

Two Churches

Then it began to blow a gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, "Master, do you not care? We are going down!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Quiet now! Be calm!" And the wind dropped, and all was calm again. Then he said to them, "Why are you so frightened? How is that you have no Faith?" —Mark 4:37-40

OUR DAUGHTERS ATTEND a Catholic college preparatory high school. A single day at their school captures in a microcosmic sketch something of the dilemma of Christianity as we approach the third millennium.

On this particular day, the Wednesday of Holy Week, two special events have been planned, the first by members of the campus ministry staff, the second by members of the mothers' club. The first of these activities is a prayer service for all girls in the school. Their mothers are also invited. At the conclusion of the prayer service the girls are to go to their usual schedule of classes. Their mothers will reassemble for the second activity, a day of recollection directed by the rector of the local Jesuit community.

At the door of the gym, which has been set up for the prayer service, a student hands out programs. The mothers are already seated, clustered in the front rows of folding chairs. Then the girls file in, smiling and chatting in a low hum. As soon as they find their places, the focus turns to the front of the gym. In the center stands a long altar table draped with a white cloth. On it are arrayed three large glass bowls that might double on another occasion as salad bowls. There are also three large glass pitchers filled with water—perhaps, too, for iced tea? Flank-

ing the altar table on the right is a grand piano, on the left a lectern. Stacked on another table in the rear is a thick pile of orchid bath towels.

Enter a tall lanky priest dressed in clerics. He is in his mid- to late thirties, with carefully styled hair and a tan. He settles in at the grand piano, deftly taking off in background music for the piano bar. Smiling at the onlookers, he breaks into song, likewise a melody for the piano bar. He has a good voice; and he enjoys rippling up and down the keys. Playing fortissimo, he signals for the girls and mothers to sing along. Then he goes soft pedal.

Enter a woman religion teacher dressed in a long white robe. Stationing herself at the lectern, she greets the priest and the audience. To the accompaniment of the soft piano, she reads some prayers that she has written for this service, interspersing her prayers with passages from Scripture. She and the priest do well together, the music appropriately rising and subsiding along with the teacher's reading.

Enter a student, who takes the teacher's place at the lectern. She gives a short homily, telling how in Lent this year she has learned new self-esteem. The student has shortchanged her practice of this homily. Several times she stammers in

nervousness. Nevertheless, she perseveres to the end.

A mother of a new freshman leans over to whisper, "What is this? Are we having mass or what?" "No mass," a senior mother whispers back. "This is a prayer service."

There is a murmur of voices and a shifting of papers and chairs. Enter a train of some twenty students and faculty. As this procession moves behind the altar, each student and teacher takes turns pouring water over the hands of the next person in line and then dries the hands on one of the orchid bath towels which have been brought forward. Since there is no inconspicuous place to deposit the used towels, everyone clumps them in a heap on the altar. An embarrassed titter, even from the faculty in the procession, accompanies this whole procedure. Now that everyone is seated again, the piano priest gears up for his finale. The white-robed teacher reads more dramatically. Then she dispenses a blessing. After a closing song the service is over.

Now we immediately shift gears for the second scene. The girls go on to class. The mothers walk to the school's small modern chapel, where the visiting Jesuit rector will direct them in a day of recollection. The mother in charge of the day of recollection, noticing a student stretched out for a snooze on a bench in the back corner, shoos the girl away. The student obeys but looks slightly annoyed; this was her free period.

One woman, looking about the chapel, notes there is no corpus on the abstract cross that hangs from a ceiling rafter. Another asks where the Blessed Sacrament is. There is a moment's speculation about where it might be. Then it is discovered to be more or less in view but still obscured behind a hodge-podge of bronze metal attached to the gray brick wall.

The women settle into their folding chairs. After being introduced, the Jesuit priest, dressed in clerics, takes his place at the lectern. He is a tall broad-faced Irishman, robust but trim. Wrapping his big

hands around each side of the lectern, he casually remarks that although he is a Jesuit, he loves Notre Dame football. He says that instead of being a missionary in India, as he had expected, he has spent his priestly life teaching and advising teenage boys. Then plainly and directly he unwinds his theme: the spiritual life which depends on creed, sacraments, and prayer; reference to the Trinity in an examination of conscience; the need for meditative reading and prayer; the faith of Ignatius; tips for faith in God's providential care.

After the priest's three talks and then a break for lunch, there is mass. The priest vests with deliberation. His liturgy follows the rubrics. Adhering to the words of the eucharistic prayer, he does not ad lib. When mass is concluded, the women gather about to thank him. Their gratitude indicates the recollection and mass he has given them has been a rare moment of richness in the spiritual fare they are ordinarily offered. Several remark that they have seen the ridiculous and the sublime all in one day, and they say it is hard to believe that they can have attended both the prayer service and the recollection on the same day in the name of the same church at the same school.

The two scenes we have just glimpsed—first, the hand-washing prayer service and, next, the day of recollection—present in a nutshell modern cafeteria Christianity. Though I write this essay as a Catholic and a convert some twenty-five years ago from Protestantism, I think, nevertheless, that the Catholic dilemma encompasses the subjectivist dilemma of the entire Christian church. Because the Catholic Church makes such sweeping claims; because it is the largest of Christian denominations; because it is the mother of all of them, what happens in the Catholic Church in the modern world is a magnification of what also faces Protestant Christianity and, to a lesser degree, Orthodox Christianity. Furthermore, because the Catholic Church is nearly alone in the world, though it is supported by the Orthodox church, by some Jews, and by

some Protestant churches, in upholding the precepts safeguarding the sanctity of life, and because it is also the largest institution to do so, it is the last bastion of the West against barbarism.

We are living in a time when the Christian church—especially the Catholic Church—is thoroughly despised, even though this hatred, according to the protocol of pluralism, must often be disguised in most peculiar forms. Yet, at the same time, our age has deep interest in religion, one that attests to the persistent longing of human nature for the transcendent. If one listens carefully to any serious conversations about religion, for example, one discovers that people are not nearly so interested in saving the environment as they are in saving their prayer life. The difficulty, however, is that their authentic spiritual yearnings find no home, no truly ordered structure within which to take root. Though there is a lot of religion going on, a lot of church-going and participation in parish life and a great enthusiasm for lay pastoral ministry programs, one suspects that, as a movement with wide ramifications, religion today is more a stirring up of religiosity than a renaissance of Christian faith and culture. Upon examination the new religious movement has little content. Its thinness poorly serves the faithful who want true enrichment of their faith.

There is, to be sure, a real life of the spirit in the West—and as much, I think, in America as anywhere. This real life of the spirit is the hope of the West. But because of the very nature of democratic pluralism, this life of the spirit can make no claim of authority as a basis for Christian culture, and so it is forced into private crannies. Deprived, too, of the literature that once provided the language for a common culture, the real life of the spirit lacks a universal vocabulary for speaking to the world. Without a common literature our frame of reference has shrunk. One wonders nostalgically how it must have been when Fra Angelico painted his beautiful, simple, unsentimental fifteenth-century annunciations and everyone

understood. How quaint, the modern world would sniff, such a simple, unquestioning faith. Not quaint, not simple, Flannery O'Connor would have said, but merely open to reality; it is the modern world that is closed and ignorant. She herself, hoping to give new impact to old truths that our culture could no longer understand, used grotesque images.

Although I am a great admirer of Flannery O'Connor, I myself am inclined to doubt that we need new images to translate these old truths. I would rather suggest that the old images—the paintings, the sculpture, the poetry, and so forth—can still convey to modern people a message of the transcendent—but only provided that someone somewhere is doing the hard spadework of re-introducing the literature of Western civilization that can educate us in the background of the images. And I have no grand illusions about the possibility of Western civilization, including America, re-blooming into a universal Christian culture. Nevertheless, dismaying though that admission may be, it is no cause for despair. Christians are not permitted to despair. We do what we can. We can help bring about, we hope, at least a partial renewal. As Mother Teresa has said, "We are not called to be successful; we are called to be faithful." Scripture tells us, moreover, that faith works by way of mustard seeds or by way of yeast in dough; it does not raze cities. Perhaps we must remind ourselves that the mysterious, quiet, unseen way is best.

The two scenes at the Catholic girls' school depict the schism that the zeal for subjectivism and relativism has produced in the church in the West. In this single day in the life of one school we see two churches, or, rather, one church against which a nationalized sect is rebelling: on the one hand, the Roman Catholic Church in America, and, on the other hand, the American Catholic Church. We could just as well speak of the Roman Catholic Church in Holland and its problems with a dissenting Dutch Catholic church, or we could speak of a similar situation in France or Germany. The effort to nationalize the

Catholic Church is the manifestation of the modern subjectivist movement. This impetus toward a nationalized church is sprawling, loose, and almost never promoted as a formal split from Rome. It is simply proclaimed instead that in our new age when the spirit of modernism has brought in fresh air, the old doctrines and structures of the church are no longer valid. The church as it has unfolded in the democratic age of America of the last three decades is to be seen as the shape of the church in the future. The church in the modern world, according to the modernists, is the product of the historical development of democracy.

This subjectivist push has produced warfare in the church, a battle that penetrates the daily lives of all the faithful, not just the intellectuals. It goes on continually on college campuses, in parishes, in parochial schools, in religious communities, even in public schools and the general community, producing bizarre struggles between parents, for example, who want their children to learn that family life is sacred, and teachers and directors of religious education who would prefer to teach that a family is a group of people.

Nowhere does the modern refusal to submit to the authority of truth focus more sharply than in the insistence of a nationalized Catholic sect on dissent from the orthodox positions of the universal Catholic Church. The proponents of an American Catholic Church declare that a particular culture—America, for instance—is so unique that it cannot possibly fall under the authority of a universal church and doctrine. The orthodox notion of the church of Christ, instituted by Christ and formed in Holy Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium, must give way, according to proponents of an American church, before a democratic church as a “people of God,” which can pretty much believe what the people want to believe. As the late theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar has said, the loss of the church as united to Christ produces a situation in which “any pastoral guidance in the Catholic sense becomes impossible, for its end is no

longer the ‘body’ and ‘bride’ of Christ but a church-people, which feels and acts in a democratic fashion.”¹

The American Catholic church insists on its own authority to set doctrine. And so everything goes. A Protestant would be scandalized. The deep divisions that presently rend the Catholic church must surely alarm a Protestant, for he knows that if he himself is to be protected, the Catholic church must remain what it is. If the Catholic church loses its integrity, a Protestant, too, is threatened. Thus, a Protestant looking in on the hand-washing prayer service, and knowing that the mass is the highest act of worship in the Catholic church, would think it strange to substitute a prayer service for mass. With a bit more background he would know, too, that this service was a parody of the Holy Thursday mass in which part of the liturgy is the washing of feet. Why, too, only a prayer service when a priest was present? Why a priest in clerics merely playing the piano? Why a student giving a homily—and on anything but the Gospel? Why lots of things.

But yet the hand-washing prayer service is only one-half of the picture. There is indeed a second scene—the solid authenticity represented by the Jesuit priest giving the day of recollection. The sturdy content of his talks and the reverential rightness of his celebration of the eucharist are the real Catholic church, the church as it is. The women who listened were so compelled that not even the cold bleakness of the chapel could distract them. Those women did what the faithful do everyday—look past, put up with, make do with the silliness and incorrectness and even heresy of the first scene in order to survive for the real, the authentic, the true of the second scene. The real church, contrary to doomsayers, the wheat for the bread of life, does still exist amidst the weeds in the field. It *is* there. But in the culture of pluralism it is sidelined, unable in the tyranny of democratic tolerance to be more than just one among many “opinions.” The solid, comforting, holy church is still with us, right in our

midst. It is not a fortress isolated from the world, but a living body at the center of the world. But since we are not yet in paradise, we must accept the church as suffering in the particular form the cross takes in our age. Our time is not post-Christian. No age since Calvary is post-Christian. What we need in our age, however, is a church that the secular world, in league with a form of a church that masquerades as the real church body, would confine to a side aisle of opinion. But the church is there, as it always has been. It is just that the faithful must be heroes, perhaps even martyrs. Were we not told this would be our lot?

When Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium, afterward known as Constantinople, he set the stage for a long and important development in the history of the West. The empire eventually split in two, effecting not only a political but also a religious split. In the East the Orthodox church was founded on a union of church and state authority in the person of the emperor, who appointed the patriarch. Even after the fall of Constantinople this tradition persisted in Russia. But in the West the Roman Catholic church maintained its independence from state authority, asserting its identity as a universal church.

Few Christians in the West would seriously regret this separation of the church from secular authority, for in theory, at least, it is a guarantee of the freedom of the human soul from political coercion. And yet, at the same time, the church in the West must live ultimately with the fact that it has no political power. If it is to influence the world, it must be through conversion of souls. To be sure, there have been periods when the papacy had considerable political power and engaged in push-pull exercises with the emperor. There have been times when the clergy have been thickly embroiled in politics, paying off officials, hoarding wealth, whispering to kings, even plotting murders. Nonetheless, in the long span of Western history since the fall of the Roman Empire, the balance of power has favored the state. In comparison with that

of the state, the temporal power of the church has been short-lived and illusory. In sum, a state by definition has political power. The church in the West does not.

Today church and state are not pitted against each other in an overwhelmingly apparent way. Yet if in former days the church was menaced by mighty monarchs who closed down monasteries and confiscated church lands, in the age of democracy the secular power, although fuzzier, is perhaps more subtly pervasive. It works in our day by simply drawing the church into its sphere, not by force so much as by subtle encouragement of the church to become secular itself, by encouragement of the church to reject its transcendent mission and to assume the same goals as has society.

The church is always tempted to become worldly. Today, however, the temptation is not for the church to acquire the material wealth of a Pope Julius II. Rather its modern temptation is to take up the secular effort to make man a product of this world, limited to an end in this world. Yet if the mission of the church becomes fixed in this world—as the American Catholic church would like it to be—with its mission fulfilled through utopian social reform and the re-making of man into his own creator, then church and state become synonymous in a way that no monarch of old could have dreamed.

When the temptation of the church is to reduce its vision to the merely political, we do not see so much the traditional case of the spiritual man, the Thomas More, struggling against a tyrannical monarch. We see instead the secular man joined in the same thin, one-dimensional vision of the democratic, bureaucratic state. Together the secular man and the bureaucratic state, united in the same mission to reform society according to liberal social goals, make a terrible combination, an unbeatable tyranny over the genuinely spiritual man, whose religious life must go underground or at least go entirely behind closed doors.

The difficulty is that in the last centuries, and more speedily in the last two centuries, the foundation stones of both

the spiritual and the political elements have changed. Clearly man has now announced his own authority. He has denied the human nature that has been given to him. The very idea that a human nature is given to him at all is a thought that enrages him, for a human nature given to him implies that he is somehow subject and beholden to the creator of that nature. Human nature instead is now seen as what man makes. With metaphysics thrown overboard, human nature is his to control. Since no authority can be above what he decides, man is governed by no law other than his individual will.

Over the last centuries man has thus become his own God. Without reference to anything higher than himself there is no real substance to human nature. Man's nature receives no essence from a creator. Rather, his essence only comes about by his living and exerting his will: He is what he does. With no reference to any authority above the individual's own will, there is also no reference to what one ought to do. As Ralph McInerney has said, "If man is the measure, there is nothing that measures and limits him; his freedom is absolute. He may do whatever he *can* do. Indeed, moral restraints make no sense, for there are no restraints on man unless he chooses that there should be."²

Virtue in such a view has no substance. It can only be a matter of feeling, never a habit of behavior governed by respect for the kind of person one ought to be. In order to achieve some consensus for standards of behavior, the best we can do, according to the subjective view, is simply to take a poll. Agreement is the key, not goodness and righteousness. Thus we have such ludicrous examples as a poll given to engaged couples, which indicates that if a couple agree on the answers to the questions, they will have a happy marriage, but if they give different answers to the same question the graph immediately registers alarm. What a couple agree about makes no difference—only that they agree. Or we can read today's headline: "College Students: Religious, but Liberal about Sex." The article, reporting a Gallup

poll on 100 campuses, says, "Nearly 80% of college students say religion is important in their lives but their faith has relatively little impact on their sexual behavior and attitudes. . . ."³

The virtue-by-poll mode makes life hard for those least able to combat the heavy burden of modernism, young people with consciences and characters still in formation. High school religion classes and health classes tend to become contests of wills, with the student who seeks authority for an ethical base retreating to his family with the lament, "Almost the whole class said I was crazy to agree with an old pope, and the teacher didn't say anything. I felt so alone!" But even a teacher has no moral authority to come to the defense of a fourteen-year-old in search of truth. The truth-seeker must always give way before the opinion poll. It is the process of thinking and arguing that is all-important, not the pursuit of and actual grasp of truth. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said in his opening address at the Rome meeting of the pope, curia, and American archbishops, March 8-11, 1989,

. . . In the hierarchy of values of today's world, the free rights of the individual and those accorded to the mass media take highest place, while the objective moral values, about which there is no agreement anyway, are banished to the realm of the individual where they merit no public defense from the community. There is, to put it bluntly, a right to act immorally but morality itself has no rights.

In an address to the same group John Cardinal O'Connor linked the loss of objective moral principles in America to the growth of pragmatism and the abandonment of natural moral law:

Catholicism [he said] is pre-eminently attuned to the basic principles of the American Republic as articulated by the founding fathers in large measure because of Catholicism's affinity with natural moral law. I suggest that Catholic moral teaching has been accepted or rejected in our country in

almost direct proportion to the acceptance or rejection of natural moral law in the formulation of public policy.

Cardinal O'Connor went on to cite the place of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., in rejecting appeal to natural moral law for interpretation of the Constitution. In the place of natural moral law, according to Cardinal O'Connor, Holmes

substituted the philosophy of pragmatism: the good is whatever works, or is expedient. Moral relativism entered jurisprudence and American life by way of pragmatism, which is unconditionally hostile to all moral absolutes. I suggest that, simultaneously, the law has become the primary teacher in America. Whatever is legal is assumed to be morally good. Abortion and homosexuality, for example, are legal, hence assumed to be moral. The horrifying rise in court-assisted "euthanasia" I believe to be ultimately traceable to Justice Holmes and to his medical doctor father.

The denial of human nature and the concomitant denial of natural moral law have in no way wreaked more havoc, especially in America, than in the rejection of female human nature. The insidious destruction of the feminine by way of the heresy of feminism has tragically affected men as well as women. The feminist heresy has taken over entire high school and college administrations and faculties; it has laid waste church dioceses and seminaries. It is the apex of modern relativism. No one is untouched by it. It manifests itself, in the name of women's individual rights, as a denial of the sanctity of all life.

Central to the battle over the nature of the feminine—who a woman is and what she is to do—is, of course, the whole topic of sex, whether the sexual act is tied to love or whether it is an act of a human machine. Since our sexual nature is so primary to our identity as incarnate beings, it is not surprising that the angriest wars for the human spirit against the tyranny of the individual will are going on in the arena of sexual issues. The sexual issues—in conjunction with the life issues with

which they inextricably intertwine—are the gravest issues we face on the horizon of the third millennium. The loss of metaphysics, the retreat of intelligence, the abandonment of our Western literature, the clamor for rights: all surface in the super-charged battle over what it means to be a man or a woman, what love is, what a family is. The feminist heresy has catapulted us into a war for our own nature.

It is not surprising that in the Catholic church's furor over dissent the point upon which all dissent finally turns is that of sex. The issue fans out into questions of abortion, euthanasia, homosexual rights, and so on into the entire secular society. Cardinal O'Connor told the American bishops that "we are developing in our country with frightening speed a consistent ethic of death, with some 20 million abortions since 1973, and euthanasia under a variety of euphemistic terms becoming acceptable to the point that laws authorizing outright suicide may be just around the corner." The sexual and life issues stake out the division between the Roman Catholic church and the nationalized sects. Somehow the world seems to sense the pivotal role of the Catholic church in holding on to the weakened strands of Western civilization. Despite the modern hatred of the church, there is also a side of modernity that watches in fascination, even, despite itself, in hope, to see if this last bastion will hold out against barbarism. Since Christians do believe that the church is more than simply human, we do expect that somehow over a very long time the church will prevail. Nevertheless, in the short term the picture looks grim. Although we remind ourselves that the church has faced dire predicaments many times and the Holy Spirit has done its work, we nonetheless realize that never in the history of the world has so advanced a civilization as the West killed off its most innocent and helpless members, and in such numbers over such a long period of time. For a civilization on such a huge scale to will itself into annihilation is unique in history. The mammoth propor-

tions of this will to self-destruction are beyond all comprehension.

Paul Johnson has declared that "Sexual politics is probably the area where those who seek to defend Christian principles will have to be most active in the decades to come."⁴ I think Johnson is right. The goading of women to pursue "reproductive rights" has produced a society in which, despite the cheerful aura of material prosperity, despair lurks ever on the fringes. Our Western population is declining, a sign that people with little hope for the future will themselves be barren.

Because women have been unhinged from their own being, so have men. Women's rootedness is at the heart of a stable society. Not only does a woman provide a home for a man, but she also is literally, physically his home. Without her in her place, a man rushes frantically about the world in search of a purpose. Although men and women are equally sacred and their purposes are equally important and are complementary, it may be said that a woman's purpose is prior to that of a man. Her purpose in conceiving and nurturing new life is immediate, concrete, and obvious. Her purpose is carried out inside her own body. But a man's purpose is more abstract. His relation to new life is less direct. Consequently he depends upon looking to the woman to see what his actions have brought about. Only when he sees the new life coming to fruition in his wife and then her care of their baby does he fully realize that his wife and child depend upon him for protection and provision. By looking to them he discovers why he works and what it means that he is asked in Scripture to build up the Kingdom. Moreover, through his own personal relationship to his wife and baby he learns, too, that he has a paternal responsibility to the world. The mature man's attitude toward the world comes to reflect in a small way the fatherhood of God toward the creation. A man's knowledge of his fatherly character will come in large measure because a woman has taught him.

Women, simply by being who they are, teach the race. Their task is not so much to *do*, to act in the world as a man does, but to *be*, to stand fast, to be place and permanence, to reassure those around them that it is right to want truth, fidelity, eternal life. A woman properly understood is one who hands on the tradition of civilization. Without her in her home, turning the smallest action into transmission of knowledge to the next generation, without her there to guard the privacy and sanctity of the family, the seedbed of society dries up. Without her in her home the people there become a mere conglomeration of individuals. Moreover, without her in her home the contemplative, meditative aspect that beats in the heart of any vibrant civilization dies away. If woman is lost from her home, not even monasteries can supply that contemplation, for it is in the family that the first glimmerings of any religious vocation occur. Without the place and permanence of women not only are men knocked off balance, but the state that complements family life—that is, priesthood and religious life—suffers.

The severance of women from their wifely and motherly function and their hustling into a proletarian work force seem the ultimate rejection of the highest achievements of Western civilization. This giant backward step can only hinder us in our task of retrieving the transcendent. A woman, by her very nature, is given the great gift of being close to the origins, the mystery of life. If she rejects this gift then there is no way that a man can single-handedly grasp the mystery of the transcendent.

The ever-pressing momentum of relativistic individualism, the denial of human nature, the consensus definition of morality, the loss of the feminine, and the corresponding erosion of the sanctity of life and of the family are all sober and depressing. And yet we still have no excuse for despair. There is genuinely such a thing as freedom, and our world is not foreordained. As God's world, it is instead a drama, an unfolding. Christ himself told

us at the Last Supper: "In the world you will have troubles, but be brave: I have conquered the world."

When we look for signs of hope—and we must—the signs are astounding. We find in unexpected places little pockets of good, sound people—especially young people, mustard seeds sprouting on both secular and religious campuses, in seminaries, in parishes. Here is a group of students who gather with a professor each week to study Pope John Paul's great work, *Love and Responsibility*. There is a young man who reads Chesterton and Newman and who edits a magazine. Here is a young Hispanic man who calls up and says he is sure God wants not only him but a group of his friends to be Jesuits. How does he know? Well, he says, he and his friends have been studying Ignatius and they want to follow that illustrious saint. Indeed, one sees a little resurgence in the troubled Society of Jesus. At Harvard there is a brilliant and steadfast young Jesuit who, while working out as a member of the Harvard boxing team, immerses himself in advanced studies in ancient languages, counsels young people, hears confessions, and gives excellent talks to encourage healthy family life. And in Rome there is a pocket of young Jesuits who are devoted to the church, who enthusiastically say they love religious life and who, like their friend at Harvard, are as intelligent, as soldierly, as dedicated, and as intent on living the Spiritual Exercises as any young man St. Ignatius himself could have recruited to his Company.

In New England, in Virginia, in Texas, in California, and scattered across America, are little intellectual oases of teachers and students, gathered together in little colleges or in institutes in larger universities. Even on ordinary campuses plagued with the usual ideology, at schools both academically elite and of distinctly lesser caliber, at state schools and small private colleges, certain students emerge with an affinity for truth, with determination to live a good life, intellectually, spiritually, morally. One marvels at how they have risen like phoenixes from the ashes. How

did they get such solid notions, one inquires. Oh, from their parents, they say, or from taking a certain professor's class, in which they began to read Aristotle or Thomas.

These priceless young people, along with the parents, brothers and sisters, and teachers to whom they are attached, are relatively few in number. Yet they form a network. Joined to the network of stability that is already in place and that stretches across this country and even into Europe, this inter-connecting band of faithful exercises surprising impact. Even though the number of people in this network of orthodoxy is small, if the network can reach some key people, then numbers do not matter so much. The apostles, after all, were only a minuscule number. Yet they were commissioned to carry out the mission of the church. They began by effecting some key conversions, chief of which was that of Paul.

When we are looking for conversions, which, of course, must always begin with our own, we can be thankful that the Holy Spirit has sent us two towering spiritual figures remarkably suited for our age, Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa. Both have centered their lives on the Trinity and incarnation, which is the whole focus of Christian faith. Mother Teresa, giving her life to the poorest of the poor, especially to caring for the dying destitute and to saving the unborn babies, has been asked how she has strength to do all that she does. In answer to one such interviewer she simply replied, "I have all the strength I need. I had the Holy Eucharist today. I have the Bread of Life." Pope John Paul II, so often ridiculed by the American church as a Polish pope who has no understanding of America, is a man of brilliant intellect with a staggering aptitude for theology. No one has written more beautifully and profoundly on the reality of man and woman and the family—a work so needed in our time—than has this pope, who has developed the theology called personalism.

Furthermore, we are fortunate to live in a time in which, although the lower ranks

of clergy are often weakened and demoralized, the upper echelons of the hierarchy of the church, especially notable in Pope John Paul and in Cardinal Ratzinger, are strong, faithful, and ascetic. Contrary to the complaints of the American church, these men give every indication of being aware of the problems of American society. Their plan for reinvigorating the church is obviously to hold firmly to doctrine. At the same time their tack is not to oust dissenters, thereby causing an open and formal schism. Rather, their plan seems to be, as appointments open up, a gradual one of replacing lesser bishops with strong ones.

If we are to participate in a revival of Christian culture, we must keep in mind three preliminary points. First, we are not going to hark back to olden days, nor should we. What the Holy Spirit is leading us to is a challenge and an opportunity. In large measure it is open-ended. So much depends on our response to the challenge we are given. Second, we are not going to overhaul our entire culture. Our task is to nurture the mustard seeds, the leaven in the dough. At the same time we do not hide from the world. The Incarnation of Christ teaches us that the holy penetrates every particle of the world. If we are part of the body of Christ, the church, then we are meant to help bring the holy into the world, or, rather, we are meant to take what has been given to us by the creator and give it back again in the all-encompassing worship of the eucharistic mass.

Finally, the third preliminary point is that if the work is in our hands, the results are not. This is God's world, not ours. If we do what the Lord asks of us, he will see to the results. We can be sure that his plan for the world is a vision infinitely sweeping and grand, a vision we have no way of comprehending. Since we are not in charge of the results, we have every reason to hope.

With these preliminary points in mind, then how ought we to nourish our mustard seeds, our pockets of hope from which a revived culture may spring. Again, I suggest three points.

First, we begin with prayer and sacraments. Faith and culture make a marriage, but in this case the partners are unequal. Faith is always prior to culture, never the other way around. Faith is the animus of culture, its soul. Culture is what grows out of faith. It is our response to faith, carried out in the world. Faith creates culture, which is an expression of faith. A dying culture is merely the vestige of the institutions that grew up centuries earlier as a response to faith; though the institutions remain as a skeleton, the flesh of faith has withered from the bones. Eventually the skeleton cannot stand by itself and will rattle to the ground in a heap.

If we are to do our part, we must begin with private prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments. Prayer and sacrament are not the by-the-way addition to our tasks; they are the task that comes before all others. I use the word "task" because attention to prayer and sacrament is hard work. Perhaps prayer and sacrament come easier for saints, but for most people they require discipline. Without discipline the grace that is always available in abundance falls on infertile ground. Grace is ours for the taking, but we must make room for it. And unless there is a real movement of the individual will toward God, an action that takes place in secret and in mystery, nothing much happens in history, whether we speak of the history of a single life or the history of a people. The response of the soul to God's gift is the real action of history.

Second, sound catechetical instruction is indispensable. Much of the crisis in all Christian churches has come about through overthrowing metaphysics as the starting point for understanding human nature and the world. Although the Catholic church in its magisterial teaching has never relinquished its base in the knowledge of reality, in the lower ranks of the church during the last three decades the notion prevails that the intrinsic nature of things should be decided according to how we feel about things. Nearly all catechetical books that are officially approved by the archdioceses of this country generate

from a subjective view. Faith, however, begins with intelligence. We do not have faith about formless blobs or puffs of smoke. We have faith in God because first he shows us his world both through nature and through revelation. We then surmise, because he both shows us and tells us, that he is intimately involved with his world. We have faith primarily because we see; we pay attention; then we affirm or assent to what we see. We do not acquire faith because we feel good about what we see. Even though feeling good is sometimes a pleasant and heartening accompaniment to seeing, it is not faith. Because loss of intelligence as the foundation of faith has been a chief reason for our falling into the present crisis, the recovery of intelligence will be the key to leading us out. Thus we simply cannot do without a revival of learning of the first principles of our doctrine.

Central to any renewed catechetical instruction must be the proper explanation of the doctrinal heart of Christianity, the Trinity and Incarnation. That Christ is really God, the Son of the Father, identical in substance with the Father; and that the Holy Spirit is equally one with the Father and the Son, the fruit of the love of Father and Son, is Christianity. Without this Trinity of God we might have a religion, but it would not be Christianity. The Trinity—revealed to us through the Incarnation of God in the all-human all-divine person of Christ—is our treasure. The Trinity explains God's own love-life.

To guard the integrity of the Trinity and the Incarnation we must have Mary. Without her Christ becomes unfathomable and is always mistaken for a being other than who he is. By her acceptance of the divine invitation to bear within her human body God himself, not only to bear God but to unite her own human substance with the divine substance, Mary proves that Christ is both fully man and fully God. Mary is not, as feminists often would have her, the woman who could not make it as a priest, the woman who was short-changed in creation. On the contrary, God so honored Mary that he arranged crea-

tion so that without her full acceptance, God could not have come as the incarnate Christ. Without Mary we would have none of the Gospel revelation. Absolutely essential to a catechetical revival, then, is full and proper treatment of the place of Mary in the doctrine of the Trinity and Incarnation.

Finally I would suggest that our third commission for re-energizing Christian faith and culture is the encouragement of Christian family life. The family, after all, is the human expression of the Trinity; it is the human union that is most like the Trinity. Reflecting the trinitarian love-life of God, the love-life of the family produces the child. Our faith that is nourished through prayer and sacrament and through catechesis then infuses culture; it infuses culture by flowing first through the channel of the family and then out into the open sea of the wider community. One may object that simply to preach healthy Christian family life is a tall order; the question is how we go about it. The answer is in front of us—through teaching the great doctrines of the church regarding the sanctity of life in all its forms, regarding the sanctity of men and women and children, regarding the sanctity of the origins of life and of how people come to be. If our coming in and going out of life are revered, then the family becomes the haven in which life is naturally affirmed, welcomed, and protected. Because we are incarnate beings with a Christian faith that is distinctly founded on the incarnational penetration of flesh by the divine, I believe that any resurgence of Christian faith and culture must be founded unequivocally upon the sanctity of life and must preserve the integrity of our conception, birth, and death. If we were not incarnate beings, if we were only bodiless spirits, then we would not be concerned with how we become flesh. But since God has chosen to impress his image into our beings that are embodied in matter, then we must pay attention to our sacred coming in and going out. Body and spirit are inseparable in us. If we do not guard our bodies, then we do not guard our spirits.

Difficult as it may be to begin to put families back on course, the family is nonetheless the concrete, fleshly avenue, the church within the church, through which God works in our world and through which faith becomes true culture. In and through the family, prayer and sacrament take root; faith is handed on; conversions come about; books are read and saved; new life is generated and new families encouraged; and the calls to priestly and religious life begin. In the family we first learn to love one another. If we hope to save our faith and our culture, I believe we will cherish our families.

Our mission is difficult but it is also undeniable. "You did not choose me," Christ said, "no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; and then the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. What I command you is to love one another."

Von Balthasar, despite his criticism of the church and his mourning of what has been twisted or lost, still remained optimistic. He spoke of

... my love for a Church that has endured for two millennia, has retained her vigor throughout and thus was not born suddenly as a "post-conciliar" Church. . . . I am anything but pessimistic, for the Church, assailed as she is from without and within, demonstrates by that very fact that she possesses a vitality that is unbearable for the godless world. Amidst the present din of battle, I can clearly sense this vitality, which is bursting forth with renewed life.⁵

Let Von Balthasar have the last word.

—Anne Husted Burleigh

¹*Test Everything: Hold Fast to What Is Good*, an interview of Hans Urs Von Balthasar by Angelo Scola, trans. Maria Shrady (San Francisco, 1989), p. 22.

²"The Roots of Modern Subjectivism," paper delivered by Dr. McInerney at the Bay Area Conference on the Ethics of Human Reproduction, San Rafael, California, July 27-31, 1987, published in *Creative Love: The Ethics of Human Reproduction*, ed. John F. Boyle (Front Royal, Va., 1989), p. 12.

³Associated Press article, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (May 29, 1989). ⁴"Is Totalitarianism Dead? New Temptations for Today's Intellectuals," *Crisis* (Feb. 1989), p. 15. ⁵*Test Everything*, pp. 7-8.