. We visited Lullingstone

Villa in Kent; St Albans; Silchester, and Reading Museum where the curator had Christian glass, a seal and two rings from Silchester's Christian basilica photographed for me; Cirencester; Canterbury and, of course, London itself. By now we must have seen almost the entire corpus of Christian Art thus far discovered in Roman Britain. It is rather limited in scope, but it is very valuable indeed, e.g. the frescoes from Lullingstone and the Christus portrait in mosaic from Hinton St Mary's.

III

Ireland was the Far West of the Roman world, and was never itself incorporated into the Empire. But it was evangelized from Roman Britain and Gaul in the early fifth century, so that one goes in the steps of Palladius and to the Rock of Cashel and elsewhere as pilgrim of St Patrick. There are holy places from the sixth century or the seventh, e.g. at Gougane Barra, St Berriherth's Kyle near Tipperary, and Glendalough; a bit later at Kells and Clonmacnois and other significant centres of Irish monasticism. (In the Ambrosian Library of Milan I had already examined some manuscripts written by Irish monks at Bobbio).

We went first to the south-west and west of Dublin, to Glendalough, Cashel, Kilkenny, Gallarus and the like; and later to the Boyne Valley (where Newton Grange from the third millennium B.C. is one of the greatest sites in all Europe), to Mellifont, Monasterboice and Kells. For ten days my wife and I participated in a course on *Ireland: Land and People* at University College, Galway, which provided an historical and geological background for the work. In Dublin, of course, one must visit Trinity College to see the famous manuscripts of Dimma, Durrow and Kells; the National Museum with its notable collections of treasure trove: rings, gold, collars, bells, shrines and brooches, including the glorious Tara Brooch and the Ardagh Chalice.

What stands out from a very busy month in a vast area of the Green Isle? The extraordinary Gallarus Oratory from the ninth century (or the twelfth!): the churches, shrines and crosses of Glendalough, Ahenny, Kilfenora, Drumcliff near Sligo, serene Clonmacnois by the calm waters of Shannon River, Kells and Monasterboice. (I have to omit all the priories, monasteries, and Romanesque buildings that are later than the tenth century!) But of primary significance perhaps is the unique series of the Irish High Crosses with their panels of carved icons, decorated with interlacing, spirals, bosses and other features, some of which descend from the distant centuries before Christ. As Françoise Henry has written, they "are of tremendous importance as an experiment in the working out in stone of Christian themes prior to the development of Romanesque art..." (*Irish High Crosses*, 1964, p.13).

One of the features that Celtic Irish Art shares with the Christian Art of Roman Britain is the persistence of pagan themes in the iconography. This can be seen also in the art of the western and eastern Roman Empire during the first six centuries. It is instructive to think about this when one

enquires how and why the Church came to promote in this world of temporary space a Christian civilisation, a culture remote from its Palestinian homeland and its Jewish womb. Here in Ireland we saw the past baptized into the promise of a divine future for humanity, because humanity itself, as the Church believed, had become the supreme agency for a final and redeeming revelation of God. You can see that in the strange figures of the Evangelists and the Christ in the Book of Durrow and the Book of Kells (ninth century). It is there also in the quaint birds, beasts and other shapes that haunt the Gospel texts, and even in the snippets of medieval humour that creep into the venerable Book of Kells.

IV

I have now reached the stage in my evolution into an art historian that I shall hope to offer a half course next session on *Early Christian Art* as part of our program on *Religion and the Arts*. It has taken twenty years!

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SELECTED READINGS : BOOK REVIEW

FAITH AND FRATRICIDE: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism. By Rosemary Reuther. The Seabury Press. New York. 1974.

Jewish-Christian dialogue is very much in vogue these days. Any person who participates in this dialogue, either socially or academically, eventually finds, once the barriers are down and trust has been established, that she is faced with *the* question: "But if Jesus was Jewish, and if he preached love and tolerance, why is Christian history so anti-Semitic?" Every Jew who has ever asked me that--and there have been many--has asked it in true puzzlement, even pain. And my answer? Well . . . "Christians aren't perfect, any more than Jews." "Don't judge the spirit of Christ by the actions of his so-called followers." Or, in a more sophisticated mood, I might counter with an analysis of the corrupting effect of power, and a wistful statement to the effect that Christianity was really "better" before it became legitimized under Constantine. In short, I thought of Christian anti-Semitism as an unfortunate aberration, not truly Christian, as peripheral rather than central.

Reuther, in a closely argued and well-researched book, presents the thesis that Christian anti-Semitism is not aberrant, but rather normative--and is inextricably intertwined with the Christian message, from the Gospels to the present day. The historical focus is somewhat lopsided--she devotes only twelve pages to the period between the Enlightenment and the Holocaust--but her analysis of anti-Semitism in the New Testament, the Church Fathers and the Medieval Period is rich with discovery. Reuther shows how the initial tension between Christianity as a Jewish sect and orthodox Judaism (which is reflected in the Gospels) hardens into an isolation of the two faiths, in which both groups almost willfully misunderstand each other. The difference, of course, is that Judaism makes no claim to be the only truth for all peoples, and is therefore relatively untouched by the claims of other religions. Christianity, however, claims that Christ is the only path to salvation, and therefore it cannot fail to be threatened by other faiths. The existence of a living Judaism after the Christ event is a particularly sharp thorn. "Anti-Christianity was an extrinsic and defensive need for the synagogue, which was over as soon as the Church was organized outside the walls of the Jewish community. For Christianity, anti-Judaism was not merely a defense against attack, but an intrinsic need of Christian self-affirmation."

So the Jewish Bible becomes the "Old Testament" and the creative self critical tradition of the Prophets is reinterpreted by the Church Fathers as hopeless condemnation of the Jewish people. The concept of election and the Messianic promise of the Jewish Bible are taken to refer exclusively to Christians, while the critical passages are interpreted as referring exclusively to Jews. Christians are "spiritual" while Jews are "carnal." The fact that Judaism had responded to the Christian proselytizing effort by a strengthening of synagogue life and rabbinic tradition make this a difficult claim to support, which is

perhaps one reason why the invective of some of the Church Fathers was so hysterical. Chrysostom: ". . . the synagogue is not only a whorehouse and a theater; it is also a den of thieves and a haunt of wild animals....not the cave of a wild animal merely, but of an unclean wild animal....The Jews have no conception of (spiritual) things at all, but living for the lower nature, all agog for the here and now, no better disposed than pigs or goats, they live by the rule of debauchery and inordinate gluttony. Only one thing they understand: to gorge themselves and to get drunk." And, more ominously, "When animals are unfit for work, they are marked for slaughter, and this is the very thing which the Jews have experienced. By making themselves unfit for work, they have become ready for slaughter. This is why Christ said 'Ask for my enemies, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me.'"

Reuther goes on to detail how the anti-Jewish myth of the early and Patristic periods becomes socialized and legitimized until it erupts into the full-scale persecutions of the Medieval period. Unfortunately, she does not discuss the effect of the Reformation on the Jewish-Christian relationship. One can only hope that a Protestant theologian will present us with a parallel effort.

In the final, and, disappointingly, the slimmest section of *Faith and Fratricide*, Reuther discusses the theological implications of her thesis. If anti-Semitism is at the core, rather than the periphery, of the Christian message (as Gregory Baum puts it in his introduction) then what must be done to extract the poison? The heart of this question resides in Christology.

Reuther claims that the Church is historically and theologically inaccurate in claiming Christ as redeemer, when it is obvious that the world is, as yet, unredeemed. "The assertion that the Jews are reprobate because they did not accept Christ as having already come is really a projection upon Judaism of that unredeemed side of itself that Christianity must constantly deny in order to assert that Christ has already come and founded 'the Church.' The Jews represent that which Christianity must repress in itself, namely the recognition of history and Christian existence as unredeemed. . . .Judaism's Great Refusal stands for its recognition of the critical theological error in the heart of the Christian Gospel which rendered its message nonnegotiable for Judaism from the beginning." Reuther sees Christ as a "way" but not an "end"--as "paradigmatic" and "proleptic"--and as only one way among other possible paths. By eliminating the concept of an historically accomplished Messianism from Christology, she hopes also to eliminate the "left hand" of that concept--a defensive anti-Semitism. In addition, she proposes a program of demythologizing the New Testament, and of an active Jewish/Christian dialogue within the context of schools of divinity (the latter might prove a fruitful topic for thought here at McGill).

But Reuther does not seem to have a great deal of faith in her proposals, correct and necessary as they may be, and it is here that I find her finally disappointing. She writes, "We must be frank about the risks of this under-

taking. Possibly anti-Judaism is too deeply embedded in the foundations of Christianity to be rooted out entirely without destroying the whole structure.' But the risk turns out to be, *not* the risk to Christianity, but the risk to Judaism (except, of course, in the sense that the two areas of risk are really reversed--as Sartre said "There is no Jewish problem; there is only a Christian problem"). The risk is that "we may have to settle for the sort of ecumenical goodwill that lives with theoretical inconsistency and opts for a *modus operandi* that assures practical cooperation between Christianity and Judaism." But Reuther's analysis has already shown that a Christology which is anti-Semitic is inevitably responsible for concrete acts of anti-Semitism --theoretical inconstancy will not produce that "assurance" of Christian/Jewish cooperation. The risk or option that she implicitly rejects, and that I think merits consideration, is that of abandoning Christianity itself, if the anti-Judaic poison cannot be extracted from it. This possibility follows logically from Reuther's own Christology. If Christ is one paradigm among others, then the way is open for rejecting one paradigm in favor of a better one. If belief in Christ as Messiah is not uniquely necessary for salvation, then perhaps we may begin to consider other ways. If Christianity cannot, in fact, be purged of this corruption, then we may finally have no other choice. A Christianity which is in some sense responsible for Auschwitz is no Christianity at all. Is it possible that the only place in which we can witness to the truth which we know as Christ is outside Christianity?

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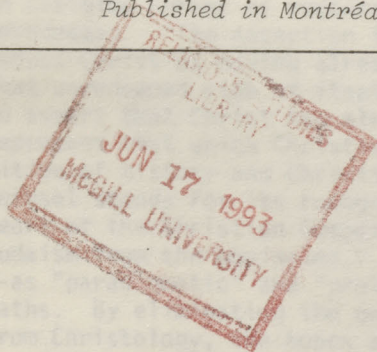
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