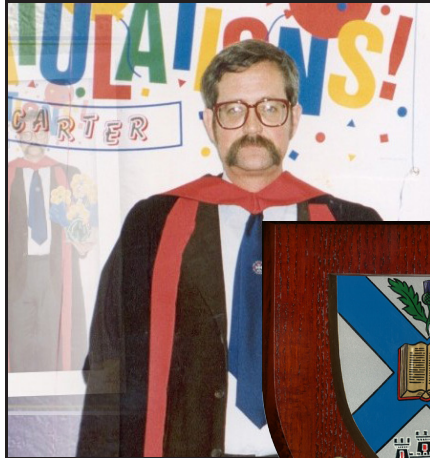




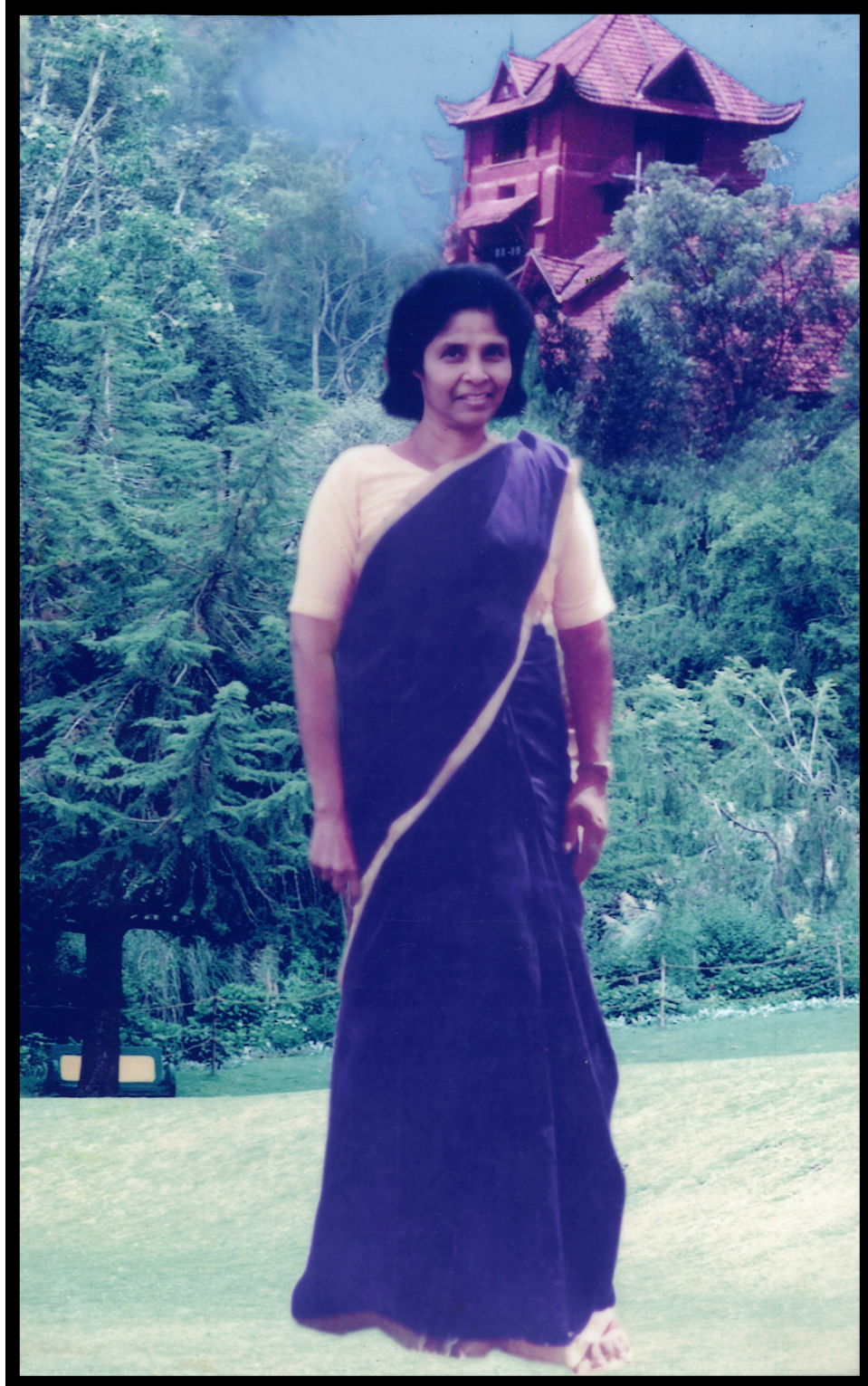
Theology of a Murder



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Book cover compiled and edited by Salma Carunia Carter



In the Summer of 2017, Salma traveled to Italy and stayed in Rome, near the Vatican. She presented her scholarly husband's books and writings to the Vatican Library. In September of 2017 she received a thank you letter from Pope Francis expressing appreciation, acknowledging the gift of inscribed copies of Dr. Ben Michael Carter's writings with his personal photo with the Papal seal.



THE THEOLOGY OF A MURDER



Words are mined with ideas that explode slowly.
We scarcely notice when the world blows up.
One day we kick a shard
And are surprised to discover
What we would have died for.
This may paralyse us,
Locking us forever in a secular "Perhaps....."
It may seduce us into ourselves.
It may reduce us to tyrants.
Wisdom is knowing how to be unsure.

Once on the plain of Shinar
God came down to confuse.
God with different names
Became different gods,
Became no god,
Became an image.
To know a man
You must know his image.
To know his image
You must know his grammer.

Shaping our grammer
Ideas explode slowly,
Deepening our pool of words.
"Skysill" became "horizon"
But who noticed that the world had shifted
And that we would never again be what we had just been?

Since you asked me to put down on paper my explanation for

murdering her, "my side of the story" as you put it, I have thought much about how to begin. I have even wondered if I should co-operate. In the first place, "my side of the story" has already been well aired through the courts. It is "her side of the story" that has never been heard. She's dead and though I'm sure she intercedes for me before our dear Lord, she says nothing to us who must still endure at this level of existence. If you want to know "my side of the story", the court records, though they present it on a rather superficial level, are public and at your disposal. But you are a social worker and you want depth. You believe my deed is part of a larger social pathology. You believe my guilt is a factor in the sum of society's guilt. In your mind individual aberrations reflect (or are created by) social conditions. And society, wealthy enough to be vastly generous, funding space programs and "spaced" programs, will subsidise your study of me and support you at a fairly comfortable level while you diagnose its ills (real or imagined) through me. Society even funds the university through which you pursue your PhD. Frankly I find the whole enterprise distasteful and a little odd on two levels. I find it odd that society (or "the system" or whatever you want to call the abstraction you serve and seek to remold) tolerates, even encourages, your incessant criticism of it, though I suppose at one level such tolerance is a faith statement expressing a general belief that analysis can clarify, that society by amassing knowledge and distilling its understanding of itself and its environment can in some measure reshape its institutions and

control its destiny (or cheat its fate). After centuries of being in its thrall, the Jewish community by and large abandoned apocalyptic theology after the failure of the Bar Kochba revolt. The assumptions of such theology had simply cost the community too much. That genus was dropped from the genera of world literature - at least until recently. Now we gentiles since the days of Thomas More have been seduced by the Sirens of utopianism and, no less slow to learn than were the Jews, have striven with unabatted zeal to establish the ideal within the real. We have suffered mightily, crushed and squandered much, and achieved little in the process. Yet those who kissed the Blarney Stone still lead us to the Wailing Wall. As I said, I find our gullible optimism odd. But I suppose people must believe something.

I also find it odd that you, a woman, should in this era of radical feminism choose to try to understand me. I am a man and have killed a woman I could not dominate through love. I have acted out the darker male fantasy. What is there to understand? But perhaps you seek to resolve that paradox so central to our social conscience which views the criminal as victim. I know you do not sympathize with my act and, though in our interviews you have always been pleasant in a professional sort of way, I know you do not like me. Indeed, I suspect you may even despise me - not that it matters. Yes, I find your interest in me odd. However, I think that you are, though misguided, sincere and your sincerity appeals to me. I am a sucker for sincerity. So perhaps I should co-operate.

But there is another reason for not taking part in your project, a reason which gave me serious pause. "Write it all down" is an important first step in certain kinds of therapy as well as in brainwashing. Confession is a tool for both police and priest. Tell us all about it...get it off your chest...come clean and we shall help you begin again. It is as though description was a way of devitalizing consequences; a further indication of our tremendous confidence in analysis. (An anthropologist once told me in all seriousness that scholars could solve any problem. Some weeks later I watched her become involved in a debate, which grew angry and remained unresolved, about spirit possession in African societies.) Indeed, my confession might even be considered an abnegation of my own authority over myself and a tacit admission that you are right and I am wrong, that I have come to you for absolution, to be kissed and made well. But those of us who would retain our personal integrity, our grasp of reality (notice how I equate personal integrity with a grasp on reality), have been admonished by no less an authority than Russel Kirk in his classic study Brainwashed based on the experience of American POWs in Korea not to "write it all down". So perhaps I should heed Russel Kirk (who is after all one of my sex) and refuse to co-operate, refuse to "write it all down". However, my very refusal to co-operate might be interpreted by you as a tacit admission by me that you are stronger than I and that your whole sexually biased social critique deserves some measure of respect. That you might interpret my refusal in this way is appalling. Your request pre-

sents me with a genuine dilemma. Were I a Buddhist I might take refuge in silence or a koan but I am a western man and a Christian and hence feel an obligation to respond in some more coherent way. Therefore it seems to me far better to run the negligible risk that you will convert me, reshape me, wash my brain than it is for me to run the very real risk that you would misunderstand my refusal to co-operate. And who knows, by "writing it all down" I might convert you. Now there would be a thesis for a PhD: "How I was Converted to My Subject's Point of View". It has happened before as you would know had you taken the time to study the origins of the Hoa Hao movement in Viet Nam.

Finally I should tell you that I enjoy the company of women, particularly beautiful women, and that few things give me greater pleasure than conversing with them (shades of Ezra Pound's "Tame Cat"). Therefore, your femininity is itself alluring. This prison is as depressingly masculine as a monastery. The prospect of several meetings with you for the purpose of "discussing my case" is more appealing to me, given this gender response, than it would be were you a man.

So I have decided to write. And having made that decision, it seemed appropriate to begin with a poem. We are, after all, as St. Paul reminds us, God's poems (Eph. 2:10). "Workmanship" is how it is rendered in the King James Version, the Biblical translation which I requested and which the authorities were kind enough to supply. But the Greek is poiēma: poems. We are God's poiēma.

This is a most apt description in light of the first chapter of Genesis where the cosmos comes into being as an expression of a series of commands and the soteriological significance of the term begins to become apparent in the very beginning of the gospel of John. What God says happens. He calls those things that are not as though they were (Rom. 4:17). Which is, incidently, why God cannot lie. His inability to lie is a consequence of his creative not his moral dimension. God is in fact not too moral to deceive us. He simply does it through secondary agents (I Kngs. 22:19-23; Isa. 19:14; Jer. 4:10; II Thes. 2:11 - should you care to look the references up). Perhaps the translators rendered poiēma as workmanship because of the way the process is described in Genesis 2:7 but I for one cannot help but wish that they had employed the more accurate poems.

So much for the theological justification for beginning with a poem. There is also a psychological justification. It may seem to you that I am sure that I am right and you are wrong. The entire tone I have adopted undoubtedly conveys that impression. But in truth I am not so sure I am right. It is more accurate to say that I am sure you are wrong. Frankly I sometimes feel uncertain about my position because I am not always sure that I can distinguish between rhetoric and reality. I sometimes suspect that I am a prisoner of language for my experience of the world is modified by my language even as my experience of the world provides my language with its content. Indeed, it sometimes seems to me that what I call experience is little more than an inner dialogue which molds even as it is molded.

Language is my way of cribbing from God's poems. In one sense there is nothing wrong with that. It is the way we are as dependent beings made in the image of another. And it was God, after all, who brought the animals to Adam to see what he would name them. God made us stewards of the world, told us to take it for our own, to fill it and subdue it (a mandate which has forever feminized the Earth). And all that with its labor and attendant responsibilities was before the Fall. The problem which confounds me is not a problem inherent in language but is a problem inherent in the distortion of the role of language. Whether one agrees with the secular anthropologist or with the religious fundamentalist (of any one of a variety of faiths), one must agree that we are new-comers, that the world was here before we began our voyage of discovery in it, before we began to make it our own. Discovery is the key for it is by discovery that we make something our own. But what is it we are discovering? That which is outside ourselves? Or only ourselves? How are we to understand the unity and diversity of both these realms, especially when they create as they innerface a third (or fourth? or fifth?) realm of unity and diversity? To know I must make the world mine. This is the burden of our Judeao-Greco-Christian heritage. It is the legacy of the West. I am not a rebel against my culture. I speak a western language, think western thoughts. My significance is expressed within - even created by - my culture. And I accept that culture as good or at least as the foundation of my understanding of the good. Yet if I would make the world mine, surely I should be

able to distinguish between what is mine and what is the world's. And here is a dilemma for whether I have evolved from within the world or been shaped by divine hands from its dust, I am very much a part of the world. We are one flesh, the world and I. How then can I confidently make that division between what is mine and what is the world's? Does not the dualism (even pluralism) of western culture and even my hope for Heaven imply that I am in the world while at the same time not of the world? Does not our Christian faith, especially when it was written in Greek and still so terribly Jewish, admonish us in these very terms? Even those of our culture who have rejected that faith as so much myth and medievalism retain the traditional distinctions in the language. It is part of our mental furniture. Such divisions haunt the ecological movement in its concern for perserving "unspoiled environments". It is implied when we speak of natural and man-made. How can such concerns be justified coherently (assuming, of course, that coherence is important) if we really believe that we ourselves are part of the natural order? Life, which has endured innumerable catastrophes over the millennia will surely survive us. And if it does not, so what? The world must someday end. If it ends tommorrow in a nuclear disaster or in a few hundred million years in a super nova, is the difference much more than quantitative? If species die, they've always died. Failure is the other side of evolution's creativity. But more of this another time. What concerns me right now is division.

The ancient world was structured conceptually in terms of

opposites grouped around the horizontal and vertical axis of a huge imaginary box. These opposites were intrinsic to the nature of things and their orderly interplay allowed for variety and structured change in a universe where human concerns were primarily ontological and there was little awareness of temporal depth. In the ancient world myth performed a function analogous to the function mathematics performs today. Equations express permanent relationships. Myths, too, were intended to express permanent relationships between opposite truths (up/down-forward/backward-left/right-high/low-sky/earth-life/death-light/dark-sun/moon-hot/cold-good/bad-active/passive-man/woman) which were believed to exist beyond the temporal realm, beyond time. Such verities, while impacting mundane events, were themselves unconditioned. They could create effects while remaining uneffected. Myths are stories of events beyond time. They describe eternity. In the west this ancient view would have died with the Greeks had not Plato by employing concepts like order and disorder, form and substance, provided through the vehicle of analogy the terms for its resuscitation. Though Plato banished poets from his republic, Greek culture had too much stake in the poems to give them up easily. Homer, it was agreed, was describing much the same world Plato was describing, he was simply using analogy. This academic sleight-of-hand enabled the Greeks to enjoy the best of both worlds. And, since Scripture was inspired using mythic terms, the idea of analogy provided a convenient and respectable means for early church theologians to render its truths intelligible and meaningful in their debates with

the philosophers.

Now here is the problem. To create is to express one's self. If God created the world, did not God express himself? And if God created by speaking, does not the word become the world? Could we not, as Luther did in his commentary on Genesis, call the world the word of God? Would this world not express the mind of God? How then can we distinguish between the divine and the natural? The natural reveals the divine, gives glory to God. But what if the world as we understand it today is conceived in terms radically different from the way the world was conceived when God revealed to us our significance in it? We are creatures of symbols. We think in terms of words, of pictures. It is through the abstract that we attempt to grasp the concrete and through the concrete that we construct our system of abstracts. What kind of truth does God give us when he speaks through his prophets? Do the prophets speak metaphorically or propositionally or both? And if they speak both ways, how can we determine when they are speaking metaphorically and when they are speaking propositionally? The issue is not resolvable in purely grammatical terms for grammatically metaphors and propositions are identical. Yet how completely we misunderstand their truth content if we confuse them!

In the beginning was the logos. God made man in his own image. But God also brought the animals to man to see what man would name them and on the plain of Shinar God came down to confuse that system of names by which man controlled the world and called on God. Our quest for knowledge is an attempt to resolve mystery but there is a

great mystery to this whole attempt at knowing. And ofcourse it is through knowledge that we subdue...and are subdued. Hence I am uncertain that I have done right. I have acted definatively. I have freed her from the world and changed fundamentally my own role within it...but I am uncertain that I have done right. We are poems shaped in a world of poetry where significant knowledge because of its psychological dimension must always assume the proportions of myth. In the end all reasoned action grows from the bedrock of faith and faith by its nature assumes the possibly of error. This then is the psychological reason I chose to begin with a poem.

Finally, there is a mythic justification for beginning with a poem. If reason is the light we carry into darkness, myth and poetry are the fuel for that light. We are always and forever story-tellers. At the heart of every culture are the tales. We categorize the world in terms of preceived opposites, weave this assemblage into the schema of myth, and in this way construct phenomena. Even the certainties of the modern and rational adult are shadowed by the sunlight of haunted childhood. In the child it is lyric, music, and dance which are the arbiters of experience. Herein lie the energies of myth and the distillation of the poem.

Because we are at base poets, creatures of language and dance, and poems ourselves, we need a center from which to begin. And if the story we are to tell is to be a human story, that center must be a human center. Is it any wonder then that the most powerful symbol in the west for the last two thousand years has been a man nailed

to a cross, immobile, spread out left and right, suspended on a hill between heaven and earth, reconciling good and evil, concretizing our worst fears (injustice, the condemnation of innocence), cancelling the past and freeing the future in order to say life's Yes to death's No? Here hatred is metamorphized into love for what is hatred but angry love and who can loose one's independence to love and feel one's self being transformed by that loss without knowing both the thrill of passion and the pulse of anger? In every act of love one tastes the salt of sorrow. Love is exclusive. It would possess exclusively. And that is why it is dangerous for in the tenderness of its jealousy it is willing to kill. We grow angry with the beloved because we care so much. It is our dilemma, this wrath that can so easily transform itself into hate. It is God's dilemma, too. God loves us with a jealous and possessive love. God is passionately concerned with our affairs. That is why there is Hell. Hell is the other and necessary side of love. Hell is real because love is real. It is only by reducing God's love to a benevolent indifference that we convince ourselves that there is no Hell. In the Old Testament the Jews struggled with God's possessive jealousy. The New Testament universalizes that struggle, revealing its cosmic dimensions. Christ is in a conflict with Satan. The Son of Heaven vanquishes the fallen angels. It is in the New Testament and only in the light of Christ that the lord of darkness emerges from his shadows. And it is in the revelation of that dark lord that we discover that love and its exclusivity is

the central problem of human existence. All other opposites: good and evil, truth and falsity, value and valuelessness, meaning and meaninglessness, spring from that problem. It is the simultaneous movements of generosity and jealousy that create the dynamic tension of love. Hence, hatred is not the opposite of love. The opposite of love is indifference. Live and let live is the summation of all that is wrong with the world.

I count the centuries
 Until I come to the dark one;
 A hundred years of genocide
 And third world caesars.
 Someone has said, "Japan survived the Bomb and prospered."
 Blessed assurance!
 It is not the Geiger counter that ticks away our time,
 It is instead the weight of so much clay
 Made in the conventional way.
 How many today even remember that a million died at the hands of
 the Turks in 1915?
 We have not become complacent.
 We have not become tired.
 We have not become too powerful,
 Too big for our britches.
 We have only become more helpless,
 More accustomed to the plight of the victim.
 The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.
 A languid paralysis quiets us.
 It is not that we have forgotten Truth,
 It is rather that something more strange than Truth
 Tunes and plucks the strings of our longing.

Please be patient. I am trying to explain myself. But I do not wish to tell you a story you already know. The planning, the assault itself: all tedious details. I want instead to try to re-create for you the intellectual environment of the murder. I want you to think as I think, to empathize, to understand. I want you to feel the reasons for my decision to slay the most wonderful woman I ever met. Naturally we must admit that the murder was a creation of choices. It did not "have to be that way." I might never have met her but having met her I had to fall in love with her because of what she was. That part, of course, was chance or fate for both of us. The choices lay in her response to my initial overtures and in my response to her response. After all, she could have accepted my love. She could have submitted to my urgent embrace and my pledge of eternal fidelity. But she wouldn't. So I guaranteed our mutual chastity. Had I felt only benevolence, then such a drastic solution to my dilemma would have been reprehensible, criminal. But I was in thrall of a drastic emotion so my solution had to be drastic. The drastic was a powerful and efficacious cathartic.

I suppose my response to her was rather like my culture's response to German metaphysicians. We live in their thrall even though twice in this century we have sacrificed hundreds of thousands of our youth (many of whom had read and believed what those metaphysicians wrote) to defeat the nation, the geographic center of that culture, which made those metaphysicians possible. Of course it was not against the German intellectuals that we fought, it was against the

Kaiser and the National Socialists. But they're all tossed in the same salad. In the case of Germany it is as false to distinguish between its form of government and its academic environment as it is to distinguish between the government and the people in democracies. We defeated Japan once and strove to remake the culture of those islands. MacArther even called for an army of missionaries to instruct and convert the natives. We have defeated Germany twice and yet we remain eager to drink from the Hippocrene of their inspiration. In this way do our western biases become manifest. It is a bit of xenophobia that shall cost us dearly...and I make this observation as a western man who owes much to Luther and Kant.

But I digress and must return to the topic at hand; the murder. Yes, I killed her, killed the woman I loved, still love, love more now than I did before I discovered (we are on a voyage to discover that which we would make our own) how wonderfully red her blood was. Not scarlet, you understand, but bright arterial red, pulsing, spreading, finally clotting into deeper shades of brown. I lived for some years in Panama, the land of many fish, and use to troll for dolphins (the fish not the mammal). They are beautiful creatures, surface fighters, and to watch them die to behold a pattern of color change more subtle and awe-inspiring than a sunset. The death of blood is like that; a pooling, cooling, fading into night. Death, even violent death, if seen through the eyes of love (genuine love and not the casual piriapus that passes for love in this permissive and passive age), is beautiful. The beloved is there, her helplessness

calling forth our tears and tenderest care. She was lovely down to her corpuscles. I wept after I killed her and gently arranged her for the police who, I must tell you, handled me much too roughly. But what should I expect? After all, they did not love her and so were shocked and outraged by the "savagery" of the deed. This made them angry which, given their detachment as trained observers, translated itself into roughness. They even pushed me though I had never done them any harm. Indeed, I called them, invited them in, and have always paid my taxes. They failed to see the beauty of her death because they did not have annointed eyes.

We claim to find death horrible but such professions sound sincere only after carefully schooling. They do not stand up to close analysis. I do not wish to deny that death is God's judgement upon disobedience and of course it can, on those occasions when it brushes our lives with its sudden finality, startle us. But it is so common as to be trivial and most of us know down in our bones that it is not permanent. We may even, in moments of abrupt honesty, admit that death may be preferable to life for, like death, the life we live is also God's judgement upon disobedience. Indeed, we feed on death and through the process quicken its elements into life again. It is this creation of life from death that is behind the Jewish emphasis on feasting, an emphasis Feuerbach failed to understand else he would have never ridiculed it. How odd that he should prefer fornication to the feast for death and sex are intimately bound together. Sex became possible only when organisms

became sufficiently complex to allow for the blending of genetic heritages. And it is only at that level of complexity that organisms are able to die. There is no death when a single cell divides. One cannot even properly speak of a loss of identity. Which points to another property of death. Death gives our lives their ultimate definition. And as death comes with sex so violence comes with eros. The embrace of lovers is like mortal combat. And what is a kiss but a disguised bite? We even say as an endearment, "I love you so much I could eat you up." The placenta was intended as the first feast of motherhood but some species, the tiger for example, may go further and consume the young they bore. Even human mothers, who are today demanding as their right access to abortion, justify the surgical procedure, at least in part, by assuring us that they will love even better those children they allow to live. Sentimentality and cruelty go hand-in-hand. If you do not believe me, then I encourage you to read the romantic poetry of the Old South with its slaves and its captive belles. Or better yet, read the Twenty-third Psalm written by King David who was beloved by God, greater than Saul, and had killed his tens of thousands. It is not death that is horrible but dispassionate killing at a distance, death on a massive scale made possible by technology. Robert Graves was right, the intellectual world made a serious mistake when it chose Apollo over Diana. We no longer image as well as we once did. We no longer see a floating skull in the waxing and waning moon. Instead, that portent has, like the summit of Everest, become a receptical

for our footprints and flags, a way of measuring our achievements.
 The stone circles of Britian remain a closed book to us for there is
 no longer a clear focus for our terror.

If we become our choices,
 If we create ourselves through goal-directed choosing,
 It is death which defines us.
 When tomorrow has closed to us her possibilities
 And all the data of our selections has been accumulated, ordered,
 and evaluated,
 Then at last (and only then) can we be known
 Fully, completely.

The rational eye directs the finger's thrust.
 Here is a consistency,
 There a pattern of ordered change,
 At this point conversion.
 The dates, the deeds, and the decisions;
 These are the significant movements in that event remembered as "his
 life."

Here is a packet of his collected letters.
 There is a list of the names of those he loved.
 Those friends who survive him can still recall the occasions of his
 likes and his dislikes.

One can understand his photographs
 Or stand above his bones
 Or trace those tender currents between his birth and his demise,
 Those tendencies that channeled his fluidity,
 That gave him his coherence and identity.
 Such are the shadows of his personality (completed now).

There is something god-like in such scholarship,

In the difference between obituary and the biography.
History loots us.
We live and leave behind a clutter
To be surveyed from the uncompleted heights of secondary consequence.

She was very clean, took good care of herself, dressed conservatively but with an eye on styles. She wore jewelry which was modest but quite unusual. I suppose that's what attracted my attention in the first place. Of course she was beautiful but beautiful women are not uncommon. The earth gives forth lavishly of her splendor. Beauty alone attracts little more than passing notice. No, it was her jewelry and the delicate sensitivity she had with make-up. She used cosmetics not to highlight the outlines of her beauty so much as to draw attention to the person who filled those outlines. Consider, for example, the way she wore high heels. She almost always did and the shoes not only accentuated the curve of her hips, they also pitched her slightly forward on her toes so that when she walked she appeared almost to strut. Hence, she carried herself with an ingenuous arrogance which I found completely devastating. Her hair was black and fell in a full wave over her shoulders. Her lips were full and when she smiled (which she often did for she was very cheerful) I was reminded of that passage in the Song of Solomon: "Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them." Her eyes were a soft brown

and her skin was flawless. She was somewhat shorter than I, full breasted, and looked like she might play tennis on the weekends. In fact, I found out later that she jogged. She was competent, confident, and made me feel protective and secure when I was in her presence. Indeed, when I was not in her presence, even when I had not seen her for several days, I had only to think of her and those feelings of protectiveness and security would warm within me. When she was praised, as she often was, I rejoiced and was quick to smile my encouragement to whoever admired her at the moment. And yet, because I was falling in love, my feelings were not unselfish. No, even after knowing her for only a few weeks, I was beginning to dream of possessing her. Sometimes I would envision the two of us together on the porch of a mountain cabin at five A.M. looking over a fog shrouded Appalachian valley in the early summer. Or strolling together down a deserted beach in Puerto Rico as the gulls screamed above us and the blue sea smoothed the sand before our feet. Or sitting on a braided rug before a dying fire while a winter wonderland stretched away in pearly moon-stained silence among the frozen trees of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Of course such fantasies are so much romantic fluff, non-sense really, but even the eagle needs to be coddled in a tender nest before it develops the strength to soar. No, such infatuation serves a purpose. It allows one to explore possibilities. It accentuates the pleasure one discovers in one's beloved. It is fundamental in binding heart to heart. But it takes two and she was not dreaming as I dreamed. If only she had

coveted me as I coveted her. If only my presence had excited in her the same kind of dreaming her presence excited in me. Then we might really have stood on that cabin porch, or strolled down that tropical beach, or made love in the shadows of that crumbling fire. She liked me, she said, but she did not believe that her feelings would mature beyond that. However, my attention flattered her vanity. As Aristotle said, we cannot hate the one who loves us. So she encouraged me in subtle ways and I allowed myself to be beguiled.

I even wrote a poem for her and presented it to her after we had begun to talk for longer periods during our chance encounters (arranged by me) than mere chance, had it truly been a factor in those encounters, would have justified. I gave her the verses on a folded paper which she accepted not knowing what they were but if she read them (and I suspect she did for who could be so inhumanly incurious as to discard unopened a folded sheet of paper which one had been given or when opening it and seeing its shortened lines of prose fail to pursue them at least once to the end?) she read them alone and never mentioned them to me. Nor did I ask her what she thought of my effort though composing it had taken me most of one afternoon. Love is an exercise in power, after all. She had power over me because I loved her and I desired to have that same power over her. But I did not and it was my keen awareness of the disproportionate nature of our relationship that made it impossible for me to inquire. I am a private person and have always felt

renewed and strengthened by the regenerating powers of "that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude" but being in love with her was (I can no longer say is) an experience too profoundly lonely to be true to my taste. Longing, if it would inspire us, must be delicately balanced for it can be as witching as twilight or as stark as the unforgiving mirror, a prelude to fulfillment or frustration. And my love for her had tipped the balance, had become oppressive. My desire which at first promised to open to a new and wonderful world soon bound me in the torments of Tantalus. The poem was a plea for her to loose those chains. I needed to know whether or not she had understood (could she be so inhuman as not to understand?) and yet I could not ask. She was like a pane of glass. Through her I could see a sunlit happier realm and yet I feared that if I pushed through her to that happier place (which after all was really her and not a place) she would shatter and I would be badly scarred, perhaps even blinded, meaning of course loss. The smooth floor and steel and constant hollow noise that is prison (wasn't it C.S. Lewis who described Hell as the kingdom of noise?) suggests to me that my premonition was more than a little prophetic. Poor prophecy for it failed to take into account the restoration. Now she is mine since no one else can possess her. Now she is in the bank if you will. I have secured my treasure in heaven where rust and moth do not corrupt nor thieves break in to steal. I have sent her before me to prepare the way. I have consigned her to "the silence of eternity interpreted by love", if I may borrow a

line from John Greenleaf Whittier's wonderful hymn "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind". And I believe that when I, too, have passed beyond the Jordon and entered that land where all is love, she shall be there to meet me and she shall understand me and in that first embrace all shall be made right. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel or so the book of Proverbs tells us. How cruel are those mercies which forbid the duty of the executioner! How wicked are those who would lock me away for decades and how ironic that they leave me in this torment for the sake of their own worthless purity. Don't they realize that God commanded death for the murderer because God is merciful and knows what lies beyond death? But they know nothing of the sort. Their ethic is not transcribed by faith. Better, oh, much better, to descend upon that wooden chair and ride the lightning to God. But I can bear these decades for I know that at the end she will be waiting and I can take her hands and, young again, forever young, the two of us will walk away among the marvelous flowers of the sky into the rippling wind of a new and eternal morning. And Christ himself will pronounce the benediction. It is too bad that we could not enjoy the dawning of that promise during our lives here, that we could not refract through our joyful union a beam of that heavenly light into this ruined and tormented world, but our failure is not fatal. The consumation of the dream is as sure as the resurrection of our Lord. She shall be there for I have claimed her. She opened her door to me on the same night the police shut me behind theirs and in the complement of that

opening and closing the promise has been sealed. I have staked my claim, staked it with a knife. She shall enjoy me and she could have enjoyed me sooner had she listened to my poem. Why did she retreat into such inhuman silence? Could she not have even told me that she had read it and like it? I know she could not have been indifferent. Was she perhaps confused? But she has repented now as she waits for me even as I wait for her. What wonderful joy when all this waiting shall end! But here is the poem, social worker with your theories of shared guilt and social engineering, here is the poem of the victim. I call it "Estoy Solo".

I am a shadow scattered in stone,
 Solitude, my wife and my own,
 Flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone.
 Estoy solo. I am alone.

I am the sum of all I am taught.
 I am dust in halos of thought.
 I am a moth a candle has caught.
 Estoy solo. I am alone.

I am a fly in amber, a gem.
 I am echos of requiem.
 I am a bud on a severed stem.
 Estoy solo. I am alone.

I am a cock grown hoarse for the sun.
 I am a thing others have done.
 I am a room which shelters no one.
 Estoy solo. I am alone.

I am a tree the forest obscures,
 Freckled with bosky paramours.
 I am surrendered; thus I am yours.
 Estoy solo. I am alone.

To you, my social worker dedicated to doing good by redeeming me (and perhaps thereby winning my parole and hence improving the quality of my life) or at least understanding me in order that the imperfections of the community (imperfections which make monsters like me possible) might be corrected, to you my hope for Heaven may seem like so much utopian moonshine. He denies he is a utopian, you may be thinking, but he has his dreams. Whatever its ideological content, you may be cynically thinking, religion remains the opium of the people. But cynic is the Latinized version (cynicus) of the Greek kyōn which also gives us the Latin caninus from which we derive the English canine. It means dog, you bitch, and is a reference to those who lived like dogs because they thought virtue was the highest good. And what is wrong anyway with a little ideological opium? Can the student of history really believe that religion is a soporific? Marx would have done better to call religion the amphetamine of the people. And think what contributions the opium-eaters (men like S.T. Coolridge, A.L. Tennyson, even the evangelical William Wilberforce) have made to our culture. Without a vision the people perish. It is important - essential - that there be a vision. It is less important, at least initially, what the content (pleasure garden, divine city, or worker's state) of that vision is.

But there must be a vision and it must be believed. The individual needs a cause. The community needs an integrative metaphysical system. There must be a basis for agreement. There must be a cause for a cause creates meaning, makes possible the hero. In the name of a cause the people can suffer prodigiously. It is the cause that makes life sacred. Only among the prosperously cushioned, pluralistic and tolerant secularists (who in their paralyzing broad-mindedness have risen above causes) does life, losing its sacred energies, become trivialized, boring. It is only when the vision is lost that suffering is simplified into an ultimate evil and pleasure (understood as immediate gratification of whatever whim teases us) exhalted as the supreme defining principle. What is history seen in such mundane terms but the record of our attempt to escape the futility and pain created by the warp in the natural order we ourselves provoked in our rebellion against God? Such history records not progress but our floundering to escape the consequences of what we have done. It is a quest for power and, insofar as it attempts to neutralize consequences, it is a quest for ultimate power. It was Cain the agriculturalist and metallurgist who, though he had been condemned by God to wander, built the first city. And it was within the context of the urban environment that atheism was born. The city is the quintessential expression of this stage of our cultural development. We call ourselves civilized - city dwellers - as opposed to savages - forest dwellers. Yet how brutalizing and alienating urban life has become! The neurotic city caps the chronicle of our flight from God.

Our naive conceit that the civilized man is educated, that education equals acculturation, reveals not our embrace of truth but our own pathetic belief that our truth is somehow worth preserving. A confrontation with the ancestors in a trip to the museum reveals it all. How odd their beliefs were as they succeeded and endured. How tarnished with obvious non-sense was their view of the world. And how deeply indebted to their non-sense we are!

Even if we stand directly in their tradition we have no certitude that our metaphysics are more coherent and reasonable than theirs. For example, most Christians today believe that John's proclamation that God is love is central to the faith yet how easily we make the verb "is" a synonym for "equals". Hence, God is love becomes God equals love becomes love equals God. In this way those preconceptions of love which we carry to the Scriptures, preconceptions hammered-out in the hard experience of real life, that is in the concretizing of potential, that is in the divinization of contingency, that is via acculturation, in this way our preconceptions create God for us. Theology from below twists the very fabric of heaven. It was not we who planted the Garden, it was we who spoiled it. It is not through the progress of history that the City of God will emerge. That City descends from Heaven. It is given to us not built by us. And therein we discover the reasons for our frustration with history.

There is only us and history and God.

There is the thing in God, the is that is,
 And there is what we think about the thing,
 The interplay of thought and thing,
 That is, the is we shape as it shapes us.
 The two, the thought and thing, are not the same
 And yet not so dissimilar.
 One swings moon-like upon the other.
 What seems conceals what is. Of this I'm sure
 But certainty is small, quick, hard to catch,
 Harder still to hold for is is protean.
 If one cannot conceive the A,
 A=A is only an abstraction.
 Significance I grasp but being vanishes
 Or changes what it is within a universal constant change.
 I feel it and I see it in my bones.
 I feel the present as a fragment.
 The past is shard and my imagination.
 The future is concealed like that which seems.
 Sometimes I think I am not even me nor have I ever been.
 What fickle grounds I have to say what is.
 Judgment is crushed between uncertainty and ignorance.
 "Thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" prove flexible to my desire.
 "Love God and love thy neighbor as theyself" provoked a foolish
 question from a smaller world; who is my neighbor?
 We know the man today. He lives with us on this small rock.
 We do not need to know his name because we know his need.
 We know his need because we feel his need.
 We feel his need for it is our need.
 And here we have a name to love.
 We have a name but do not know where we should point it.

This is one of the reasons I do not believe in that abstraction

"the people". I don't believe "the people" really exists. "The people" is only a bid for power, a democratic perversion which the imperial Alexander (the West's first ideological conqueror) bequeathed to history. It is a method of impressing a face on the political process. The political process is the actualization of power and, as Spinoza the pantheist said, power is the ultimate attribute of God. Hence the voice of the people as they seek to align themselves behind this or that political slogan becomes the voice of God. We dichotomize and then tell God to choose. We limit our options, strive to persuade ourselves, and then vote on the truth. God's choice wins.

Yet the Jews and their crucified (or still anticipated) Messiah (Christos, the annointed one) contr dict the imperial assertion that success is evidence of God's blessing. Oh, yes, there is an Israel today but it is a secular democratic state that defends its existence through its special relationship with the Pentagon rather than by prayer. The Almighty of history was not to be relyed upon for he was as quick to tear down the temple as he was to build it up. But the Pentagon; there is a force one can understand, commune with, trust.

The divine right of kings was pilloried on those revolts that began with the murder of Charles I in Britian (the deed was conceived at a Baptist prayer meeting and would no doubt have enjoyed the blessing of John Knox using Ehud as his exemplar) and became a world-

consuming conflagration in the hands of the French regicides. It was Cromwell and Napoleon who prefigured our modern democracies even as it was Alexander who introduced the idea to the world.

Vox populi; vox Dei; the Urim and Thummim of the ballot box. Having consulted with and polled his desert hord , Moses ascends Mt. Sinai to ask God to ratify their decision.

Conflict rests on partial truths and voting is the structuring of conflict, the ego's demand for supreme authority, the quest for personal power. Every child is supposed to want to be President. Hence "the people" becomes a seductive "we". "We" have chosen this course of action. "We" have elected this leader. And such a "we" whispers "you and I" are responsible, have a personal stake in this, must co-operate.

Except that if I had my choice, this is certainly not what I'd be doing with my time.

"The people" is a chimera, a Judas goat, leading us into the unknown where, if we become fearful, a swig from the populist bottle fortifies us. Far better that we should rely upon the crowd than upon our own resources (which are society's gifts to us anyway). Two heads are better than one; they can argue. Our desire for union with the godhead, our quest for a sense of personal power have wed politics and religion. Politics has become religion.

Yet on the surface of it Christ's teaching, his ethical message, is essentially a message of passivity; turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, judge not lest ye be judged, take no thought for

tommorrow, do not worry about what you shall eat or wear, resist not evil but overcome evil with good. To overcome evil with good we must act but we act by turning the other cheek, walking the extra mile. If someone asks for our coat, we are to relinquish our cloak as well. We are not to insist upon or defend our rights. This is because God's ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts. And it is God's purposes not ours which are to be accomplished. The logos expressing itself in the world is the logos of agape and if we want to be part of its purposes, we must be made new, must become God's passive instruments. It is God's will we are to seek and not our own. It is not we who live but Christ in us. It is this loss of ourselves, this surrender, that is the crucified life. But we surrender not to fate but to providence. Our passivity is an expression of our faith and our faith lies, at least in part, in our confidence that death, that most passive of states, has been overcome by the Lord. (I swear I never loved her more than I did while I waited for the police, my arm around her limp and cooling shoulders.)

I say on the surface Christ's teaching is an admonition to passivity but that is only on the surface for beneath such deceptive calm we are born by a powerful current: Christ's teaching is a lesson in love. Resist not evil but overcome evil with good, that is the key. It is this love, this loss of self, that terminates the power struggle of our political existence and provides a new dynamism for our lives. We act under the spur of love and are

assured that our deeds become part of that process the Good Shepherd is guiding and that we, his sheep, are forgiven. What joy and confidence there is in such certainty. Is it any wonder that Christianity is the religion which sings? The battle is not ours to fight, the battle has been won...by Him. It is only for us to enjoy the fruits of his victory.

In an earlier world where ontological concerns predominated, it was enough simply to be. One's significance was founded in existence itself and the divinely ordained role one played in the community into which one was born. The universe was historyless, static. Opposites complimented, dominated by space conceived in terms of the vertical. Such a world had dropped perfect in all its parts from the lips of God. But in today's evolving world where teleological concerns predominate, where history is the final justifier, where we seek dynamic results, where opposites resolve themselves into new truths, where reality is conceived in terms of a horizontal time line, power is what is demanded. We are proscribed by dates, remembered for our deeds. It is no longer enough to be: we must do. The act defines us (a man is what a man does) but the deed once done becomes part of a greater and ambiguous social reality. The act is never completed, never achieves ontological wholeness. It is never itself, it is always becoming something else. And it may generate consequences unforeseen. It is the paradox of technology that most of us feel we can do so much and in fact achieve so little. It is our peculiar frustration that we

are expected to act as though in action we apprehended cosmic principles while at the same time we are denied the ability to control the consequences of our actions or to define their meaning. Such tensions at this period of history can only be resolved on the subjective level. Let each man be persuaded in his own heart and let each do what is right in his own eyes. The Apostle and the author of the book of Judges have kissed each other. And in their kiss I discover freedom, the freedom to discern a private meaning for my existence, and power, the power to act. Ofcourse this is not precisely why I killed her, though power was part of the reason, that and my desire to secure my future with her.

Perhaps I should have killed myself after I murder her. I certainly gave a great deal of thought to the option of a murder/suicide, thought of it as a complete emptying ourselves before God, even considered the possiblity of a suicide pact though I knew when I emerged from my fantasies that she was not sufficently enlightened by the faith to join me in such a resolution. Nor did she love me enough. Indeed, I doubted that she loved me at all. I could have justified a suicide scripturally. After all, Samson, who the author of Hebrews in the eleventh chapter of that magnificent book lists among the faithful, brought the building down on his own head, slaying more Philistines in that one act than he killed in his whole life (and he had killed a thousand once with the jaw bone of an ass). And Saul, who David called the Lord's annointed, lovely and pleasent in life, the beauty of Israel, fell upon his sword.

But these were suicides in the extremes of battle. They found their vindication in circumstances.

I could have appealed to the example of Christ who willed his own death upon the cross but what he did was part of a larger redemptive movement, part of a struggle to vanquish death by one who had the power both to lay down his life and take it up again. That power did not apply to me. Therefore his example (as is so often the case and for that very reason) did not apply to me. Killing her would achieve good for both her and me but I could discover no good (except the escape of suffering - and suffering purifies us) in suicide. I resolved therefore to confess the deed and allow justice to take its course. It was the example of Judas which stayed my hand. Not that I believe he was condemned for his suicide. It was his betrayal of Christ for money, his profit from the sale of innocent blood, that was the reason for his perdition, at least in the immediate sense. Judas was like Esau; he sold his birthright and repented in tears. He even did Esau one better for though Esau tried to put the best face on things and made such peace with Jacob as he could, Judas, to show how truly he despaired, followed his master to Hell. The only trouble was that he heard nothing there he hadn't heard before. No, Judas was a devil who revealed his condemnation in his suicide. He despaired because he doubted the goodness of God. And he was correct. God had singled him out as the son of perdition.

But Moses, whose face shown from being in the presence of the

Lord, was a murderer. And there is no evidence that Moses ever repented for killing the Egyptian. I, like Moses, have taken another's life and after I did so, I took off my shoes. In fact, I've done Moses one better for Moses did not love the man he killed and he tried to conceal the deed but I love the woman I slew and have openly proclaimed the deed. I even rejoice in it! If Christians can kill one another in the pursuance of limited mundane policies for secular states and do so in confidence that God will forgive them or choose sides among them (petitioned by the prayers of various churches) and even approve the slaughter, am I really to believe that God is angry with me because I secured the future of my love by using a knife? If God blessed the dead at Verdun, he will surely bless me.

What provoked Christ's anger, anyway, Christ who judged only as he saw his Father in Heaven judge? We might believe in a Manichaean way that he was furious with demons and perhaps he was. Luther certainly thought so. But there is no specific statement in Scripture that demons made him angry. He commanded them and conquered them but it is certainly possible to command and conquer that which does not provoke one's anger. He even showed a legion of demons mercy once by allowing them to go into a herd of swine (though ofcourse that might have been an object lesson for our sake). There are however specific statements that the Pharisees' hardness of heart made him angry, particularly when that hardness of heart was manifest in their understanding and application of the Law. Hence,

it is reasonable to infer that hardness of heart provokes Christ to anger. Also his actions toward the money-changers in the temple appear to be the actions of an angry man. Apparently the money-changers were cheating those who had come to purchase sacrifices for Christ judged the money-changers guilty of theft. Now the Pharisees were a religious/political party which had developed under the Hasmonaeans. The money-changers had, under the provision of Deuteronomy 14:24-26, been instituted as a convenience. But the Law itself made stipulations for neither group. Those men had attempted to usurp authority under the Law and convert that Law, which God had intended to reveal the divine standard for guilt, into a vehicle of special privileges. This corruption of the Law seems to have made Christ very angry. His response to correct this situation was to free us from the Law.

I anticipate your objection. It is a classic one. You will tell me that this freedom does not refer to the moral law. The moral law, you will argue, is still in effect. Christ fulfills the ceremonial law. The civil law is applicable only in a theocratic state. But the moral law is still in force and can be obeyed through the power we receive when we profess the faith. It is only as believing Christians that we can be freed to obey the moral law not freed from the eternal consequences of failing to obey it.

To answer your objection I make two points. First, we are to ask the Father daily for our bread which means, I suppose, that we are to pray the Lord's prayer daily. Yet in that prayer, in the

very next line, we are to ask forgiveness for our sins - which suggests to me that we sin daily. Where, then, is this power of perfect obedience? Jesus, when asked by his followers for an example of prayer, did not tell them to give thanks for their physical and spiritual perfections. He told them to beg daily for food and forgiveness.

My second argument comes from the Law itself. There is no division of the Law into ceremonial, civil, or moral parts. The Law does not assume a society with a sacred and secular aspect. The Law is a single code of ethics regulating all areas of life in a theocratic state. The case of Israel under the Law was so unique that Josephus, writing the history of his people from a first century perspective, had to coin the word theocracy to describe it. It is this Law, this entire Law, Christ claims to fulfill and it is from the penalties of this entire Law that he frees us. To claim, as some do, that Christ has fulfilled the ceremonial side of the Law, that the civil regulations no longer apply because we are not under a theocracy, but that the moral law is still binding is to divide the Law by introducing secular assumptions into the application of that Law, assumptions which are quite alien to its original spirit and intent.

The Law in its original terms had been given not to all people for all time but to a particular people at a specific period of history. These people had been chosen by God and received promises from God centuries before the Law was revealed to them. When revealed,

the Law defined the specific terms of a covenant relationship between God and those people, a relationship effecting the occupation of land to which God was leading them and which God had promised their forefathers. In this covenant God expresses his requirement that those who possess the land be holy and he defines the terms of their holiness: it means separate and transcends strictly moral categories. If the people fulfill the terms of that Law, they will be blessed. If they fail to fulfill those terms, they will be cursed. Chapter twenty-six of Leviticus and twenty-seven and twenty-eight of Deuteronomy are quite clear about the conditions of this blessing and cursing. Furthermore, the blessing or the curse falls upon the people as a single entity, not primarily upon individuals and certainly not upon the mass of humankind.

Under the terms of the Law graven images depicting deity are forbidden (Ex. 24,4). The reason lies in God's character. God is jealous and will tolerate no rivals. To worship an image, even though that image may at some level be understood to depict God and not itself be divine, is to worship something other than God. However, both the tabernacle and the temple where people bowed down to worship were filled, at God's direction, with graven images. Also the incarnation was to provide Christians with a powerful argument for employing depictions of divinity in their acts of worship.

Under the terms of the Law the Sabbath (Saturday) is to be strictly observed. The reason is found in the nature of the created order itself. God made the world in six days and rested on

the seventh. Augustine interprets this resting as receiving praise. Hence, we are to honor the Sabbath. Those who disobey this regulation are to be put to death (Ex. 31:14-15; 35:2; Num. 15:32-36). There is no perscription for mercy, no sacrifice to atone for the sinner's guilt. There is only the penalty: death. Yet one of the first things that the primative church, freed from the Law, did was to re-define the Sabbath. It changed the Sabbath to Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection, and, since the Roman world had no tradition of putting Sunday aside as a day of rest, the church allowed its members to work on that day.

Under the terms of the Law one was to be killed for cursing one's mother or father (Ex. 21:17). If an ox was known to be dangerous and the owner allowed the ox to get out and the ox killed someone, the owner of the ox was to be put to death (Ex. 21:29). Witchcraft was punishable by death (Ex. 22:18), death by stoning according to Leviticus 20:27. Intercourse with animals was to be punished by death (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 20:15-16). To sacrifice to any God but the Lord (and by implication to worship any other god) was punishable by death (Ex. 22:20). The difficulties of enforcing this prohibition in a pluralistic society which guarantees religious freedom are evident. But religious tolerance is not a characteristic of a theocratic state. Adultery was to be punished by putting the guilty parties to death (Lev. 20:10). Nothing in the Law is said about their being put to death by those who had never sinned. When Jesus gave his judgment (John 8:7) he added that restriction to remind

the Pharisees and teachers of the Law that they had no legal authority under the terms of the Law to carry out its sentence. Homosexuality was to be punished by death (Lev. 20:13). Blasphemy was punishable by death (Lev. 24:16). There is nothing here about blasphemy of the Father and the Son being forgivable but blasphemy of the Holy Spirit being unforgivable. It is blasphemy alone which is punishable by death. False prophets are to be put to death (Deu. 13:5; 18:20). Indeed, anyone, even the mother you were forbidden under pain of death to curse, anyone who entices you to worship false gods is to be put to death (Deu. 13:8-9). Stubborn sons, that is those who are drunkards and gluttons, are to be put to death by stoning (Deu. 21:18-21) and a girl never married before if she was found on her wedding night not to be a virgin was to be put to death (Deu. 22:20-21; 23-24). Rape is also to be punished by death (Deu. 22:25-27). Again, there is no sacrifice prescribed for these sins, no mercy to be shown. Those who are guilty are to be put to death. To allow them to live is to violate the Law.

While violations of the civil aspects of the Law were usually rectified by compensation requirements where value was assessed and indemnities paid, violations of the ceremonial and moral aspects of the Law frequently demanded the death penalty. God was to be adored in specific ways and violations of that norm were considered very serious. How peculiar it would be if the death of Christ and the new covenant sealed in his blood freed us from the theocratic state,

satisfied the ceremonial requirements of the old covenant, but still left us bound to the fatal consequences of moral violations, and how doubly odd when one realizes that those distinctions (ceremonial, civil, and moral) reflect our later interpretations and not the Law as it was originally given and when one remembers that Christ claimed to fulfill the whole Law.

The Biblical Law is in fact an instrument of oppression, an instrument of death which employs fear to enforce conformity. Believers are free of it and I for one am grateful. Let those Christian Reconstructionists like R.J. Rushdoony or Gary North who would use the Law to slice the Gordian knot of our post-Enlightenment dilemmas imagine theocracies as they will. It is orthodoxy not orthopraxy that distinguishes the Christian from the Moslem and Jew. The Christian emphasis on ethics was a secondary development, a defense in the Roman era when new religions were outlawed, a witness to pagans when their own ethical systems were degraded, a starting point in societies converted to the faith and freed from their traditional prohibitions. But the Law is not the central issue of Christianity. If you are looking for ethical systems, look elsewhere. The central issue of Christianity is the salvation provided by Jesus Christ. All else is subordinant to soteriological concerns. Hence our view of the cross fundamentally impacts all other aspects of our faith. And that salvation rests in the authority of Jesus. What we believe about Jesus will ultimately shape what we believe about everything else. Christ claims that

he came to fulfill the Law and to put our relationship with God on an entirely different basis. I believe he accomplished just that.

Whatever else he is, Jesus is not a great moral teacher. The Sermon on the Mount is not a great moral statement. There is nothing ethically profound about the propositions that the poor in spirit, the peacemakers, the meek, and those who mourn are the ones who are truly blessed and this becomes clear when one attempts to adopt these assertions as principles of living and conform to them on this cursed and dying planet. One becomes wretched and miserable and is held in general contempt. This is the blessed existence? Isaiah describes Jesus himself as despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. In fact Christ legitimized suffering. To say that those who suffer are happy is on the surface of it absurd. Such statements deserve to be (and would be) laughed at or, better yet, ignored except for one thing: Jesus is who he says he is and that is why we find such assertions ultimately compelling. Though I am poor in spirit, Jesus, the sorrowful man, assures me that the riches of the spiritual kingdom are mine. Though I am persecuted for righteousness' sake, Jesus, who appeared as one of the meek and lowly before Jews who believed that wealth was God's blessing on the good, tells me that the riches of the spiritual kingdom are mine. But how can it be that one who is poor in spirit, that one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, will enjoy the riches of the spiritual kingdom unless that person is filled? Jesus assures his followers that they will be filled but how can

he be so certain of that unless he himself does the filling?
Though I mourn I shall be comforted. By showing mercy I shall obtain mercy. In the role of peacemaker I shall be called a child of God. But how can Jesus know this unless he is himself the source of blessing? Our recognition of this truth is predicated upon our confession that the one who utters it has ultimate authority. The Sermon on the Mount is not an ethical admonition, it is a claim to authority. Its essence is uncovered in the litany, "You have heard it said but I say to you..." It is the repetition of this phrase throughout the sermon that forces the hearer to ask, "Why should I reject tradition in preference of you?" And it is one's answer to that ultimate question which is definative. What delighted the people, after all, when they heard the sermon was not the wisdom of the speaker, it was that he spoke with authority.

But perhaps, in spite of your having asked that I explain myself to you, you find the explanation tedious and boring. My alienation reveals itself in the sermonizing of a frustrated preacher. "His word is in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot stay." But you do not wish to be hectored by a convicted and admitted murderer or by anybody for that matter. You have your own agenda and perhaps, as you read about the intellectual pilgrimage that finally led me with my secret wedding knife to her door, you grow restless under its burden. Would you prefer to be tantalized with a tale of suspense

(how will he plot the murder? will he succeed in killing her? will he be caught and punished?) or by a description of her desperate struggle (sorry to disappoint you but she struggled not at all so surprised was she) and how it felt to plunge the knife through all that resistant tissue? Would you prefer I describe acts of fornication and violence? Would you rather read of hatred and revenge? Was it not you Paul spoke of when he wrote, "Who knowing the judgement of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:32)? Read the literature of the world in light of that verse. Here is God's moral critique of culture, of the foundation of the educated! What could be a more godless, secular, amoral principle than MGM's motto, "Art for art's sake"? Talk about concupiscence! Did you really think that the lion roaring beneath that slogan is the lion of the tribe of Judah? It is not the passivity of the faithful servant that quickens our pulse and rivets our attention, it is violence and sex. These are the great themes of art. For limited beings like us who covet authority, violence and sex are supreme expressions of power; the power to dominate and control, the power to engender. There are two other great themes, incidentally; the modern chaos of images which represents art's descent into Hell, and the Adamic experience which is pastoral art.

You may believe that I have contradicted myself, that I have, by condemning the moral mucus overgrowing so much of our art, condemned myself - and perhaps I have. But some decay, as the vintners

know, is noble. Issues of the heart are decided in the heart. Samuel Johnson (for whom I have the greatest respect) was simply wrong about good intentions and the road to Hell. We are all on the road to Hell. It is only through our good intentions, through the cleansing of our hearts, that we turn from the wide to the narrow path. Even as the deed of charity may not be what it seems because the heart that planned the deed is corrupt, so the deed of violence is transformed if the perpetrator's heart is pure. And mine was purified by love. I loved and still love her. Without love the marriage bed is defiled. With love any bed is a marriage bed. Without love the golden temple is stripped and gilded with brass. Without love faith itself rings like a gong or clashes like a cymbal. Without love there can be no altruism. With love even murder becomes sweetest charity.

We wear our mask always and unconsciously. It is stretched across our features before we are born. We do not know what lies behind that mask. Kindness may be cruelty, cruelty kindness. What amazes me about the parable of the sheep and the goats is how surprised both groups are. The sheep are as unaware as the goats of their status before God. Neither group knew the significance of what they had done or failed to do. Yet how quick we are in this life to accuse one another and how imaginative in excusing ourselves. It is the nature of love to seek reasons to forgive. That is why our Lord admonishes us to love others as we love our-

selves. Mercy is the quintessential expression of God's righteousness. Contrast in this regard I Samuel 15:22 "to obey is better than sacrifice" with Hosea 6:6 "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" or Matthew 5:48 "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" with Luke 6:36 "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." In these verses obedience and mercy, perfection and mercy are equated. But who would die for an evil man? How distasteful we find God's mercy when it is vouchsafed to others, how sweet when granted us. Our hearts are still under the Law therefore ours is an ethic based on fear, fear motivated by our ability to feel but not to empathize. It is the will to life in each of us that convinces each of us of our essential goodness. Surely it is God's will not only that I should live but that I should live well. And because this is surely God's will, it follows that I must be good. But you by contrast may be quite transparently evil. Hence, it is not at all obvious that you have the right to live or to live well. Surely if God is not angry with you, then God just doesn't care. Such is the mask of the judge, the mask we wear since the Fall, the mask which glazes our features with such harsh light in this dark carnival of cultures.

But in loving her I judged her, judged her worthy of love. I did not intend to love her. I fell, as the saying is. We fall in love, into tumult, even as Adam and Eve fell from their self-contained paradise. Yet eros, though tarnished, still bridges the gap between agape and the involuted self. It is eros which inspires

commitment, it is agape which is commitment's goal. When you are married you are forced always to consider the other - and how wearisome that can be. Hence, marriage is the symbol Christ chooses for his church.

Eros is not chosen,

It is discovered.

It is hidden in the lushness of each of us,
Like a secret land of rocks and starlight,
Like a desert brimmed with stars.

Eros is not charitable,

It is replication

Spun from and feeding on the sun.
How can we sustain,
How can we contain such power?

Its urgency seeks a culmination
In expressions of patterned change
Striving against collapse,
In expressions of passion and spasm
That dig tomorrow out of us
And leave us hollow as a tear.

It is as we discover this night within us,

It is as we lie empty and alone,

Gripped by the heavy judgment of our potential,
That we long to forge a sacred pledge
Of relationships exclusive
And predicated upon some simplicity of will.

Eros is not honest,

It promises fidelity, companionship,
Heroic adoration untransformed.
But this is shadowland.
This is ancient sparkling darkness
For all that we will be is fire
That springs from and is consumed in each burning moment.

I have held you in that moment
When you whispered, "Do not forget me."

Where I am now you are not.
Yet you remain forever in the passion of my memory
And in this solemn and somber silence
I discover myself pledging to that shadow which you left,
"I will not forget you."
And this I can say because
I know that I shall never forget you.

Of course she did not love me, would not marry me, would not
(or could not) accept my gift to her of myself. Yet we were
agreed on the proper object of our affections: I longed to serve
her and she longed to serve her. How evil is this autonomy which
sees freedom as service to the self! She was evil. There is no-
thing unusual in that. We are all evil. But I freed her from her
evil and have dedicated the rest of my life here to her memory.
Because she would not marry me, she could not truly live. And be-
cause she could not truly live, I had to set her free to live.
Yet, though I long to join her in her suddenly happy life, suicide
was denied me. So I chose prison. It is the monastery where I

wait. She was to me a crucifixion of what I am. I was to her an affirmation of what she thought she was (and what I longed for her to be). I delighted in her and she was pleased and a little flattered, no more than that. What I did in her apartment was not murder, it was rescue. I freed her from herself, forced her to confront divinity, and shielded her with my prayers.

It may be that I love her imperfectly. So be it. What is important is that I love her. Perfection, as Paul tells us in I Corinthians Chapter 13, the great chapter on love, is yet to come. I await it. I have said that marriage is the symbol Christ chose for his church. Let us examine the church, that one institution on this earth which acknowledges Jesus as her Lord, to see what we can learn about this heavenly union. What is it to be married and yet love imperfectly?

Because I am a religious man I long for what is real. I do not seek the conditioned convention but the invariant ultimate. Hence, my highest loyalties are claimed by Jesus Christ through his church. Heaven and earth will pass away but the church will endure throughout and beyond the ages. Yet it is the church which reveals in her unity and division both our hope and our tragedy. It is the very confidence we have in our faith that leads us to rend the institutional expression of that faith. She is murdered by our philosophies, fossilized in the tombs of polity, yet ever reborn and reigning triumphant in heaven. She witnesses both to our fractiousness and our desire to obey. She is the fold where

the unholy holy have gathered. It is in the church, as Peter tells us, where the judgment of God begins. Here is both fire and balm.

In his book The Idea of the Holy, Prof. Otto writes that God as revealed in the New Testament is more, not less, holy than God as revealed in the Old. In defending his position he refers to the penalty for sin under both covenants. Penalties other than death were assessed for sins committed under the Old Covenant but under the New all sin is condemned as worthy of death. I admit the truth of Prof. Otto's observation and would like to develop its implications.

We live in a world dominated by moral relativity. This is reflected in those judgments we express using terms like 'better' and 'worse'. But in the divine economy there is only obedience and disobedience, and obedience to be acceptable to God (i.e. to glorify God) must be perfect. It is this requirement of perfect obedience which is assumed (or revealed) in the New Testament. And it is in the context of Old Testament millennial promises that New Testament perfect obedience takes on its peculiar significance for we are assured that in the world to come God's will shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven, that is, perfectly. That such obedience is in fact possible is one of the important implications of the incarnation. However, the problem with the world in which we find ourselves currently is its imperfect conformity moment by moment to the divine will. This quality of universal imperfect obedience, a problem which traces its origins to a single

act of self-centered willfulness among created beings, is both sin and a divine judgment upon sin and it is this dominion of self-centered willfulness and God's judgment upon that willfulness which shall be destroyed before the new creation becomes an experienced reality. It is the millennial hope and the promise of a restored creation which necessitate the New Testament's condemnation of all sin as worthy of death. Actions are not better or worse, they are perfectly obedient or else they are disobedient, and disobedience, even of the smallest kind, will be destroyed. This expectation is the joy of the redeemed and the terror of the lost.

Disobedience has traditionally been conceived as an expression of two interrelated possibilities; misbelief and misbehavior. Both being imperfections will be eliminated in the new creation where God will be glorified and we will know even as we are known but within the confines of our tradition misconceptions are considered more deadly than misbehavior. There are two reasons for this. The first reason involves the insidious nature of misbelieving. Experience and reason within cultural paradigms provide the structures for most of our beliefs but cultural paradigms may express positions more or less true. Experience is always partial and reason, left to itself, has been the source of illusions which have proven both powerful and enduring. Hence, misbelieving, though not in conformity with God's will, may not of itself be willful. Few of us willfully and knowingly choose to believe a lie. By contrast, misbehavior is generally willful. Many of us willfully and knowingly choose

to act as though we believed a lie. Hence, misbehavior is more easily revealed and corrected than is misbelief.

Christianity has always had the highest regard for orthodoxy, that is right belief. Of course it may be argued that Christianity is loyalty to the person Jesus rather than conviction concerning a certain set of propositions about Jesus but we are creatures of this world and the world is such that we know people by knowing about that part of them that goes beyond their physical appearance, nationality, or dates of birth and death. We know them by knowing something about their personality, by knowing something about that part of them which cannot be seen. It is this knowledge which commands our loyalty (unless, of course, that loyalty is coerced, unless we are dragged kicking and screaming into the kingdom) and it is a property of this knowledge that it can be expressed, at least in part, by propositions. We say, "He is a good man. He is a kind man. He is a truthful man. He is a patient man." Should we discover ourselves mistaken concerning these propositions, our loyalty is undermined and the more mistaken we discover ourselves to have been, the less loyalty the one we thought we loved can claim. Marriage is a revelation and disappointment is the litany of divorce. Hence, though it is not untrue to say that Christianity expresses loyalty to Jesus, such a claim hardly exhausts the meaning of our faith. We are loyal to Jesus but it is to a Jesus we know, a Jesus we can in part define. It is not untrue to say that we are loyal to a Jew born in first century Palestine but it is

scarcely the whole story. We not only follow Jesus, we believe things about him. And herein lies the risk (admittedly as conceived in faith but none-the-less a risk): we believe we are sinners forgiven by God in virtue of our belief in or about Jesus but that belief in or about Jesus may itself be misconceived, that is sinful. Thus, either we must believe perfectly to be forgiven for actions and other conceits which are imperfect or else God (who is, after all, the offended party) chooses to forgive us for our sins because we have a belief in or about Jesus which is itself sinful.

Traditionally the faithful have denied the possibility of salvation through sinful belief and defended the importance of perfect belief, that is belief which is not exhaustive but which is construed in a specific way. It is this conviction that lies behind the identification and condemnation of heresy. And herein lies the second reason that the faithful have traditionally considered misbelief to be more deadly than misbehavior; it has been the position of the church that while it is true that God, through one's belief in Jesus, will forgive both one's misconceptions and one's misdeeds, one must, to be the beneficiary of God forgiveness, either belong to the orthodox community or believe the orthodox position concerning Jesus or both. And it is precisely here, as seen against the background of a faith that values orthodoxy, that we confront that tremendous dilemma created by pluralism. Ours is a fractured community, a community which cannot agree among its own members (that is those who claim to be participants in the salvation offered by

the Christ who prayed to the Father for unity among his followers) on questions of polity, morality, or even Christology. Indeed, there is nothing new about these divisions. Our disagreements reach all the way back to the apostles.

This pluralism casts the gravest doubt upon the authenticity of that salvation we hope is ours. It is evidence of an uncertainty that, if we reflect upon it, is most unsettling. If pluralism in the world is an evidence of its corruption, how are we to understand pluralism in the church? In the West prior to the sixteenth century the church was, by legitimizing various monastic traditions, able to incorporate pluralism within its broader unity but after the Reformation this confidence in the institutional church was lost. In its stead Protestants substituted Scripture and/or predestination.

The church, the Bible, the will of God. The church divided, the nature of Biblical truth uncertain, the will of God secret in many particulars. The dust of the ages has settled in the empty sepulchre.

Tragedy is; it does not change what is.
 It brings to triumph no perfection.
 It bites and blights and polishes a path for coming things.
 It is the strange work of the King of kings.
 Here seem and whirl are kings. Within this covered realm
 They govern, overrule, and overwhelm.
 There is a time for every purpose under heaven.

Tragedy is; it does not change what is.

It is because there is no reciprocity;
 Because one crime may move eternity;
 Because my word betrays the thought I have,
 Achieving less or more; because I might ignore
 (Chose to ignore) that vital instant when the good is given.
 Intent is mine; the act belongs to heaven.

Tragedy is; it does not change what is.
 It is a treachery of purpose.
 The cosmos was not summoned and left void.
 It is profane, this suffering to no point
 Under the chronic, fretting, lingering probe of tragedy.
 Its fingers wear the worlds like rings; it reaches out.
 We are remote, yet it has found us here.

Tragedy is; it does not change what is.
 Beyond our vast and sparkling halls of curving dawn
 There spins another splendid star (perhaps),
 Another thermal nuclear indifferent eye
 Through ochre twilight in a smouldering sky
 Beaming upon a butchered blasted globe
 Where theriomorphic knowledge was and made no difference.

I have committed a crime as legally defined but have I outraged the essential nature of things? Have I acted on and believed the moral equivalent of $2 + 2 = 3$ or A is not A ? Or have I merely insisted on misspelling a word? Does the universe express moral realities which we discover or which were revealed to us or did we come over many thousands of years to a general consensus based on such cultural goals as we considered desirable about what con-

stitutes proper behavior? Be it karma, code, or agape, or the near universal perception that blood sacrifice is required to correct imbalances in the sacred order, is there a moral nature intrinsic to the universe or do moral systems merely reflect something temporary and culturally specific? Are ethics absolute and universal? Can there be a mathematics of morality?

The comparison of morality and mathematics is very much to the point here. Because we generally condemn lies and deception as immoral, truth and morality are closely associated in our minds and truth can be apprehended within the context of two extremes. On the one hand, there is the truth of mathematics, the truth, for example, that the circumference of a circle is equal to pi times the radius of that circle squared. This is always and forever true regardless of the size of the circle, the nature of triangles, or the philosophical prejudices of the mathematician. Before the universe existed, during the period of its existence, and after stars have collapsed the circumference of a circle will be the same.

On the other hand, there is the truth of analogy, the truth we point at indirectly when we say that one thing is very like another. The poet does not lie when he says that night came like a flashing tide but the truth he expresses calls us to participate in it. We must strive after its meaning. It demands a creative response from us. Unlike the truth of mathematics, the truth of poetry is not a naked fact; it is a cloak for something greater.

It needs to be interpreted.

Moral truth falls between these two extremes. My question is: toward which of these two extremes does moral truth most closely approach? For example, is the injunction "Thou shalt not commit adultery" always and forever true like the truth about the circumference of a circle or does its meaning and significance change according to the circumstances of one's culture and one's private universe?

The question of God's revelation is irrelevant here since God as the source of all truth can express truth in all ways. The issues of salvation are only indirectly relevant since on the one hand, if we must work out our salvation in accordance to a certain set of moral laws, we must be sure we have understood and applied those laws aright (which is the problem) and, on the other hand, the proposition that I am saved by a gracious act of God apart from anything I do conspires to undermine God's ethical relevance. What really counts, I think, is the nature of God's relationship to the universe. Does evil have an ontological dimension? Can God's purposes be frustrated? Is there the possibility of tragedy? This last question is extremely important, I think, for significant moral action requires the possibility of tragedy. If deity's purposes cannot be frustrated, then my actions, having no particular bearing on the culmination of events, are devoid of ultimate significance. For my actions to have moral significance the possibility that I can frustrate the purposes of deity must

remain open to me. But a deity whose purposes could be frustrated could claim no ultimacy. Such a deity could not guarantee control of natural or historical events. Such a deity could be surprised and disappointed. Such a deity could not make unconditional promises. Indeed, such a deity would be a conditioned being, evolving and dependent, a deity forever struggling and never certain of prevailing. In fact, to affirm such a deity is to plunge into the morass of polytheism. The demand to be able to attain to significant moral action is the demand to be godlike. It is this very demand which awakens revolt, springs the trap of tragedy, and inspires the descent of God. And it is for this reason that Christianity denies the possibility of tragedy, affirms that all things work together for good for those who believe. For Christians there can be no possibility for significant moral action. There can only be the possibility of the redemptive act of God and against the backdrop of this redemptive act the universe ceases to make moral sense. This is not to say that there are no laws or even to say that there are no divine laws. It is rather to say that the continuing possibility of God's creative action in the world cancels the consequences of those laws. And what are laws which can enforce no consequences? Morality flounders on the miraculous!

My society in pursuit of its own purposes can make claims upon me. The body politic can demand a limited conformity to certain rules and regulations. But the authority is conditioned. I admit that I have violated the laws of my culture but I have done

nothing, indeed I can do nothing, to frustrate the purposes of God. In moral terms it is largely a matter of indifference whether or not God exists. The riddle of life does not revolve around a moral code. The key to the riddle of life is love. And as I have constantly averred I have expressed my love for her and secured her in that love. I have done nothing ultimately wrong and in the judgment of eternity I am justified. Anyway, it was time for her to die for has not God numbered our days? I was only an agent like an accident or a disease to bring to a close her predestined span.

Of course taking her life in that way was not my first choice. I would have much preferred to take her life at a different kind of alter before a minister other than death and not in solitude and surprise but with happy planning and before a joyous crowd, to mingle her life with mine. But she was, as I have told you, non-responsive. My attentions flattered her a little, nothing more. Of course I was far too discreet to embarrass her in front of our co-workers. Impetuosity would have cost us too much. I am sure that apart from her no one at the office knew of my feelings for her. The thorn bush that was my passion burned in the fire of God but remained unconsumed. I stood before it and was instructed. My awareness of her grew, blossomed with the crimson buds of hope, and would not be disappointed. Even as the frustrations of overcrowding transform the grasshopper into the locust, so the surrender to her that was my love became in time a resolution to murder. I needed to adore her and for that reason I needed to possess her.

I could not bear the thought of her spending even this brief life with another. How well our ancestors chose when they selected the rose as a symbol of love. The appropriateness of the emblem suggests to me that we are all the same under the skin. The varieties of love are undoubtedly experienced in individual ways but the emotion itself is drawn from a deep well of commonality. When I say that I am in love, I am not saying something purely private. I expect that you can empathize to some extent with me. And our agreement that the rose with its twining beauty and tangle of daggers represents one of the best symbols for what I am describing reassures me that in fact you can empathize to some degree. And if you can understand to some extent the feelings I have, you can recognize to some extent the murderer in yourself. What is feminism, after all, but vaginal chauvinism? We share a great deal as human beings and what we share goes far deeper than the similar patterns provided for us by our shared cultural experience. It is woven into our genes and is part of our flawed spiritual heritage. Despite the plurality of our aesthetic and moral sensibilities, we are under the same judgment by the same Lord, we are seduced by the same devil, and are all offered the same cross of salvation. We share a great deal as human beings. The saint and the satan are meshed within us. The same hand heals and harms, steals and bestows. You and I both know that in your attempt to understand me you will come to understand yourself better, yet how could that be if, when looking at me, you did not see the expression of a possibility

within yourself? I love her and I think you can understand that. But she rejected the possibilities I offered her. I had not asked to fall in love with her but once that love sprang up it grew like the river flowing from the restored temple Ezekiel described. It grew from within itself like a miracle and would not be stayed. Its power was relentless and where it would have nurtured and watered it burst forth in destruction. Crenelated, churning a sable butter, immense as the plains they ravage, tremendous as the sky, like whickering dragons, our love storms rumble out of their polar and Occidental nativities. Always awaited, always unexpected, inexorable, mitered in lightning, robed in purple and black, they thunder our vulnerability and imperially and decisively brush away our pretensions in the flotsam of our Jamestowns. We plow, we sow, we cultivate but the storm sneers and claims the harvest as its own. We are children struggling to dam the causeways with broken toys.

The bush that burned would not be consumed because it was constantly renewed. It flourished with every watering glimpse of her. Inside I shown with ardor/adore/adder but I kept my face veiled before the people. Then finally the land was cleansed for all was swept away. That is the method of love. When Moses cast his staff upon the ground it was transformed into a serpent and the staff is the symbol of a loving God's chastisement. Love is a dangerous creativity. It discovers us and molds us by ravishing

us. It kisses and claws. Love is the great inversion, the finely tempered alloy of angry joy, the pit into which we fall and from which, once we have fallen, we judge all else as though we stood on the mountain of God. Love draws its purity from multiple sources and fractures the rock from which it springs. And that rock is the human heart. She thought when I stabbed her that I was going to embrace her and the exasperation in her eyes when she stepped back was answered by the sadness and resolution in my own. Yet I knew that our parting would be a brief one and that when we were joined in that death which is a greater life, our union would resonate with divine harmonies. I love her. I love her. I never asked to love her, I simply discovered that I did. And having made that discovery all else paled before the future that had to be either one way or the other. She disrupted my life completely. Was I not, am I not now, will I not be tomorrow her victim? I love her. I think you can understand that.

Love, like hate, is a dependent emotion. It cannot exist without an object. John's statement that God is love implies diversity within the godhead. A simple unity can love nothing, cannot even be aware of itself. How then could a simple unity create? If love is the fundamental reality, God must be triune for there must be both object and subject and the love between them must also be God. Which means that love and hate, though opposites, are not equal. It is Manichaeian to insist that opposites must be equal. If God is love, he cannot hate himself. But love can hate, it can hate that

Which attempts to frustrate love. It can hate evil. It can hate its adversaries. It can even hate that which the beloved does. Hell exists because God is love. Jesus came to die because God is love.

There are two things very peculiar about human existence. The first is that we believe in God. The second is that we believe in God. To imagine the existence of a powerful and invisible being who created the world, is involved in its processes, and must be appeased in some way is not an obvious solution to the problem of existence. Indeed, the assumption that such a being exists multiplies our ethical and philosophical dilemmas. Yet human beings, so far as we can tell, did not begin as atheists. Atheists arrived late on the scene and have not, until recently, commanded a very wide audience. Secularism, that interpretive principle that is essentially ungodly and reduces everything to the level of the trivial, has only lately seemed credible. Across the ancient world every people that we know of bowed before some concept of deity. Even the Neanderthals, as the Shanidar burial cave in Iraq has revealed, laid their dead to rest amid bouquets of flowers and while this does not prove to us that they bowed, it does suggest that they wept and hoped.

Now this belief in God is very strange. Indeed, it is so strange that the atheists have been forced to invent all manner of explanations to account for it. God, they have hypothesized, is our objectification of the ideal man, our personification of

the great mystery, a form of wish fulfillment, and so on. But are these explanations credible? Are we to believe that the threat of eternal punishment by an outraged deity is wish fulfillment? Are we to believe that people massed for war against one another confident that the great mystery personified was leading them? Did our ancestors believe that the ideal human was so ferocious as to demand the lives of their children at his burning altar? Look into your heart. On those secret occasions when in desperation you humbled yourself and begged before the footstool of the Almighty, was it really to one of these that you prayed? Why is it so natural for humanity to believe, so difficult and wilful for humanity to doubt?

Yet if there is a God, why do we know so little for sure about God? Why does this universal belief conjure so many contradictory and fantastical pictures? Why does our awareness express itself in faith rather than in knowledge? Why do we believe...and in God?

These two peculiarities suggest, at least to me, an original knowledge and a general forgetting, a muddling of information we once had and deemed, when we had it, to be of utmost importance. They render credible the sorts of scenarios we find in the Old Testament or the Qur'an. If God is involved (and this general awareness suggests to me that God is - it is as incredible to believe that evolution would produce such a universal delusion as it is to believe that evolution would produce organs of sight when there is nothing to see), then, since we know for sure so

little about God, is it not reasonable to assume the presence of a satan, an adversary, an iblis, a seducer? Such an adversary would explain why we have awareness but have not evolved toward consensus. That we are lured by something to believe a lie seems to me to be both possible and significant. The very multiplicity of faiths, all of which cannot be equally true and therefore cannot be on a rough parity with one another, suggests seduction. And if we have an adversary, we should try to discover something about our adversary. As one who embraces the Christian tradition, I believe I know something about Satan. It is this; Satan is very like God with two big exceptions. First, Satan is a created being, God is not. Second, Satan cannot create by speaking which means that Satan can lie while God, who creates by speaking, cannot. Now lying can be a very subtle thing. Consider, for example, the lie in the garden. How was the woman deceived (I Tim. 2:14) and what was the lie the serpent told her?

He told her the truth about the effect of the fruit, that eating it would make them like God knowing good and evil, and God himself admits the serpent spoke the truth here (Gen. 3:22). He told her the truth that, God's warning to the contrary, they would not die and, indeed, God himself stepped in to prevent their deaths. Hence, Jesus could say that God is the God of the living and not of the dead (Matt. 22:32). The big lie that the serpent told her was a lie of implication. He caused the woman to question the

character of God. He suggested to her that God, who had given her so much, was trying to keep the best for himself (Gen. 3:5). And the woman, though she had walked with God in the garden, believed the lie of the serpent. This is why Paul says that it was she who sinned.

The knowledge of good and evil produces judgment. Those who have such knowledge begin to act as judges. Jesus constantly admonished his followers not to judge because humanity was never meant to judge for in judgment we seek to assign responsibility. "The woman tempted me...the serpent tempted me...I was tempted...I was beguiled...it was her fault...it was my fault...we were all guilty else how could we have been tempted..." We strive to know as God knows and we fail. We are able only to know as human beings know. We are like God for God made us in the image of God. But God made us; we are not God. And though we know good and evil, we do not know it as God knows it. We have awareness and misbelief coupled with the experience of love and hate and the sense of our own worth but not a sense of the worth of the other. We can feel but we cannot empathize. And such is the moral condition of those who have accused and condemned me. They were appalled by the deed but only because they could not see it in the light of eternity. They could not see it through the eyes of faith. But I, who know by faith the joy that awaits me, do not fear them any more than I fear death or the brutalities of this temporary confinement. If this life was all, then perhaps I should regret the course mine

has taken but I know of that splendor which gleams beyond the veil of this dim world and I know that she waits for me there and that for her the wait will not seem so terribly long. Do not weep for her! If you must waste your tears, weep for me! It is I who suffer. It is I who have always been denied, first denied her love, then denied the option of following her to Heaven immediately, now denied even that freedom Cain, who was also a murder, enjoyed.

Killing her became possible only when creeping eros slept and emerged as winged agape. The knife was wielded in purest compassion. I was judged not because I hated or was indifferent (callous, cold-blooded) but because I loved, I longed, I dared to cherish. Had I been a bureaucrat allocating government funds for the poor, a faceless entity being paid to spread social largess among those victims that the very society of which I was a part had created, I should perhaps have been called a good man. But because I had the desperate courage born of love to confront a personality with whom I yearned to have most intimate communion (to eat the flesh, to drink the blood, to have eternal life), I am deemed a monster. The knife with which I opened her belly did its job well. She hardly suffered. One does not live long when one's organs spill from one's body cavity. And the numbing physical shock is profound. I was so grateful for the divine mercy that spared her so much agony (though it has demanded much from me) that I kissed the blade, kissed the tender wound. But the communion was symbolic. I did not - let them believe what they will - drink her blood. They

were deceived, as they have always been deceived, by appearances. My judges through a provisional law which the majority might change tomorrow have pronounced me guilty. And I am guilty...of refusing to recognize the decision of the majority as binding, of daring to make my own decisions and to accept the responsibility for them. So be it. But Jesus who cannot lie pronounced me clean when he saved me. He created my purity even as he created the world from nothing or commanded the dead to rise or the flesh of the crippled to be healed. He created it by speaking it. This is not a legal fiction any more than the existence of the universe is a creative fiction or the cleansing of the lepers was a medical fiction. I am not guilty before God because Jesus says I am not guilty and that is all that ultimately matters. It is my self-righteous judges who command death for political reasons who should tremble.

It is because I experience so constantly this miracle of redemption that I believe in the miracles: the floating axe head, the fish that swallowed Jonah, the feeding of the multitudes. If these events happened, we can employ them as data while we attempt to construct a more comprehensive model of the universe and interpret its meaning. If these events did not happen, if they are merely poetic illustrations of principles (principles which in most cases are ambiguous at best), then we must apply these (often vague) principles to events that occur in our world in order to discover the significance of those mundane episodes. In the former

case, the full range of our human creativity comes into play. We attempt to imagine a universe into which we know God can for his own purposes intervene. But the significance of that universe, relative to the models we build and the questions we ask, retains its human and cultural dimension. If the accounts of the miracles are historically reliable, the universe remains at a profound level our universe. At the same time, God continues to be very much a part of that universe. He is tremendously relevant. We know not only that he is capable of action, we also know the forms his actions might take. Consequently, the God who was with us in the past remains very much a part of our present and future. God has direct power. In the latter case, significance is dictated solely by deity and only in the language of myth. It is not that our later models of the universe are irrelevant. Something far more sinister occurs. Rather than being irrelevant, these later models actually serve to obscure divine significance behind a shifting wall of symbols. They deafen us to God's voice. Events which we now realize almost certainly did not happen illustrate principles which become increasingly incomprehensible to us. Yaweh begins to sound more and more like Zeus and his mythic thunderings can be safely relegated to the realms of meteorology. If the Bible, as the Liberals maintain, is primarily a source of inspired symbols passed down to us from an earlier time and intended to help us live a fuller and more human life in this world, then we crucify the God of history upon a poetic trope. Such a crucifixion may appear redemptive on a

quiet morning when we are well rested and our belly is full but for the victim (and that is all of us much of the time) such a crucifixion speaks the language of atheism. When we hurt we pray not to the god of poetry but to the God of power.

I certainly believe in the God of power. I have often, even in this extraordinarily sterile environment, experienced the numenous, the uncanny, the whispered "Holy", though of course I believe that it has a personality and a name. I stand firmly in the tradition of those who name the name of Jesus. Yet surely the doctrines of this worshipping community have never fully apprehended deity else theology would not continue to evolve over the centuries. And does not this evolution, this exploration of possibilities, create a certain ambiguity in the faith? We have our holy book. We have customary prayers and practices. We have a language made coherent in community. But at base Christianity grows from an experience, from our recognition of the radical nature of our sin and salvation, from the humiliation of conversion and adoration. It is based upon the Bible, of course. One could hardly be a Christian and reject the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Here is a record of revealed truth surely but how helpful is that record? What is the Bible, after all, but an extraordinarily complex collection of various kinds of ancient literature written in three languages, none of which are current? It was composed over a very long time (no one seems quite certain how long) and has been (al-

most everyone would agree) edited, at least to some extent. It did not drop full blown from the lips of God. It embraces literary styles which are unfamiliar to all but scholars, words from the original languages which occur nowhere else in the body of ancient literature we possess today, and word usages in those languages which are unique. Some of its stories are among the oldest recorded and relate to a time difficult for most of us to imagine. It is, as Bultman once observed, a very strange book.

Ironically it is this alien and complex quality which is one of the principal reasons for the Bible's enduring importance and usefulness, especially in a world as pluralistic and relativistic as ours has revealed itself to be, for these characteristics are proof against a simplistic approach to the book exhausting its potential. Even were we to disallow the validity of textual criticism and ignore the problems of Biblical interpretation created by the adoption of a contemporary evolutionary/scientific paradigm, we would still be confronted with unresolvable theological conflicts generated from within the book itself and capable of producing churches as distinct as the Friends and the Particular Baptists. Indeed, churches which profess (perhaps naively) to rely on Scripture as their sole source of authority have proven remarkably fecund foci of new traditions. But it is not only among the naive that the Bible inspires division. It encourages disputation as well among scholars at all levels of sophistication.

In short, the Bible's complexity and strangeness, its religious

significance, and its importance as a fountainhead of western culture (which is rapidly becoming a world culture) assure the book's continuing relevance. And that is a problem, for even as the book from its complexity encourages the development of pluralism, it also from its religious dimension encourages this pluralistic development to move in the direction of ultimates. Hence, the Bible has both a secular and a religious side. Its secular side expresses opinion. Its religious side asserts absolutes.

Such developments can take a wide variety of forms. One might approach the Bible as though it was a scientific text and defend or criticize its cosmological statements in the light of current scientific knowledge. One might read it as an account of ancient myth, ancient history, or an interweaving of the two. One might study it to better understand humanity's existential plight or as a datum as one traces the development of western civilization. One might employ it as a source for information about concepts of God or as a record of revelations about the relationship between God and people. One might use it to defend ethical standards or to attempt to guess the outline of the future. Archeologist, poet, and faith-healer may each claim it as a source of authority and inspiration. Philosophers and numerologists have been among its devout adherents.

The Bible, like our faith, has become increasingly ambiguous. We must begin with the Bible, with the traditions, but in the end those of us who would cultivate a deeper, more personal relation-

ship with God, are called beyond them. And this, I must admit, entails risk. I am, as I said earlier, not certain I am right. I am only certain you are wrong.

There is leaven in the old familiar stories.
 Who can plumb their ciphered meanings?
 Who can catch them at their sleight-of-hand?
 We turn to them for wisdom and somehow
 They speak to us of something beyond themselves.
 But they are not history for we
 Have created history. History is our art,
 Our quest to ascribe or discover significance in what transpires.
 These are instead the old familiar stories,
 These little books giving information, lengthy reproof, or warning.
 They are one section of a journey left to someone.
 They are infallible time remaining when the rest is finished.
 They are fragments in the wind to remind us
 There was another forest in another place long long ago.

How curious that at the very time our western culture is transforming the world, its Judeo-Hellenistic framework is falling away to reveal something far more sinister and strange than we could possibly have imagined. Henotheism in the form of national interest is back. Polytheism in the form of non-integratable disciplines is back. The unholy in the form of secularist philosophies is back. What rules is fragmentation, restless fluidity, and it rules with an apocalyptic power undreamed of three generations ago. We are forced to act without a coherent moral vision. Hence our actions,

lacking the structure provided in the past by cultural agreement, seek their structure today by political coercion. It has been said that the past is pregnant with the future and this is true but what is not generally appreciated is that, since the future is built upon the past, the past lives again in the future. The ancient world, though disguised in festivals and improved techniques, remains very much with us.

This incidentally is one of the reasons I chose a knife. Though mine was forged of stainless steel, the tool itself is primal, even animal, and in using it I honored the ancestors. The emotions I felt were theirs and I wanted to use a weapon they would have recognized. The flaked blade, the hacking hand, are rooted deep in the layers of the east African Pliocene. Upon its calculated edge is balanced our power. The knife, the club, and their synthesis the axe: all else springs from them. It had to be either knife, axe, or club for me and I could hardly have entered her apartment wielding (wilding) an axe or a club.

And the flowers of the Neanderthals, those symbols of love and of hope beyond the grave, severed and buried by the hacking hand, the gathering hand, they, too, signified much. Therefore, it seemed appropriate that on my way to her apartment I stop at a florist's to pick up some flowers; a funerary bouquet. And, oh, how my heart was beating behind those blossoms when she opened her door to me.

The years wrap us unevenly
In their variegated textures.
For time unfolds according to its order.
But we get old a piece at a time.
A string of gray surrounds us.
A persistent stiffness,
A crumb of decay, a sudden splinter of pain.
Old age comes unevenly.
Rapping at us like a woodpecker.

Dr. Ben Michael Carter



Mike's library is available for viewing at 2505 W. Northgate Drive in Irving Texas.



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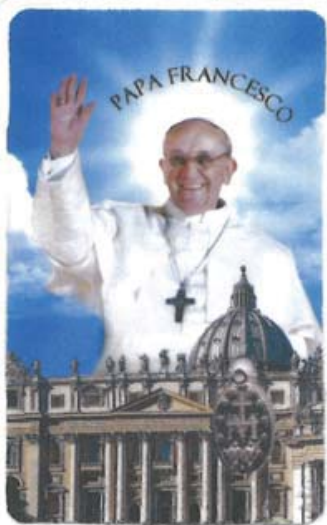
FIRST SECTION - GENERAL AFFAIRS

From the Vatican, 19 September 2017

Dear Ms Carter,

I am writing to acknowledge the gift of inscribed copies of Dr Ben Michael Carter's writings, which you presented to His Holiness Pope Francis.

In expressing appreciation for this kind gesture, I am pleased to assure you of His Holiness's prayers for your late husband and for you and your intentions.

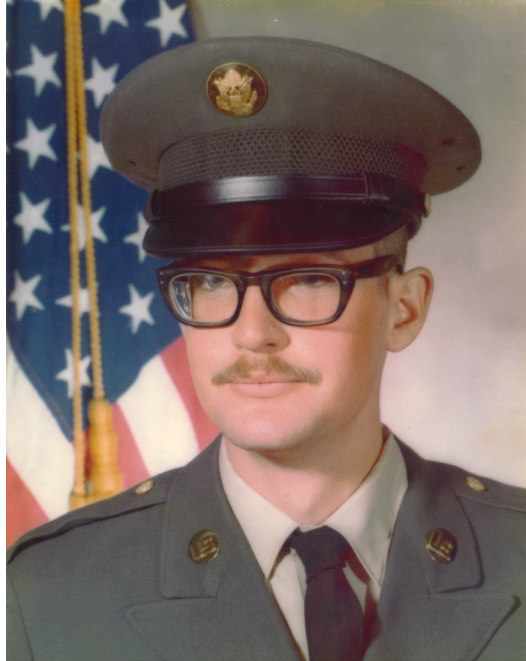


Yours sincerely,

Monsignor Paolo Borgia
Assessor

Ms Salma Carunia Carter
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USA





Ben Michael “Mike” Carter was a Renaissance man who loved writing. He authored six theology books and a novel. He also wrote for magazines, journals and newspapers, as well as poetry reviews. He earned a B.A. in Economic History from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, an MA in theological studies from Wheaton College, Illinois, an M.Th. from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, U.K., and a Ph.D. in History of Christianity in the non-western world from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, United Kingdom. He was a member of the Irving chapter of the Texas Poetry Society, the American Scientific Affiliation, and the Evangelical Theological Society. He was married to Salma Carunia from Dohnavur Fellowship, Tirunelvel, South India.