

Burghardt, Walter J.
Seven hungers -
c.2. ADK 3625

Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
LIBRARY

FEB 02 1979

CONCORD LIBRARY
BIRMINGHAM, ALA

Seven Hungers

OF THE HUMAN FAMILY

Catholic Church and social
problems



EVERETT

1880

1880

SEVEN HUNGERS

of the Human Family

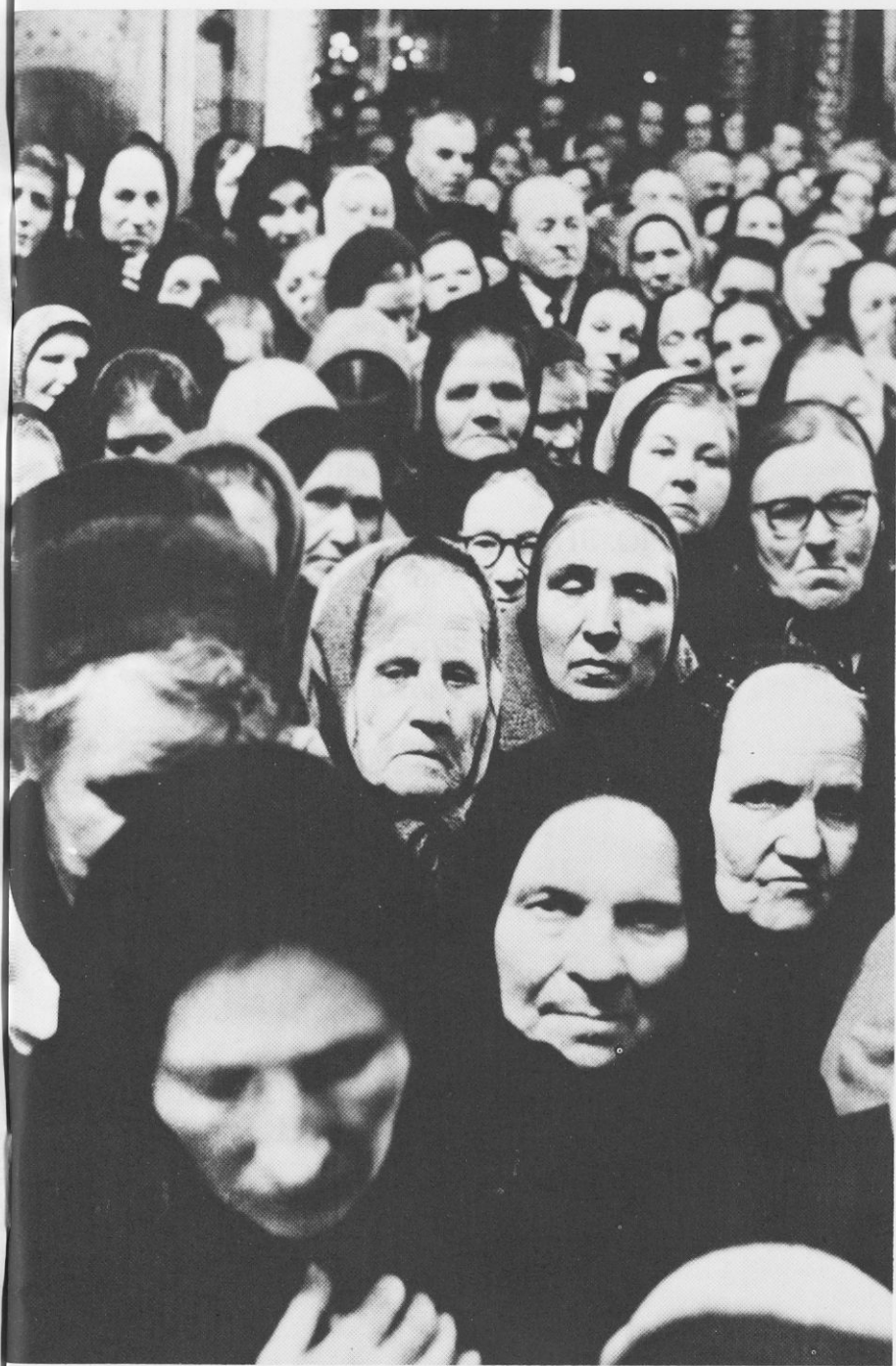
Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.



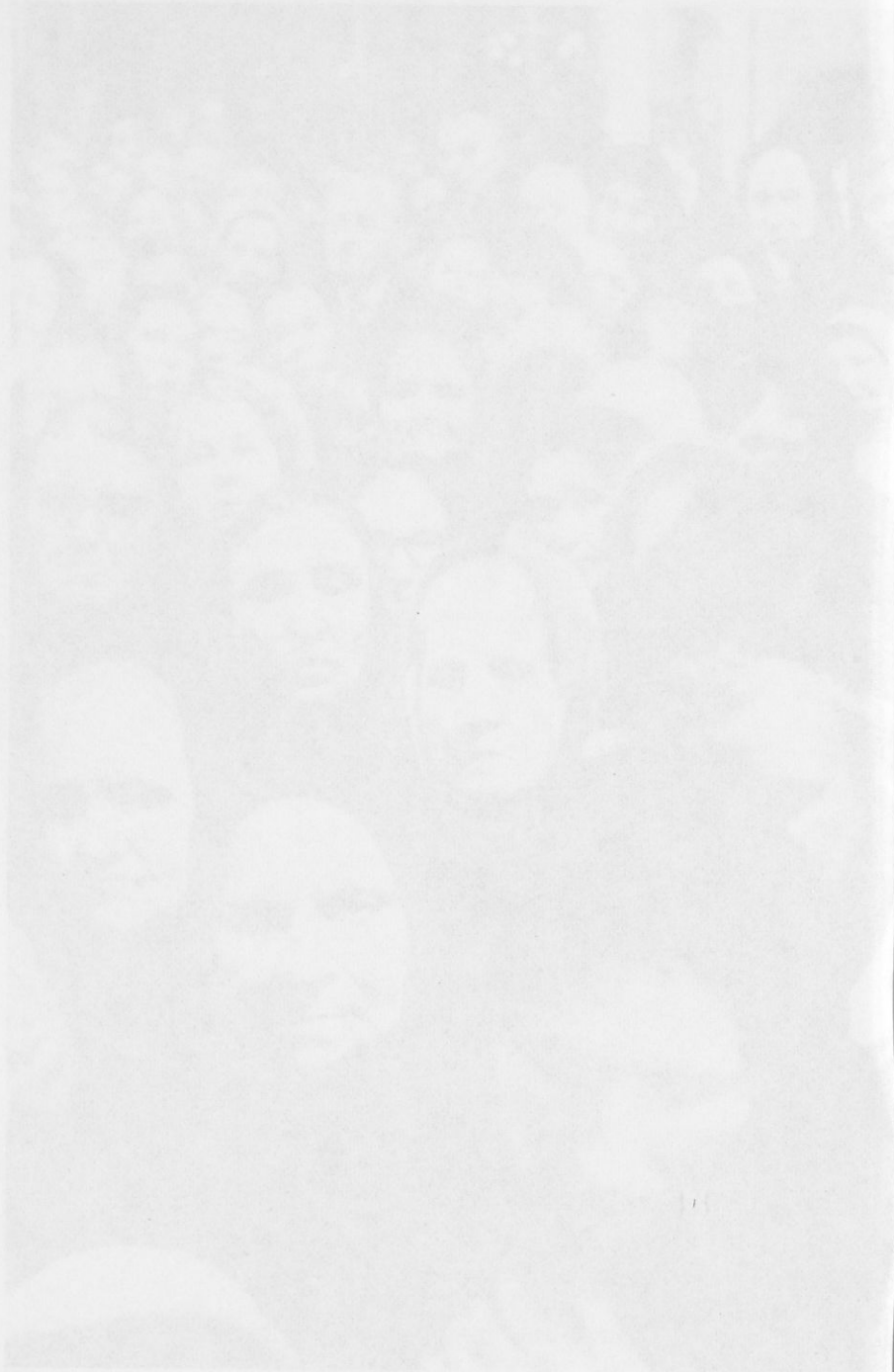
A Creative Service
of the United States Catholic Conference
Washington, D.C.

© Copyright 1976
United States Catholic Conference
All Rights Reserved

Deacidified



KNA



FOREWORD

CONTENTS

	FOREWORD	7
1	ON BREAD ALONE Hunger for Food	8
2	TO SET AT LIBERTY THE OPPRESSED Hunger for Freedom and Justice	16
3	SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES Hunger for Peace	24
4	TRUTH IS IN JESUS Hunger for Truth	32
5	YOU DO NOT KNOW ME Hunger for Understanding	40
6	WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME? Hunger for God	48
7	BREAD FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD Hunger for Jesus	56

Most Rev. Joseph I. Bernardini
Archbishop of Cincinnati
President, National Conference
of Catholic Bishops

CONTENTS

7	FOREWORD	
8	ON BREAD ALONE Hunger for Food	1
18	TO SET AT LIBERTY THE OPPRESSED Hunger for Freedom and Justice	2
24	SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES Hunger for Peace	3
32	TRUTH IS IN JESUS Hunger for Truth	4
40	YOU DO NOT KNOW ME Hunger for Understanding	5
48	WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME? Hunger for God	6
58	BREAD FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD Hunger for Jesus	7

FOREWORD

A "mystery," in Catholic belief, is not a mere meaningless riddle. "Mystery" is used in this sense, for instance, when we are asked to explain the reason behind somebody else's evidently senseless words or acts and we reply: "That's a mystery to me." In such cases, "mystery" suggests absence of meaning.

It is quite otherwise with an authentic "mystery" in the religious sense. "Mystery" here does not signify lack of meaning. It signifies the opposite: so much meaning, such a divine superabundance of significance, that it is literally beyond the capacities of human intelligence fully to comprehend the "mysterious" truth which is involved.

This is preeminently the case with the Eucharist. When we speak of the Eucharist as a "mystery," we point to the fact that here is an overwhelmingly rich reality whose meaning for our lives is, humanly speaking, absolutely inexhaustible.

This, it seems to me, is the central message of both the 41st International Eucharistic Congress (Philadelphia, August 1-8, 1976) and of this collection of essays, first delivered as radio talks, by Father Walter J. Burghardt, S.J. The central theme, "The Eucharist and the Hungers of the Human Family," is a reminder that this gift of God speaks to profound human needs, spiritual, emotional and material.

The more we reflect upon the Eucharist, the more we learn about God's love for us and about the loving response we are called upon to make. The more we turn to the Eucharist for help in living our lives as followers of Christ in the world, the more help—light, strength and encouragement—we shall receive. The more fully we immerse ourselves in the Eucharistic mystery, the more closely we shall find ourselves joined in union with Christ and with one another.

I commend this little book to those who will read it, not because it unravels the "mystery" of the Eucharist (which cannot be done), but because it makes clear how rich a source of instruction and inspiration, and how relevant to our lives, this mystery truly is.

Most Rev. Joseph L. Bernardin
Archbishop of Cincinnati
President, National Conference
of Catholic Bishops

FOREWORD

A "review" in Catholic Relief is not a mere introduction
to the subject, when we
somebody else's
give. That's a review
abstract of the
"mystery" in the
religion. Mystery is not really a lack of

ON BREAD ALONE

Hunger for Food



1

ONE of the most powerful scenes in the life of Christ is the first great act of His public ministry. As Matthew tells it, He “was led up by the Spirit into the desert”—apparently the barren highland of Judea to the west of the Dead Sea in the lower Jordan valley—desert that in the Hebrew tradition was at once the place of encounter with God and the abode of demons. Why led there? “To be tempted by the devil”—the same devil who of old had tempted the first Adam and mastered him. For 40 days and 40 nights He fasted—very much like Moses—and “afterwards He was hungry.” Then the tempter came to Him, came with a devilish temptation, to misuse His messianic power, to use it to His own advantage: “If you are God’s Son, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But Jesus answered: “Not on bread alone shall man live, but on every word that proceeds from God’s mouth” (Mt 4:1-4).

Not on bread alone shall man live. That phrase, torn from its original messianic context, has sparked Christian spirituality for centuries. It is a preacher’s cliché. What marks us off from the pagan, from the humanist, from the sensualist is that our hearts are in heaven, our souls have taken wing. We do not live to eat, we eat to live. Protein isn’t all that important; we have a food that comes down like manna from heaven. More significant than my corruptible flesh is my deathless soul.

Today our perspectives have changed drastically. Not that we Christians deny the priority of spirit over matter. Rather that we refuse to cleave the human person in two; we are more inclined to see man or woman as a whole, as embodied spirit; the body is inescapably man, inescapably woman. And this one person, this man, this woman, is in unparalleled peril because, to change Mary’s words at Cana, “they have no bread.” And so, in this eucharistic year, when Catholics are focusing on the



Bread of Life, the world is focusing on the life of bread. Man may not live on bread alone, but without bread he will not live.

In this context three questions surge up: (1) Is hunger for bread really a major crisis in our world? (2) If it is, why is it? (3) What can we who are not hungry do about it? The same three issues in different words: some hard facts, some basic causes, some suggested solutions.

I

FIRST then, is hunger really a major crisis in our world? To this question there is but one answer: a resounding yes. At this moment, at least 460 million people are hungry. Not hungry just for the moment, as you or I might feel a fitful craving for food, might suddenly realize we have not eaten all day. No, these 460 million are starving. I mean that this man's body is literally eating itself up, feeding on itself. His kidneys and liver are functioning badly. He is bone-weary and his mind is terribly confused. He has little defense against disease, against infection. He has lost a third of his normal weight, and when that loss goes beyond 40 percent, he will almost surely die.

Nor are these 460 million the sum total of the hungry. There are all those others who have enough calories to live, but lack so much else—proteins and other essential nutrients—that they cannot function at normal strength, cannot think and play, cannot work and pray in a fashion you and I take for granted. In their day there is simply no joy; they are too tired for joy.

If all this seems abstract to you, dreadfully cut-and-dried, then look at one city. As a national magazine pictured it recently,

Calcutta presents a harrowing vision. The destitute, the skin-and-bones starving, the leprous and the dying seem to be concentrated there as nowhere else in India—or the world. Their numbers, swollen by past waves of refugees from Bangladesh, grow daily. At least 200,000 of them live in the streets, building tiny fires to cook their scraps of food, defecating at curbstones, curling up in their cotton rags against a wall to sleep—and often to die.¹

If Calcutta seems coldly remote, then fix your eyes on America, on the United States. In this land of plenty, 10 mil-

lion Americans go to bed hungry each night, 25 million more suffer from malnutrition: all told, one out of every six Americans. This is not a naked, abstract figure. It means that pregnant women will give birth to defective children, that grown men rummage in garbage cans, that elderly women are eating dog food. It means that there are North American babies, like west African babies, who are too weak to do more than whimper, babies whose minds and bodies are already beyond repair.

If all this does not get to you, then do what Arthur Simon has done:

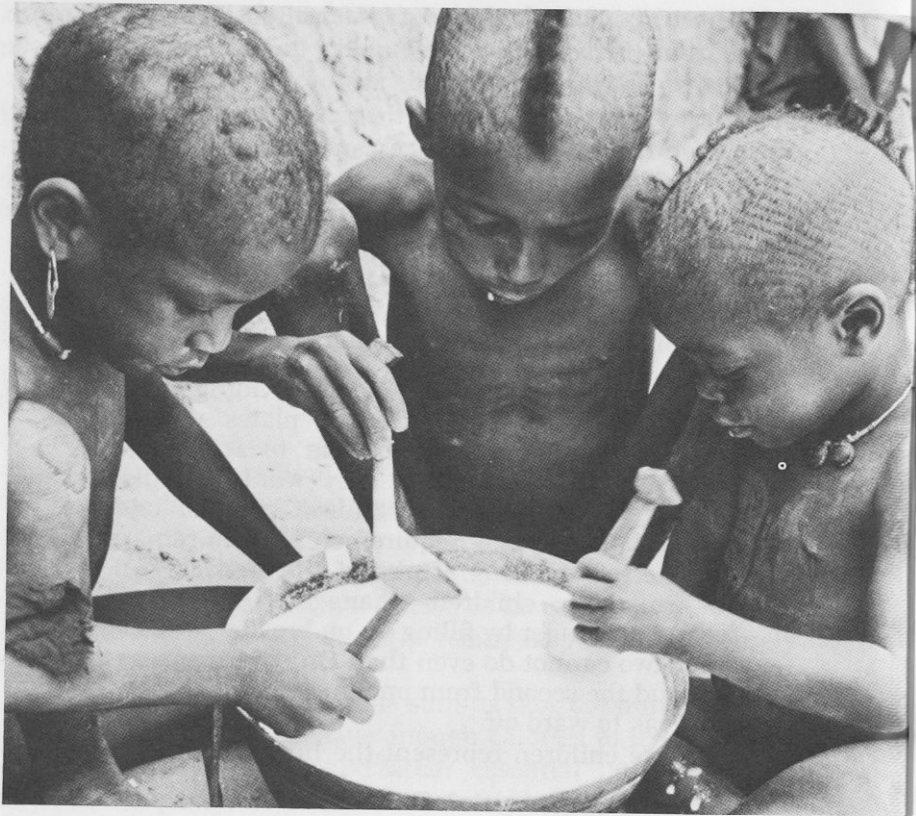
Imagine ten children at a table dividing up food. The three healthiest load their plates with large portions, including most of the meat, fish, milk and eggs. They eat what they want and discard the leftovers. Two other children get just enough to meet their basic requirements. The remaining five are left wanting. Three of them—sickly, nervous, apathetic children—manage to stave off the feeling of hunger by filling up on bread and rice. The other two cannot do even that. One dies from dysentery and the second from pneumonia, which they are too weak to ward off.

These children represent the human family. . . .²

Is there a hunger crisis? Four billion human persons walk or lie on this earth. At the very least, one billion go to bed hungry each night (some say two billion), at least one out of every four (some say one out of two); and most of them are children. Each day 10,000 of the hungry die; but for each one who dies, another takes his place. And soon two will take his place; for by the year 2000 the human family may well be twice what it numbers today. Is the world hungry for bread? You tell me.

II

MY SECOND question: This hunger for bread, this world crisis, how has it come to be? Why does it exist? To be honest, I do not know. The causes are confoundingly complex, and even the experts are at odds. But as I read the experts, I come away with four major approaches, four analyses. None of these excludes the others; but the stress, the priority, within each is strikingly different, and it determines in large measure the response to the crisis.



AID

For Group 1, the villain is nature. Drought in the Sahel, south Asian monsoons, a poor harvest in Russia, a drought-flood-frost cycle in the United States, advancing deserts and soil erosion, malaria and the tsetse fly, these and a hundred other "acts of God" are, for some, the reason why half the world is hungry. The appropriate response? Immediate food relief for each disaster, a food-reserve system for future disasters.

For Group 2, the villain is people. The world is growing too fast: two percent annually for the world at large, 2.5 percent for poor countries as a whole. This is 70 million more persons each year—most among hungry peoples. By 2000, four-fifths of the human race will be in poor countries. Our food supply cannot keep pace with such increase; each year millions more will be hungry. The appropriate response? Massive efforts to control birth.

For Group 3, the villain is productivity. Developing countries do not produce enough food, because they do not have the

agricultural know-how. The rich 30 percent of the world produces 60 percent of the food, consumes 50 percent. The appropriate response? More research, technical assistance, modern technologies, the Green Revolution with its seeds and its fertilizers and its mechanization.

For Group 4, all this is important, but it fails to touch the heart of the matter. The villain is our international economic order. The food problem is a symptom—symptom of a structure, a disordered structure, a whole web of unjust relationships between rich and poor countries. The development models followed in the 50s and 60s, models inspired by foreign-aid programs, were detrimental to food production. These models downgraded the agricultural sector of societies, sidestepped the small farmer, subordinated the soil to the factory. These models encouraged “cash crops”—cocoa in Ghana, rubber in Indochina, tea in Sri Lanka—crops that served market needs of the West but did not feed the people. These models tied developing nations to a technology that forced impossible importing of fuels and fertilizers. These models are interwoven with military considerations, linked with the \$250 billion the nations spend each year for instruments of destruction. These models serve an economic system whose primary goal is to maximize profits. The only really appropriate response? A new international economic order.

III

GRANTED a hunger crisis, given its complex causes, what can we who are not hungry do about it? To begin with, we must recognize a fundamental human right, not simply some abstract right to life, but concretely the right to eat. The Synod of Catholic Bishops affirmed that right in October 1974; and a month later the United Nations World Food Conference solemnly proclaimed from Rome that “every man, woman, and child has the inalienable right to freedom from hunger and malnutrition. . . .”

But this right to eat is not some ethical truth impossible to realize. Our secretary of state told the same Food Conference: “The profound promise of our era is that for the first time we may have the technical capacity to free mankind from the scourge of hunger. Therefore, today we must proclaim a bold objective—that within a decade no child will go to bed hungry, that no family will fear for its next day’s bread and that no

human being's future and capacities will be stunted by malnutrition."

We must eliminate hunger, and we can; but will we? So many obstacles say no. For one thing, food is power. In our 16 central states there are almost 225 million acres in crops worth \$54 billion a year. There is latent power here, power that can overpower the influence of oil and missiles. From Moscow to Cairo they know this. And so our secretary of agriculture can chuckle: "When I come calling with wheat in my pocket, they pay attention."³ And so we must ask: Will we feed the hungry only if they are pro-American?

I say "we" because North America is now the world's breadbasket. Only a few countries have enough grain on their own; only a handful export grain on a global level; two of these dwarf the rest: the United States and Canada. This fiscal year, they will export enough grain to feed India's 600 million. In the words of an expert,

North America today finds itself with an almost monopolistic control of the world's exportable grain supplies, a situation for which there is no historical precedent. In a world of food scarcity, where there may not be enough food to go around, North America must decide who gets how much food and on what terms. The governments of the United States and Canada have not consciously sought this responsibility . . . but they must reckon with it nevertheless.⁴

What can you and I do? We can influence government and we can change ourselves. We have a government that is responsive to its citizens, to us; the end of the Vietnamese war proved that. But to influence government means that I must know what is going on; I cannot afford to abide in ignorance. It shames me that I know so much about *Roe v. Wade*, *Doe v. Bolton*, the historic Supreme Court decisions on abortion, and I know so little about H.R. 9005, Public Law 94-161, the International Development and Food Assistance Act of 1975. Both are critical moral issues. Can I conscientiously commend a presidential candidate if he supports an amendment on abortion and fail to ask him where he stands on the American breadbasket? Every American must examine his or her political conscience: What do I know about hunger across the world, hunger in the U.S.? What do I know about American food policy, about American opposition to a new international economic order, about the crucial internal struggle between the

forces of sovereignty and interdependence? Have I ever told my public servants where I stand on pending legislation on food aid to needy nations? If I know nothing of all this, have done nothing, am I not in part responsible for bloated bellies and shriveled spirits?

To change a government, we must change ourselves. The Letter of James put it pungently: "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?" (James 2:14-16). A billion hungry stomachs forbid us to eat today as we did yesterday, condemn our American garbage cans that could feed Calcutta each day, plead like Lazarus in the Gospel for the crumbs that fall from our tables. As long as my brothers and sisters are starving, I can no longer fill my stomach without discomfort.

But there's the rub: "my brothers and sisters." Is this the way I see the hungry—as if someone I love were starving? Isn't it ironic that so many who have no God save man feel more anguish for the hungry than so many whose God-given commandment is to love others as they love themselves, to feed the hungry Christ under pain of damnation? The Bread of Life that is the Eucharist should make me solidary with all who need bread to live; but too often the Eucharist feeds no one but me.

A eucharistic prayer from the second century speaks of "this broken bread" which "was scattered over the hills," then was "gathered [and] became one mass,"⁵ one Bread. We must reverse that process. The one Bread we eat must be given back, must be transformed into a bread we break for the millions, must be scattered again over the hills, into the valleys, through the deserts until each brother of mine, each sister, from Appalachia to west Africa, can smile each night and murmur: "I am full."

¹ *Time*, Dec. 29, 1975, p. 47.

² Arthur Simon, *Bread for the World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975) p. 14.

³ Hugh Sidey, in *Time*, Jan. 12, 1976, p. 15.

⁴ Lester R. Brown, *The Politics and Responsibility of the North American Breadbasket* (Worldwatch Paper 2; Washington, D.C.: Worldwatch Institute, Oct. 1975) p. 6.

⁵ *Didache* 9, 4.

TO SET AT LIBERTY
THE OPPRESSED
Hunger for Freedom and Justice



JERRY FILTEAU

2

ONE of the crucial episodes in the public life of Jesus took place in His native Nazareth. It was His first return there. As was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read. Handed the book of Isaiah, He turned to chapter 61 and read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because He has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me
to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty the oppressed. . . .
(Is 61:1-2)

He sat down; the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him; and He shook them with a shocking statement: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:16-21).

I say this is a crucial episode because it forces on the Christian the issue of human salvation: Why did God take flesh? Here three questions surge up: (1) Is there really oppression, slavery, injustice in the world? (2) If so, does the Church precisely as Church have any responsibility to lift it? (3) If so, what conclusions can we draw that might spur the Christian to concrete action?

I

FIRST then, is there really oppression, slavery, injustice in the world? The answer stares you in the face, from the pages of history and from the front page of each day's newspaper.

Take an economic oppression: poverty in an affluent Ameri-

ca. If you define poverty as an absence of adequate food, housing, clothing, medical care and other necessities, government tables indicate that in 1974 the poor Americans numbered 24.3 million. But a more realistic standard for measuring poverty suggests strongly that the number of poor people in America is not 24.3 but 46 million. And if you go one step further and put above the poverty level those alone whose income insures not only clothing and housing and medical care, but food that nourishes, education, transportation costs, insurance, occasional entertainment and vacation, America's poor roll up to about 60,325,000.¹ On these figures, two out of every seven Americans are poor.

And this is North America, the world's breadbasket, not the Indian subcontinent, where 200 million eke out life on incomes of less than \$40 a year. This is not yet Latin America, where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, where generally five to 10 percent control half the wealth, the lower third of the population five percent. We have not even touched the hundreds of millions of farmers across the world who hurt, farmers for whom, in Robert McNamara's words, "life is neither satisfying nor decent. Hunger and malnutrition menace their families. Illiteracy forecloses their futures. Disease and death visit their villages too often, stay too long and return too soon."²

Take a political oppression. Not one country taking over another country by sheer force as in Russia's rape of Hungary. That does happen. I focus here on what is taking place *within* a society. One example must suffice. South Africa is the richest, most highly developed country in Africa. Of its 25 million people, blacks make up 70 percent, whites 18, Colored 9, Asians 3. But only whites, the 18 percent, may vote in parliamentary elections; only whites may serve in Parliament; only whites administer the laws. And the laws, "apartness" laws, affect every aspect of South African life. They determine where you may live and go to school, where you may work and what you may write. They forbid whites and nonwhites to eat in the same restaurants, stay in the same hotels, ride on the same buses. They divide the blacks into eight separate "nations," assign them scattered blocks of land to the east—13 percent of South Africa's area. In 1971 the International Court of Justice declared South Africa's control over South West Africa illegal; but that control abides, firm and unshaken.

Take a social oppression: the oppression of woman. Despite

some progress in some areas, woman's situation is still second-class. In some societies girls are fed less than boys. In the Third World most women are still illiterate. In many countries women can enter only low-prestige, low-pay occupations labeled "feminine," and even here they are paid less than men. Forced marriage, at times before puberty, is not uncommon. Labor within families is unequally divided between husband and wife. Nine countries debar women from voting; even more keep them from voting by keeping them illiterate. With rare exceptions, political leadership is a male prerogative. Even in developed societies that have experienced women's liberation movements, sex discrimination has not been eliminated; probably it has not even decreased, has only shifted from open and direct to subtle and sophisticated.³

And only those who are blind or ignorant would deny that down through the centuries woman has been consistently downplayed in the Church, kept from contributing her rich potential to the world's redemption, prevented from actualizing the inspired proclamation that in Christ Jesus "there is no 'male and female'" (Gal 3:28).

I have given you a handful of examples—samples of injustice, suggestions of enslavement. These are not exceptions; the earth is charged with oppression, and all too often the slavery is built into a structure, a spider's web ever more complex, ever more imprisoning.

II

WHAT has God's Church to do with man's injustice? What is the relationship between the evangelizing mission of the Church and man's need to be liberated from social, political and economic oppression?

Broadly speaking, Catholics have given three responses to the question. (1) The temporal order has *no* relationship to the Church's mission; that mission is sheerly spiritual. The Church is a channel whereby the human person has access to the higher world of the spirit, can be linked with God. The Church's commission is to gather a band of true believers who will prepare themselves by faith and hope for the redemptive action by which God establishes His kingdom at the end of history. (2) Freedom from oppression is an *essential* part of the Church's mission. In the words of Cardinal Stephen Kim of Korea, "Only the Church which serves the cause of [the

poor, the suffering, the oppressed] is the true Church of Christ." This I take to be the thrust of the document on justice that issued from the 1971 Synod of Bishops: Social justice is a constitutive element of evangelization. (3) The search for justice, though not essential to the Church's mission, *follows* inevitably, rigorously, from that mission. This would be the position taken by Vatican II in its Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: The mission of the Church is not "in the political, economic, or social order. The purpose which Christ set before it is a religious one. But out of this religious mission itself come a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law."⁴ This is the posture Paul VI assumed in his inaugural address to the 1974 Synod of Bishops.

Now, no respectable theologian would say today that the Church has *no* relationship to human fulfillment, has *no* responsibility to those whose lives are inhuman or less human because social, political or economic structures grind them into the dust. But whether social justice is an *essential* facet of Christianity's proper function, or *follows* from it as the night the day, is not just a theoretical puzzle for theologians with time on their hands. The philosophical language hides a pro-



found issue, a question of ultimate concern: What is redemption, what is salvation? Time forbids detailed discussion here. But here, as elsewhere, the Christian has to avoid two extremes. On the one hand, salvation is not sheer socialization, personality development, liberation from oppressive structures; it is a divinization. The Church's primary task is to see to it that the human person is refashioned in the image of Christ; short of this there is no salvation. God fulfills us by uniting us with Him. On the other hand, any program of evangelization is inadequate if the Church does not spend itself to free the human person from every inhuman shackle. Oh yes, the Church has good news to preach even to those whose situation is humanly hopeless; for *the* good news is Jesus—Jesus alive, yearning to make those who are heavy-burdened one with Him. But this does not exempt the People of God from the ceaseless struggle to transform the city of man into the kingdom of God—a kingdom of peace, of justice, of love.

This is the vision that emerged from the 1974 Synod of Bishops in a significant statement on "Human Rights and Reconciliation." Said the bishops in common:

Human dignity is rooted in the image and reflection of God in each of us. It is this which makes all persons essentially equal. The integral development of persons makes more clear the divine image in them. In our time the Church has grown more deeply aware of this truth; hence she believes firmly that the promotion of human rights is required by the gospel and is central to her ministry.

This is not some newfangled theory of salvation. It stands in splendid consonance with the Old Testament and the New. The God of Israel ceaselessly tells His people—through Isaiah and Hosea, through Amos and Micah and Jeremiah—that He is weary of burnt offerings, solemn assemblies, the melody of harps. He does not want rivers of oil, their feasts, even their first-born. He asks for their steadfast love and that they execute justice (cf. Is 1:11-18, 42:1-4; Hos 2:18-20, 6:6; Amos 5:18-25; Mi 6:6-8; Jer 7:5-7).

But the justice God asked was not an ethical construct: Give to each what is due to each, what each human person has a strict right to demand. Justice was a whole web of relationships that stemmed from Israel's covenant with God. They were to father the fatherless and feed the sojourner, the stranger, not

because the orphan and the outsider deserved it, but because this was the way *God* had acted with *them*: "for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Dt 10:18-19). In freeing the oppressed, they were mirroring the loving God who had delivered *them* from oppression. In loving the loveless, the unloved, the unlovable, they were imaging the God who wooed Israel back despite her infidelities, betrothed her to Himself forever (cf. Hos 2:14-23). For Israel, the practice of justice was an expression of steadfast love, a demand of steadfast love—God's love and their own love. Not to execute justice was not to worship God.

This is the tradition that sparks the ministry of Jesus (cf. Mt 12:17-21, 23:23). In harmony with Hosea, He wants not sacrifice but compassion (cf. Mt 9:13, 12:7). And the just man or the just woman is not primarily someone who gives to another what that other *deserves*. The just man, the just woman has covenanted with God; this covenant demands that we treat other human persons as *God* wants them treated in His covenant plan, treat friend and enemy as He treats them. And He "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:45).

The early Christians seem to have grasped that. If *anyone* is hungry or athirst, naked or a stranger, sick or in prison, it is always Christ who clamors for bread or water, Christ who cries to be clothed or welcomed, Christ whom you visit (cf. Mt 25:31-46). And the First Letter of John is terribly uncompromising: "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 Jn 3:17).

III

Now once we admit, with the Synod of 1974, that "the promotion of human rights is required by the gospel and is central to [the Church's] ministry," we confront my final question: What conclusions can we draw that might spur the Christian to concrete action?

First, Christians dare not wash their hands of politics. Not that the Church becomes a political party. Rather that injustice and slavery are so tied to structures, including governments, that to surrender political activity to political "plumbers" is to surrender the oppressed to their slavery. Politics should be the collaborative effort of good men and good women to fashion

for their brothers and sisters conditions of human dignity, of human decency.

Second, for Christians to slave collaboratively against slavery is not to invade the secular. In large measure, underdevelopment and unjust dependence, whether in South Africa or in North America, are situations of sin, social sin—sinful because they keep God's images from that full humanness which is part of incarnational life, that divineness which is communion with God. To enter that arena is not an option but an obligation.

Third, the quest for justice is crucial for Christian spirituality. That remarkable theologian of hope, Jürgen Moltmann, paradoxically insists that the Church can discover its identity only to the extent that it associates, identifies, with the God-forsaken of this world, whose exemplar is the Godforsaken of Golgotha. If you want to liberate from oppression and meaningless existence, you must first recognize that "the glory of God does not shine on the crowns of the mighty, but on the face of the crucified Christ."⁵

Fourth, such a Christian spirituality calls for spiritual Christians. It demands of me a eucharistic spirituality, where the Christ of Holy Thursday not only feeds me. More importantly, He does with me today what He did that night with the bread: He takes me, and He blesses me, and He breaks me, and He gives me. The broken bread—then as now, Christ or I—the broken bread is a force for oneness; but then as now, Christ or I, the bread must be broken. Otherwise it cannot be given—especially to those who are themselves broken.

Fifth and finally, once we are given to others, we shall find that it is they who give to us. Given to the oppressed, we shall be lifted from our own oppression, our slavish centering on ourselves. In the broken we shall find our own healing; in the Godforsaken we shall find God.

¹ Cf. Mariellen Procopio and Frederick J. Perella, Jr., *Poverty Profile 1975* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1975) pp. 12-13.

² "The Gap between Rich and Poor: A Widening Chasm," *Social Education* 38, no. 7 (Nov.-Dec. 1974) 634.

³ Cf. Constantina Safilios-Rothschild, "The Current Status of Women Cross-culturally: Changes and Persisting Barriers," *Theological Studies* 36 (1975) 577-604.

⁴ Vatican II, Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 42.

⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) p. 327.

**SWORDS INTO
PLOUGHSHARES**
Hunger for Peace



3

WHEN first I mulled over ideas that touch the hunger for peace, it was Christmas. Once again I was struck by the Christmas paradox (some would call it a flat contradiction). One side of the paradox was sung by Christ's angels, His messengers, the midnight of His birth: "Peace on earth to men with whom God is pleased" (Lk 2:14). *Peace*. The other side of the paradox was preached three decades later by Christ Himself: "Do not imagine that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have come to bring a *sword*, not peace" (Lk 12:51).

I

As I write these lines, not peace but the sword again hangs over the world. In Angola, Soviet-backed and pro-Western forces are battling for control of oil-rich land. In Lebanon, Christians and Moslems are murdering one another with abandon. In Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants continue to lust for one another's blood. In the Mideast, Israelis and Arabs are hunched over a tenuous truce. In the Philippines, martial law still prevails, still imprisons on political principles. New York City is afraid, tense over a bomb that shattered an airport and scattered limbs across a congested area. Atomic stockpiles grow beyond belief; a cataclysmic world war is not beyond thinking; and all the while the vast majority of the world's four billion are yearning for peace, a peace that never seems to come, a peace that is consistently a prelude to war.

But war is not limited to bombs and commando raids, to napalm and intercontinental missiles, to man's inhumanity to man. Millions of human persons are hungering for peace within themselves. I am one person, yet so often I am at war with myself. For some, it is the deep-rooted conflict St. Paul

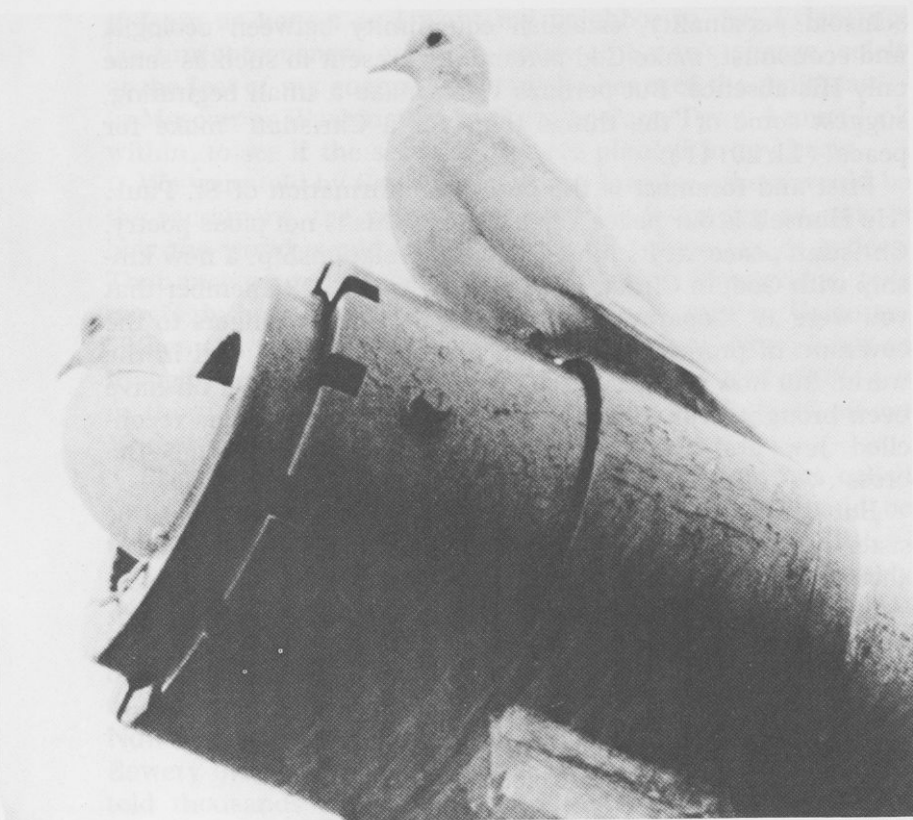
described with rare insight in his letter to the Christians of Rome:

My own actions bewilder me. What I do is not what I want to do; I do the very thing I hate. . . . It is not the good my will prefers, but the evil my will disapproves, that I find myself doing. In my inmost self I delight in God's law; but I see in my lower self another law at war with the law of my conscience, enslaving me to the law of sin which my lower self contains (Rom 7:15-23).

For others, it is not sin that tears them in two. Their schizophrenia is that they do not know who they are; so often they are two persons, confused and confounded, tormented and distracted, unglued and unhinged. Or they are nobody: Hearts shaped for love feel utterly unloved, unneeded, unwanted. And so, in place of peace there is that ultimate disharmony which is despair; the life I live is not worth living, it is not life at all.

A third war, a special kind of "world" war, severs us from nature, from all that is not man or God. It has come to a head in ecology. The land we have ploughed and plundered, the chemicals that feed our life and heal us, the air we breathe and the ground we walk, the very wealth of our world threatens to strangle us. The earth which God commissioned the first man and woman to touch with their magic, to link to their love, this earth the first sin turned hostile to us. And ever since we have enlarged the enmity that severs us. It is as if we began either with God's blessing in Genesis, "Subdue the earth" (Gn 1:28), or with God's anathema, "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Gn 3:17), experienced to our dismay how reluctant nature often is to serve us, vowed that with our know-how and our power we rational creatures would enslave the irrational and then carried our vow relentlessly to its logical conclusion. Only, the slave has turned on its master; cold reason is no longer in control; out of the nonhuman we have fashioned a monster, and the monster is at our throats. It is as though the things we see and hear and touch and taste and smell each day were divorced from the God who shaped them and, more frighteningly still, hostile to the men and women who use them. We are at war with our very environment.

A fourth facet of humankind's hunger for peace has to do with God. Here, I submit, is the most radical rupture of all. At this instant there are literally millions of men and women who



NC NEWS

say in their hearts, "There is no God." Millions more say, "There is a God," but they exile Him effectively from their daily living. And there are the uncounted millions whose experience of God is an experience of absence: God does not seem to be there. They simply do not find Him in crib or creation, on a cross or in His human images, in the proclaimed Word or "where two or three are gathered" in Jesus' name. For all of these, whatever peace may be there, it is not the peace that Christ left to His disciples (cf. Jn 14:27), "the peace of God which passes all understanding" (Phil 4:7).

II

IN THIS frightening paradox—war in a world that hungers for peace—what can a theologian say, whether to those at war or to those at peace? In one sense, I have nothing to say. Nothing I say will end war on any of its four fronts. Nothing I say will miraculously link the Lebanese in love, reshape a

schizoid personality, establish equanimity between ecologist and economist, make God perennially present to such as sense only His absence. But perhaps I can make a small beginning, suggest some of "the things that" for a Christian "make for peace" (Lk 20:41).

First and foremost is the profound affirmation of St. Paul: "He Himself is our peace" (Eph 2:14). This is not pious poetry. Christian peace, at its most basic, is a relationship, a new kinship with God, in Christ. Here Paul is limpid: "Remember that you were . . . separated from Christ . . . and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. . . ." He has reconciled Jew and Gentile "to God in one body through the cross . . ." (Eph 2:12-16). This is peace.

But Christian peace—being God's friend, being brother or sister to Christ—loses its power if it remains on the level of abstract theology. It must grasp me, shake me, thrill me as once it thrilled a perceptive sister who shared her excitement in a swift poem titled "Discovery":

It's this that makes
My spirit spin,
My bones to quake,
My blood run thin,
My flesh to melt
Inside my skin,
My very pulse
Create a din—
It's this that makes
My spirit spin:
That Heaven is
Not up, but in!¹

The peace of Christ, like the kingdom of God, is *within* you, or it is not yours at all.

But if the peace of Christ is to be within you, it must, strangely enough, go out to others. As it takes two to make war, so it takes two to make peace. That is why Isaiah could proclaim: "Peace is the fruit of righteousness," of justice (Is 32:17), and Vatican II: "Peace is the fruit of love."² Which suggests that war—whether with man or with God, with the earth or with myself—may be the fruit of unrighteousness, of injustice, of hate. Which suggests an examination of conscience along the four fronts of war, on its four faces. For

if I am as honest as I want my neighbor to be, I dare not lay unrighteousness and hate solely to Satan's charge, solely at the feet of my enemy, solely in the heart of the politician—in Moscow or Washington, in Cairo or Cape Town. I must look within, to see if the seeds of war are planted in my heart.

We were told by God's Son that our love for others would be the sacrament, the visible sign, that He is among us; this is how the world would recognize Him. To some extent it does. That once cantankerous journalist, Malcolm Muggeridge, tells movingly how he put Mother Teresa on a train in Calcutta: "When the train began to move, and I walked away, I felt as though I were leaving behind me all the beauty and all the joy in the universe. Something of God's love has rubbed off on Mother Teresa."³

Brazil's archbishop of the poor, Helder Câmara, has called forth from a Methodist missionary a tribute that should be true of all Christians: "Being with him, watching him, listening to him, one is less and less aware of him and increasingly aware of the reality to which he points—a God who cares about the little people of the earth."⁴ Decade after decade in our own country, Dorothy Day has opened "houses of hospitality" for the hungry, the heavy-burdened, the down-and-out. Now 78, jailed eight times, she still reflects from Manhattan's Bowery the face of the crucified Christ. And there are the untold thousands across the world, hearts without headlines, whose daily lives are sacraments of God's love, bring peace to flesh and spirits at war.

And still it is true that, by and large, the world does not recognize Christ, because the world does not see Him in our love. Whole cities could live on the garbage from our dumps, on the clothes we wear once, on the luxuries we have made necessities. Black and white are threatened with bloody combat because we have been, still are, as color-conscious as our unbelieving neighbors. For so many of us, a court of law is far more effective than the Sermon on the Mount. We, too, rape the earth, pillage it, refuse it the reverent care required of responsible stewards. There is no evidence that we Catholics drink less, lust less, hate less than the men and women who never eat the flesh of Christ or drink His blood. I am afraid many of us who claim to be Christlike are rather what St. Paul called the pagans of his day: We are "faithless, ruthless, pitiless" (Rom 1:31).

For all the tyranny we espy therein, what does Russia or

South Africa find in America, in us, to shake it, to make it marvel and cry, "Look how they love"? The seeds of war are within us, from the jealousy of Cain to the hate in my own heart, from the commerce that makes a jungle of the world to the ghettos we have structured for the Jew and the black, from the dishonesty of the little clerk to the tyranny of the big cleric. And even where we are not positively sinful, there is so much that makes us crawl back into our small, selfish shells. It reminds me of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's remarkable effort to capture in poetry the meaning of St. Christopher for our age. She wrote in part:

Christopher, we die

Not for lack of charity; we lie
Imprisoned in our sepulchers of stone,
Wanting your gift, O Saint, your gift alone.
No one will take the burden of the whole
Upon his shoulders; each man in his soul
Thinks his particular grief too great to bear
Without demanding still another's share.

But you—you chose to bear a brother's load
And every man who travelled down your road
You ferried on your back across the flood
Until one night beside the stream there stood,
Wrapped in a cloak of storm, a child who cried
And begged safe passage to the other side—
A child who weighed upon your back like lead,
Like earth upon the shoulders of the dead—
And, struggling to the bank while torrents whirled,
You found that on your shoulder leaned a world.

No wonder that the burden was so great:
You carried in your arms the monstrous weight
Of all men's happiness and all men's pain,
And all men's sorrows on your back had lain.
Even their sins you carried as your own—
Even their sins, you, Christopher, alone!⁵

The problem is, we are "imprisoned in fear"; we "do not heed the cry" Christopher "once heard across the stream."⁶ But, paradoxically, unless we heed the cry of others, heed it as the cry of Christ, we shall never find peace. There will only be war—not only war among men, but war with the earth, war within our inmost selves—yes, war with God.

There is a story I first heard from that remarkable Dutch priest Henri Nouwen. Once there was a very old man who

used to meditate each morning under a large tree on the banks of India's Ganges River. One morning he opened his eyes to see a scorpion floating helplessly in the strong current. As it was pulled closer to the tree, the scorpion got caught in the long roots that branched out into the river. The more it struggled, the more it became entangled in the network of tree roots.

Immediately the old man stretched out on the extended roots, reached out to rescue the scorpion. As soon as he touched it, the scorpion jerked, stung him. Instinctively the old man pulled back his hand, lost his balance. Then once again he stretched out along the roots. But each time he came within reach, the scorpion stung him—so often and so badly that his hands became swollen and bloody, his face was distorted by pain.

A passerby spied the old man stretched out on the roots, struggling with the scorpion. He could not believe his eyes. In disgust he shouted: "Hey, stupid old man! What's wrong with you? Only a fool would risk his life for an ugly, useless creature. Don't you know you may kill yourself to save that ungrateful animal?" Slowly the old man turned his head. Looking calmly into the stranger's eyes, he said: "Friend, because it belongs to the nature of the scorpion to sting, why should I give up my own nature to save?"

¹ Sister Mary Ignatius, "Discovery," *Messenger of the Sacred Heart* 77, no. 2 (February 1942) 58.

² Vatican II, Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 78.

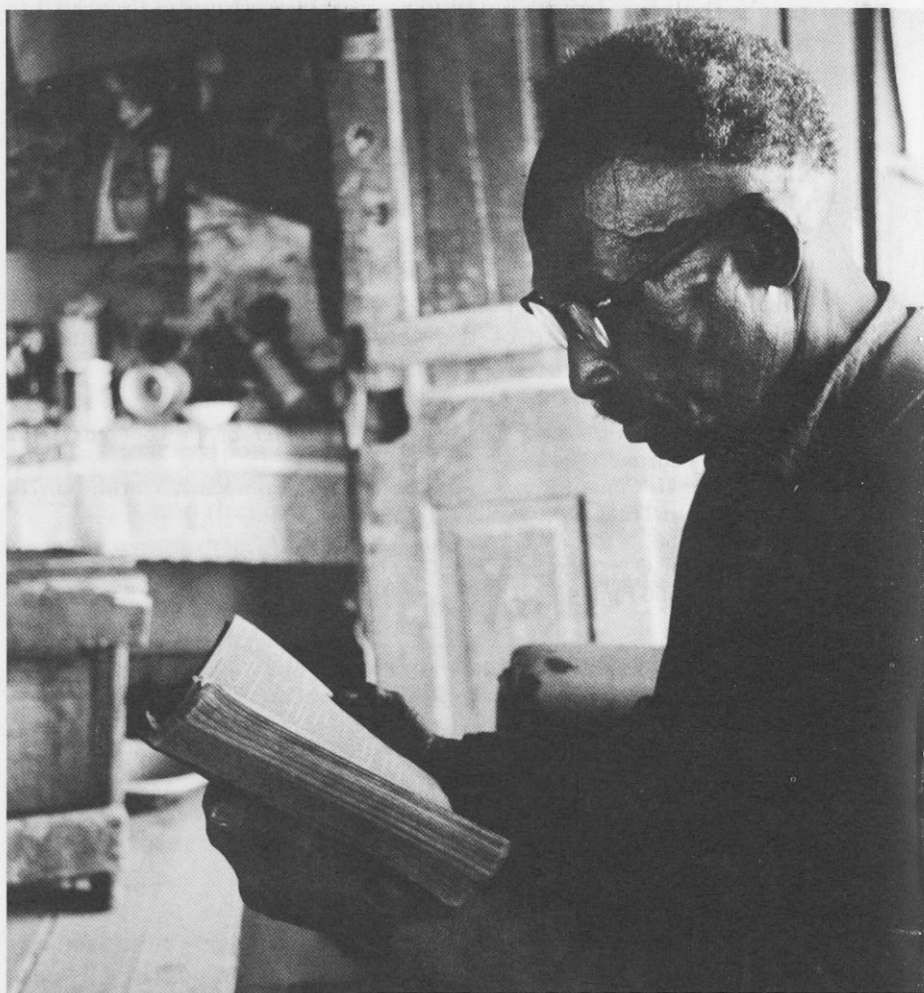
³ Quoted in *Time*, Dec. 29, 1975, p. 48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵ "Saint for Our Time," in *The Unicorn and Other Poems* (New York: Pantheon, 1956) pp. 45-47.

⁶ *Ibid.*

TRUTH IS IN JESUS
Hunger for Truth



4

IN THE first three essays on the hungers of the human family, I had no doubt that I was talking about real hungers—hungers here and across the world. At least 460 million are starving: there *is* hunger for food. Poverty afflicts perhaps 60 million Americans, in South Africa 18 percent of the population dominate the rest and the world's women are still an oppressed class: there *is* hunger for justice and freedom. War racks Angola, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, imperils the earth: there *is* hunger for peace.

But when I title this chapter "Hunger for Truth," am I not being naive? Oh, not in implying incredible ignorance in the world, from slums to universities; that much can be documented. Naive rather in assuming within this ignorance a hunger of the human family, a thirst for truth. Is this anything more than a pious Catholic rhetoric, conceived in Rome, nurtured in parochial schools and delivered queasily to an incredulous world with a cliché from Augustine: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord; and our heart is restless until it rests in thee"?

As happens so often, the profound problem here is a word, a sort of weasel word. I mean that remarkable monosyllable "truth." I can recognize bread, and my stomach growls when it is empty. I have a sense of justice, a feel for freedom, and the world's enslavements, economic and social and political, cry aloud in the streets. War rarely hides its blood-flecked face, and I know when I am at peace with God or myself, with the earth or my brothers and sisters. But truth is not so patent. And what is truth's opposite, its antagonist? A lie? A mistake? Ignorance? Before I can declare that the world is hungry for truth, I must disclose what I mean by truth.

I

THE problem is, the very word "truth" has a history, a dappled ancestry. Thinkers have struggled with it since the dawn of Western philosophy six centuries before Christ. This is not the place to recapture that struggle. But I think it fair to say that, on the whole, the search for the true has been a search for the real. For some—from the early Greeks, through Augustine and Aquinas, down to the Neo-Scholastics—that effort to discover the real has been an effort to discover what *is*, something that exists whether I think of it or not, to see how I can lay hold of that "something out there," link my little mind to objective reality.

Others—call them existentialists if you will—have little use for this kind of truth, objective truth, universal truth, reality "somewhere out there." Such reality is superficial; such truth is of no personal value. Truth in the real sense has to be practical and subjective. Truth reveals itself to me as real only as I exercise an extraordinary liberty: the liberty I have of accepting myself in the authentic human situation. Real truth, therefore, is personal truth: the truth by which I live and to which I commit myself.

And there are those for whom the only truth is pragmatic truth. It may be a proposition that, once admitted, leads to satisfactory results. Or it may be the Marxist thesis that the only reality is matter; all our thoughts, desires, and activity are the result of economic needs; truth is simply conforming my knowing to that which here and now promotes evolution towards a classless society.

These "schools of truth," and a score more, I do not intend to evaluate. Not that they are unimportant; quite the contrary. Without this ceaseless quest of human reason, our day-to-day living would be far less human, far less alive. In fact, in its extent and its intensity, in its agony and its ecstasy, the philosophical search suggests an insatiable hunger of the human spirit. I bypass this source because there is another wellspring of truth still more rewarding. It is a different approach to truth, a notion of truth founded on religious experience, founded on encounter with God. It is the biblical notion of truth, Old Testament and New.

Old Testament truth is remarkably rich. Basically, it has to do with being stable, proven, reliable, dependable, trustworthy. The true peace of which Jeremiah speaks (Jer 14:13) is a

secure, lasting peace. The true road of which Abraham's servant speaks (Gn 24:48) is a road that will surely lead to its objective. And this kind of truth, this truth that makes for confidence, is a quality that characterizes God, is expected of man and is to be found in God's revelation to man.

In the Old Testament, truth is a quality which properly belongs to God. God is a "God of truth" (Ps 31:5; Jer 10:10). But not in an intellectualist sense. The God of truth comes to consummate clarity in the context of the covenant and His promises. Moses puts it splendidly to Israel: "Know that Yahweh your God is God, the God worthy of trust who keeps His covenant of love forever with those who love Him" (Dt 7:9). The oath He swore to David is a "sure" oath, inviolable; He will not depart from it (Ps 132:11). In His gracious covenant God is never found wanting. And this same sense of truth as fidelity characterizes the *word* of God. David confesses it: "Thy words are truth" (2 S 7:28); and when the psalmist sings to God "The sum of thy word is truth" (Ps 119:160), he tells us that what is essential and basic in God's word is that His word is irrevocable and everlasting: God will never go back on His word, He will always perform for His people His wonderful works of salvation.

Now this "God of truth" demanded "men of truth" (Ex 18:21; Neh 7:2). Truth they must speak (Ps 15:2); truth they must seek (Jer 5:1); in truth they must walk (3 K 20:3). But not in some rationalist sense. Men of truth were not, in the first instance, intellects in conformity with objective reality, but persons unswervingly conformed to God's will. Oh yes, they had to *know* God's will; but this was not enough: to be men of truth, they had to *do* God's will, live lives pleasing to God. Men of truth were the people of God who were faithful to His covenant, faithful to His law—yes, men and women who were faithful to one another (Gn 47:29; Jos 2:14; Za 7:9).

Besides a God of truth and men of truth, the Old Testament unveils a third facet of truth: revealed truth. At times it is "true teaching," which priests must transmit (Mal 2:6), for it stems from God. At times it is the law, which must be obeyed (Ps 25:5, 86:11), for it comes from God. Truth here is God's providential plan, God's unwavering will, not utterly understandable, even by the just, before judgment time (Wis 3:9).

In impressive fashion, the New Testament reflects the Old. St. Paul's formula "God's truthfulness" (Rom 3:7) is God's

faithfulness, His fidelity to His promises; and for man, a life of truth is a life of righteousness, of justice, the kind of life Paul expects to find among Christians (Col 1:6; 2 Cor 13:8). But something new has come into being: For the truth of the law, we now have "the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:5, 14). For Paul, truth is the word of God he preaches, God's mystery revealed, to be accepted by faith, to be lived in love—not an abstract set of propositions but the person of Christ (2 Cor 4:5): "truth is in Jesus" (Eph 4:21).

And yet, for all the richness of Paul, it is in John that we discover a theology of truth. For John, truth is not God's own being. Truth is the word Christ heard from the Father, the word He came to proclaim, the word that should lead us to believe in Him (cf. Jn 8). This, John insists, is a fresh truth, a new revelation: "The law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ" (1:17). In Him God's self-disclosure has reached its fullness: He is "full of grace and of truth" (1:14). In fact, the thrilling newness of Christianity is that Christ is Himself the truth (14:6)—not precisely because He is God, but because, as Word made flesh, He has in Himself the fullness of revelation, He makes the Father known (1:18). It is summed up remarkably in that glorious sentence, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6). The three nouns are intimately linked. Jesus is the *way* to the Father because, as *truth* in flesh, He conveys to us the revelation of the Father in what He says and what He is, and in this way communicates to us the *life* of God. And He can be the truth for us as man because He is at the same time the Word "nearest the Father's heart . . . the only Son" (1:18).

But the truth of God does not come to a standstill once the flesh of Christ is no longer tangible. After truth in flesh returns to the Father, "the Spirit of truth" (14:17) descends upon the community. Why? To bear witness to Jesus (15:26), to lead His disciples to "truth in its entirety" (16:13), to help us grasp its true meaning (14:26). Because such is His ceaseless function, such His role in our coming to faith, the Spirit Himself can be called "the truth" (1 Jn 5:6).

In consequence, a Christian's task in John's eyes is to "be of the truth" (18:37). But this is possible only if the Christian who has been born of the Spirit in the surrender of faith abides in the word of Jesus, allows all his actions to be guided by the truth of the gospel, works with and loves his brothers and sisters by the power of the truth within him and adores

the Father with a worship inspired by the Spirit of truth and by the truth of Jesus (cf. Jn 4:23-24). This is the truth that makes for Christian freedom (8:32)—freedom not from necessity but from sin.¹ Truth is not so much, therefore, a complex of statements or ideas, not really speculation about the world or salvation; rather an address of God to man in concrete encounter, and man's response to that address—an address and a response inseparable from the person of Jesus, who is Himself the truth and the way to the truth.²

II

Now once we have taken our conception of truth not from philosophy but from Scripture, not from reason but from revelation, the hunger for truth becomes a religious issue. But the basic question remains: Is there really within the human family a hunger for the kind of truth the Bible describes? In one sense this can be questioned. How many Christians dot this earth? Perhaps a billion—no more than one person out of every four. The rest—three out of four—have never heard of Christ, or have heard of Him but see no reason to confess Him or once confessed Him but no longer care. Where, then, is this alleged hunger for the truth that is Christ?

I am not concerned with statistics; nor shall I argue that the hunger for biblical truth is a subconscious yearning of every man or woman. I am concerned with those of you who confess Christ and how you understand that confession. My focus here is faith; for the way you understand Christian faith will determine in large measure whether you hunger for the truth that St. John thundered.

What is faith? Many of you remember, some of you must still say, the Act of Faith with which I grew up, the Act of Faith in the catechisms and prayer books of the recent past:

O my God, I firmly believe that thou art one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I believe that thy divine Son became man and died for our sins. I believe these and all the truths which the holy Catholic Church teaches, because thou hast revealed them, who canst neither deceive nor be deceived.

This Act of Faith is a response. I say yes, a firm yes, to all that God has revealed, insofar as this revelation, this set of revealed truths, has been communicated to me through the

Church. Now this manner of formulating my faith, this way of expressing my belief, stems from a very specific vision of what revelation is and when God reveals. In this vision, revelation is primarily propositional: There is one God in three Persons; the Son of God became man and died for our sins, and so forth and so on. And these propositions reproduce or reflect what God said through Christ when the Lord walked this earth and what God said through the Spirit while the apostles personally preached the gospel.

This vision of revelation calls for a corresponding kind of response. I mean an intellectual assent, an affirmation of the mind, a judgment: There is one God in three Persons; the Son of God became man; Christ died for our sins. This is impossible without grace, of course, but it is still an act of the intellect. A love-laden affirmation, perhaps, but still an affirmation that such-and-such is true. I say yes to a proposition, a truth, disclosed by God centuries ago. This is, at rock bottom, my act of faith.

Contemporary theologians are trying to enrich this vision. To begin with, they are dissatisfied with a concept of revelation that puts the emphasis on propositions. What God discloses is not primarily propositions but a person. Revelation is not a book, though the Book reveals him. It is not a pope, though Pope Paul might interpret him. *The* revelation is the God-man.

Moreover, Catholic theologians are insisting more and more that God continues to reveal Himself to His people. In Gabriel Moran's succinct rhetoric,

A God who once spoke but now speaks no more is not only uninteresting but unintelligible. . . . The Christian may perhaps judge as egocentric and blasphemous the remark of Rousseau, that if God wanted to talk to Jean-Jacques then why did He go speak to Moses. Yet the question is not wholly irrelevant.³

The point is: If I am to say yes to God now, God must somehow speak to me now. The reason why Christianity is ceaselessly contemporary is the thrilling fact that God is disclosing Himself now—to the individual believer and to the whole People of God. He does so in the signs of the times, through the struggle for freedom and the yearning for bread, through the Christian encounter of husband and wife, in the Eastern contemplative and the God-fearing Jew.

This vision of revelation—God opening Himself to me now—calls for a corresponding kind of response. I mean the response of a person to a Person: “I myself, entirely myself, yield myself entirely to you.” This is not to pooh-poo propositions, downgrade dogma, betray truth. Within a faith that is Christian, doctrine is precious. Christ Himself, revelation in flesh, put subject and predicate together: “The Father and I are one.” It is rather to recapture unforgettable facets of biblical truth. I am a man of truth to the extent that, in response to a God of truth, a God faithful to His promises, I live a life of truth, a life in harmony with the covenant. I am “of the truth” in the measure that I respond with a love-laden yes to the truth that is Jesus offering Himself to me in love. That remarkable French personalist Jean Mouroux was utterly correct when he concluded from St. John: “The proper object of revealed truth is love, or more exactly, He who is the bond between truth and love. Love is the content, the very reality of the whole of Christian truth. . . .”⁴

If there is no hunger for truth in the human family, we are much to be pitied. For the burden of my message, the heart of the Christian gospel, is summed up in a song I first heard six years ago and have never forgotten: “Love is the truth we are searching for.”

¹ Cf. Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., “Truth,” in X. Léon-Dufour, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2nd ed.; New York: Seabury, 1973) pp. 618-21.

² Cf. R. Bultmann, “alētheia,” in G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 232-47.

³ “The God of Revelation,” *Commonweal* 85, no. 18 (Feb. 10, 1967) 500.

⁴ “The Nature and Structure of Christian Faith: A Systematic Reflection,” in *Toward a Theology of Christian Faith: Readings in Theology* (New York: Kenedy, 1968) pp. 74-75.

Faded, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.

YOU DO NOT KNOW ME

Hunger for Understanding



JOSEPH DUERR

5

LONG years ago, in New York City, I walked into a funeral parlor. The wife of an acquaintance had died, and I wanted to pay my respects, express my sympathy. Not knowing what to say in such circumstances, I mumbled a stilted phrase or two, then turned quickly to kneel at the coffin and murmur a prayer. At that moment another priest came in—a burly, ruddy man whose life seemed totally taken up with begging from those who had and giving to those who had not. He strode tall and straight to the sorrowing husband, put his arm around the man's shoulders and said with inimitable conviction: "Old man, I'm sorry." The gentleman told me afterwards: "When Father Delihant said that, it was just as if the heavens had opened." Those strong arms, the tears in his eyes, the simple words on his lips conveyed an inner understanding—an understanding that carried with it comfort, strength, peace.

It is this kind of understanding I wish to discuss. I am not talking about understanding in the sense of sheer knowledge or intelligence, the ability to comprehend and judge, the power of perception, the capacity to form opinions. I am speaking of that understanding which involves a special kind of personal relationship, marked by an innerness that comes through to another as empathy. I mean an "understanding so intimate that the feelings, thoughts and motives of one are readily comprehended by another."¹ It is this quality Jesus possessed preeminently; it is this quality we must recapture if our world is ever to emerge from its barbarity.

I

THIS quality of understanding Jesus possessed, precisely as a man, as human. It shows up all through His public life: with the woman caught in adultery, in danger of stoning; the sinful woman who touches Him, to the scandal of His host; the Samaritan woman at the well, to the amazement of His disciples; the women of Jerusalem who weep for Him on the way of the cross. It shows up in all those passages that describe Jesus as having "compassion"—a Greek verb that has to do with our inward parts, our entrails, our bowels, our emotions, our heart—a word that is a wedding of mercy and affection and sympathy and fellow feeling. This powerful verb is used over the sick who reach out to Jesus, a crowd that is hungry, a mother whose only son has died, a king's servant dreadfully in debt, a boy cruelly tormented by an evil spirit, two blind men sitting by the roadside, a leper begging to be made clean, a man left half-dead by robbers, the prodigal son.

To all of these the Lord reached out, for each His heart was torn. Not a sweet, sickly, syrupy, sentimental feeling; He understood. Not because He was all-knowing God, but because He was all-human man. As St. Paul sang so lyrically (Phil 2:6-8):

Though of divine status,
He did not treat like a miser's booty
His right to be like God
[His right to appear like Yahweh in glory],
but emptied Himself of it,
to take up the status of a slave
and become like men;
having assumed human form,
He still further humbled Himself
with an obedience that meant death—
even death upon a cross!²

He was so exquisitely human that He was attuned to all that was human: not indeed to adultery but to the adulteress, not to leprosy but to each leper, not to a dead Lazarus but to his sorrowing sisters. In fact, this *was* His humanness: He vibrated to, resonated to, the loves and hates, the hopes and fears, the joys and sadness of each person who touched His life.

What is particularly pertinent here is that Jesus refused to let His actions, His miraculous actions, become automatic. I

think of that moving scene in Mark (5:25-34). A woman whose life has been bleeding away for 12 years pushes through a tremendous crowd, comes up behind Jesus, touches His garment. She feels in her body that she has been healed. Jesus is aware that power has gone forth from Him; He quickly asks: "Who touched my garments?" The disciples are amazed, almost amused: "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say 'Who touched me?'" But He keeps looking around, till the woman comes in fear and trembling and tells Him the whole truth. And Jesus explains to her what has happened: "Your faith has made you well; go in peace. . . ." He is not curing a disease; He is healing a person. And so He wants eyes to meet; He wants to see a face; He wants to explain what has really happened in the depths of her heart, her faith in Him that brought healing. So far she has only "heard the reports" about Him (Mk 5:27); He wants her to know Him.

Jesus' understanding reached a kind of climax at the Last Supper, the meal He passionately yearned to share with His own before His passion. It was not simply a case of divine foreknowledge; *as man*, He sensed how changed their lives



CARL J. PFEIFER, S.J.

would be without Him—for some, unbearably lonely. Knowing their need as He did, He not only consoled them with words: “I will not leave you desolate” (Jn 14:18); He not only promised them a “Counselor” in His place, the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26). They would want *Him*. And so He would leave them, and He would stay with them. He would leave them, because His Father so willed it. He would take from them, from us, the palpable charm of His presence. No longer would we see His face, hear the music and the thunder of His voice, sense the fascination of His smile, be touched by His tears. And still He would stay: Till the end of time He would leave with us the reality of His presence, the same God-man Palestine saw with the eyes of the flesh. “This is my body. . . . This is my blood” (Mt 26:26, 28). And not only out there somewhere, on an altar, in a tabernacle. “Take, eat. . . . Drink of it, all of you” (Mt 26:26-27). He understood us so well; He understood that no gift but Himself would satisfy—His total self, body and blood, soul and divinity, given to our total selves, flesh and soul and spirit. He understood.

II

YES, indeed, Jesus understood; in fact, Jesus understands. The problem lies not with Jesus but with us. I am afraid that all too many of the human family can say of you and me what Jesus said in disappointment to Philip the night before He was crucified: “Have I been so long with you, and yet you do not know me?” (Jn 14:9). Oh, not my name or the color of my eyes; you do not know *me*. But how can we begin to translate into flesh-and-blood reality a whole world’s hunger for understanding, for a special kind of relationship that links minds and motives, hearts and emotions? No single essay can fashion a solution; perhaps no solution is possible. I shall simply suggest some facets of understanding that may spark your own reflections.

To begin with, I must relearn the *value* of *each* human person. There is a serious problem here. Things happen on such a vast scale in our time that an individual is lost in the crowd. More than 22,000 people are killed in Guatemala’s earthquakes; 56,500 U.S. troops die in Vietnam; 460 million men, women and children are hungry. There are no faces here, only ciphers. All the more reason why I must recapture the vision of a remarkable rabbi, Abraham Joshua Heschel. In an article

aptly titled "No Religion Is an Island," Heschel wrote:

To meet a human being is a major challenge to mind and heart. I must recall what I normally forget. A person is not just a specimen of the species called *homo sapiens*. He is all of humanity in one, and whenever one man is hurt we are all injured. The human is a disclosure of the divine, and all men are one in God's care for man. Many things on earth are precious, some are holy, humanity is holy of holies. To meet a human being is an opportunity to sense the image of God, *the presence* of God. According to a rabbinical interpretation, the Lord said to Moses: "Wherever you see the trace of man there I stand before you. . . ." ³

Is this my mindset: Wherever I touch a human person, I sense a divine presence? Can I even rise to the level of the Christless Roman, "Nothing that is human is a stranger to me"?

A second facet: I must sense my *solidarity* with all that is human. It will not be easy. Skim today's paper. What makes the headlines, the news? Not human solidarity but dividing lines: the Golan Heights and the barriers of Belfast, poverty levels and unemployment rates, color lines and party lines, all those marks that spell difference. And when we look at ourselves, Henri Nouwen's perceptive insight should sting us: so much of our energy is invested in defending differences, "in maintaining definitions of ourselves made up of those aspects of life which allow us to keep distance from each other. Most of our sense of self is based on our understanding of how and where we differ from each other. It seems as if we *are* our differences." We are smarter or richer, better tanned or better dressed, in a more important job or having more fun, than he or she or they. But if I want to understand, I must base my self-definition not on being different but on being the same: the common experience of being human.

This awareness of sameness, of solidarity, once struck Thomas Merton so forcefully that he has confessed: "This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. And I suppose my happiness could have taken form in these words: 'Thank God, thank God, that I *am* like other men, that I am only a man among others. . . .' It is a glorious destination to be member of the human race. . . ." ⁴

A third facet of understanding: I must learn to *listen*. Listening is an arduous art. You see, most conversations are not conversations at all. Either they are monologues: I wait patiently until you have finished—since civility demands it—and then I say exactly what I would have said if you had not spoken. Or they are debates: I do indeed listen, but only for that inept word or false phrase at which I proceed to intercept and destroy. No, to listen is to give yourself totally, for that moment or that day, to another, to put yourself into the other's mind, yes the other's heart. It means that you hear not naked words but a human person.

I have experienced this in interconfessional dialogue. The reason why the Lutheran-Catholic conversations have made such remarkable progress is that we listen. For the first time in my life I have come to grips not with Lutheranism but with Lutherans; and it is a soul-shivering experience. Here are genuine Christians—at least as knowledgeable as I am, wonderfully committed to Christ, touching in their care and concern for me—something I had never gotten out of a book on Lutheranism, would never have experienced had I not come face to face with live Lutherans, had I not been compelled to listen. Only by listening have I personally absorbed what came out of Vatican II as a theological truth: Non-Roman communities are communities of grace and salvation, where the Holy Spirit is amazingly active.

The Holy Spirit. Precisely here is a profound reason for listening, for opening myself to another: Through that other, *God* may well be speaking to me, and in speaking to me helping me to understand.

A fourth facet: To understand others, I must understand their *history*. That is true of a nation, and it is true of a person. In a recent column on the uses and abuses of history, Meg Greenfield made a very astute observation: "I have heard every political and technical explanation there is for the failure of our 10-year-long adventure in Southeast Asia. But I think there is one that takes precedence over them all. Quite simply, we didn't know who the Vietnamese were."⁵

To understand a people, to understand a person, it will help if I know where they come from and where they've been. Oh yes, it is quite possible to look into another's eyes and instantly understand; but it is also possible to look into another's eyes and misunderstand. We are all too prone to pigeonhole whole

peoples: "India is lazy and Italy is dirty, the Russians are barbarians and the Spaniards are fascists, the Germans are power-hungry and the Scandinavians are sex-crazy, the Jews own most of our banks and the Arabs are a menace to the Middle East, the English are oppressors of the Irish and the Puerto Ricans are juvenile and senile delinquents." And we are so quick to turn away from persons we do not like. There are so many men and women and children who would be much more lovable if someone loved them; but we shall not love them if we do not try to understand them, if we do not try to discover where they come from and where they've been.

A fifth and final facet: I must accept my own *brokenness*. Not in sheer resignation, because I can do naught else; rather as a positive asset, a help to understanding. I do not come to others fearless and tearless, unscarred and unshaken. Like Christ, I am a *wounded* healer. I too am vulnerable; I too must confront the brutal condition of my mortality; ultimately I too stand alone before an abyss; I too must murmur "I believe, Lord; help my unbelief!" In ministering to another, therefore, in trying to care, I am not simply removing a fear, alleviating an anxiety, cauterizing some human cancer. No, we are ministering to each other, deepening our different pains to a level, a Calvary, where, in Nouwen's words, "they can be shared as different manifestations of our similar dread-full condition."

To relearn the value of each human person, to sense our solidarity with all that is human, to learn to listen, to discover where others come from and where they've been, to accept our own brokenness—here, I suggest, is one road to understanding. And this, I submit, is what a broken world has a right to expect of those who feed on the broken Bread that is Christ. If *we* do not make an extraordinary effort to understand, to bridge the gap that distances us from our brothers and sisters, I am afraid that one day Christ may say in sorrow to us: "Have I been so long with you, and yet you do not know me?"

¹ *American Heritage Dictionary* (1969) p. 428.

² Tr. J. A. Fitzmyer, *Jerome Biblical Commentary* 2:250.

³ *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 21 (1965-66) 121.

⁴ *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Image Books, 1956) p. 261.

⁵ "Lest We Forget," *Newsweek*, Feb. 2, 1976, p. 76.

**WHY HAVE YOU
FORSAKEN ME?
Hunger for God**



6

JUST over a decade ago, the Dominican Fergus Kerr published a perceptive article in England under a frightening title: "Theology in a Godforsaken Epoch."¹ Kerr's root affirmation was that today the experience of God, our encounter with God, the way God speaks to us, is radically different from yesterday. We live in a different epoch—different because of profound changes in what is seen as meaningful, a fresh context that gives new meaning to words such as "real," "true," "beautiful," "nature," "love," "God." In this new epoch, Kerr argued, God "seems to have withdrawn," does not "make Himself accessible in many of the ways that have hitherto been viable. The way of life as a whole is not affording the experience of God it would seem to be the structure for." Our form of life is Godforsaken in that God gives Himself now only in ways which either run counter to our traditions and customs or are unrelated to them. And so, "for believers at large . . . encounter with God seems to occur now primarily in experiencing His absence." In other words, "It is the fate of our epoch that the encounter we have with God . . . takes the form mostly of failing to find Him in the system of institutions and structures which constitutes our tradition."²

You may disagree with Kerr, accuse him of unjustified generalizations; but he has provoked critical questions that demand discussion. (1) In what sense can we speak of God's absence today? (2) Where do those who are hungry for God discover Him today? (3) What challenge does this pose to those Christians who romp continuously in God's presence?

I

FIRST then, can we speak, without exaggeration, of God's absence? I think we can. You see, in this age of crises—war and peace, white and black, man and woman, rich and poor, Catholic and Protestant—there is a crisis more crucial than all the rest. The most critical issue of all is not bombs, not skin, not sex, not food, not even Church. It is the crisis of God. What can a human being believe? In the twentieth century, in the 70s, is belief still possible?

The problem is not artificial, not exaggerated. Take simply the United States. A whole generation has grown up since World War II, another generation is sprouting up now, young men and women who do not look at the world the way I do, do not use words the way I do, do not quite think the way I do, do not sing my songs or dream my dreams. More to the point, their experience of God is different from mine. There are Christians among them, but so many Christians who do not discover God in the things they see and hear and touch, do not, with the poet Plunkett, "see [Christ's] blood upon the rose,/And in the stars the glory of His eyes," do not see that "His body gleams amid eternal snows,/His tears fall from the skies." There are scholars among them, men of learning, but so many for whom philosophical arguments to prove God's existence are stale, flat, and unprofitable, for whom order and design, beauty and intelligence and contingency point not to God but to man.

There are theologians among them, but theologians who will have nothing to do with a God "out there," a God who cannot change, a God who does not weep when I bleed. There are poets and painters among them, artists of every description, but artists committed to Nothing; artists for whom man's dignity and hope lie in his ability to confront, with courage and indeed with joy, a life and a reality that is senseless, useless, absurd—artists whose basic affirmation is Samuel Beckett's "Two times anything equals zero."

There are men and women who fail to find God in the structures wherein we Christians have grown up, in our churches and our theologies, in our worship and our piety, who do not hear God's voice in our Bible, do not taste His flesh at our Supper. Increasingly, there are Catholics who are fashioning their own Christianity, because God does not speak to them in the institution of their elders, in pope or priest, in the word

written at Rome or the word preached from the pulpit. There are so many men and women who, if they encounter God at all, encounter Him in experiencing His absence, in an emptiness that says He is not there at all.

Today's problem has been impressively posited by Karl Rahner: "Every age has its own task before God; the task of today's world is to believe. For today it is not this or that belief, this or that article of faith which is called into doubt, but faith itself, man's capacity to believe, man's ability to commit himself completely to a single, unambiguous, demanding conviction. . . ." ³

There is, then, a sense in which God is absent from our world. Oh, I am not denying that God is everywhere; I am not questioning His real presence in the proclaimed word or the transformed Bread. I am not talking about God's objective reality; I am concerned about our experience of God. And I am saying that more and more Americans, more and more Christians, are not touching God, do not thrill to His touch in the structures and forms of life that, as I see it, were divinely designed to touch God to man, man to God. In that sense, and to that extent, God is really absent from our world.

II

MY SECOND question: Where do those who are hungry for God discover Him today? If the "new man" does not find God where the "old man" found Him, where can he look, where does he find God? There is no easy answer, no single answer for all. I would stress four aspects of contemporary experience that have impressed me.

1) Some find God when they are brought face to face with their own insufficiency. I am distressingly aware, for example, that I am not what people have a right to expect of me—as a man, as a Jesuit, as a priest, as a theologian. This is especially apparent when I rely on the Burghardt charism, on my native charm and the naked power of my words. It is in these moments of self-awareness that I feel an agonizing need for Another, to open myself to Him, to be filled with a little of His fullness.

It is in these moments that I sense His presence—not a vision, believe me, but effects that can hardly have meaning unless He is there. It shows in insights that flood in on me, but only (to my embarrassment) after the chapel and bended knees have become a last resort. It shows in words of mine that in

themselves are incredibly insipid, yet somehow manage to transmute another's despair into hope, hate into love, discouragement into courage. It shows in those rare moments when I rise from my sinfulness and my selfishness only because Someone else is quite obviously lifting me. It shows when, dissatisfied with myself, I find the power to go beyond myself; and I know that the power is not mine.

2) Some find God in their social relations. I am thinking, for example, of the liturgy. Here, for many, God transpires, comes to light—not so much in His real presence on the altar as in His real presence on the face of a child after Communion, in the smile that two strangers exchange, in the love that thrills through a congregation that is spontaneously one. I am thinking of contact with charismatic figures: John Courtney Murray and John XXIII, Dr. Tom Dooley and Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day—men and women whose sheer presence is for ever so many a lift of the heart, a sign that God has not forsaken His children.

I am thinking of Marriage Encounter, that wildfire movement sparked by thousands of "little churches," families aflame with love of God and His every image, husbands and wives whose whole existence opens on each other and on the other, children who encounter Christ in their parents and are captivated by the encounter.

I am thinking of the unexpected upsurge of charismatic movements within Catholicism since Vatican II, which have roused a fresh awareness of the Holy Spirit, the "unknown God," in the life of the Church, have given a profound impetus to prayer—prayer together, prayer out loud, spontaneous prayer. I am thinking that, for many a Catholic, the meeting-place of God and man is not so much an altar rail as a stinking slum in Washington or a rat-plagued tenement in Harlem, a vineyard in Delano or a decaying schoolhouse in Appalachia. For in their quest of God these Christians have an enviable grasp on what George MacLeod meant when he said:

I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; at a crossroads so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek; at the kind of place where cynics talk smut

and thieves curse and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died, and that is what he died about.⁴

3) Many Americans—at least half a million, perhaps several million—search for the divine in the great Eastern religions and their modern Western offspring. Whether it is the Hindu yearning for union with the Absolute through release from the physical world of appearances and various forms of yoga, or the many types of Buddhism that seek union with ultimate reality in which suffering is eliminated and compassion and wisdom are attained, the search is disciplined, sacrificial, enthusiastic. Is it a search for God? That is not always clear, if only because the concept of God is so difficult to pinpoint in East and West; but at least it is a heartening witness to the human spirit's ceaseless quest for an experience of the transcendent.

4) Some, paradoxically, experience God by experiencing His *absence*. By "experience of absence" I do not mean a negative indifference, a lack of interest or concern; quite the opposite. The agony lies in this: The God who does not seem to be there is a God for whom I am agonizing. I want Him to be there, but I do not find Him where I expect Him to be: in the silence of my cell or where two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, in the fragmented word or the broken Bread, in the human persons who should reflect the human Jesus or the heavens that should proclaim God's glory. It is a "dark night of the soul," which can force even from the lips of mystics the heart-rending cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is an experience of absence that is awfully close to an experience of presence; God is dramatically near.

III

THIS leads to my third question: What challenge does all this pose to those for whom God is a living reality, those Christians who romp continuously in God's presence, whose hunger for God is not a starvation? In the first place, a warning: Don't sell short the search for God in social relations, in other persons. It can be very Christian, for it is grounded in two Christian affirmations. The first is the opening line of a Latin hymn we used to sing without realizing its implications: *Ubi amor, ibi Deus est*. A powerful line: "Where love is, there God is." And so I am justified in searching for God by looking

for love; and if I find hate, especially where love should live, I may be excused if I do not discover God. The second affirmation is a sentence from Genesis: "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gn 1:27). And so I am justified if I hope somewhere sometime to find the face of God on the face of man; and if I do not find Him, it may very well be because Christians do not reflect Him, mirror Him, as they should.

This lays an awesome responsibility on committed Christians. We are supposed to be "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth." Many indeed have been: Teresa of Avila and Teresa of Calcutta, Ignatius of Antioch and Ignatius Loyola, Bonhoeffer and Merton and countless Christians whose names are now known to God alone. But this is not a task laid only on the heroic, on the exceptional believer; it challenges all who have been refashioned by grace into images of Christ, in whom Christ has been formed. Very concretely, the Son of God proclaimed a crucial touchstone whereby the world would recognize that God loves us and that Christ has come to us: the love of His disciples for one another. I dare not point an accusing finger at Northern Ireland or South Africa as long as *my* life and *my* love do not touch the God-hungry to Him for whom they hunger.

Second, too many Christians look with scorn on America's search for a new star in the East. But are we not in part responsible for that extraordinary quest? In the words of the Carmelite William McNamara, "People in the West, particularly the young, are being fed stones instead of bread in churches and schools. They know nothing of the deepest mystical tradition; yet, they want inner experience. They hear there's a mystic tradition in the East, and they go over."⁵ Yes, we have betrayed our ageless tradition: a tradition that goes back to Jesus, alone with His Father in the desert, on the mountain, in the garden; a tradition that goes back to the Fathers of the Church and the Fathers of the Desert, back to the medieval mystics, down to the contemporary Trappists whose relevance we questioned in the activist 60s—all those men and women whose life is contemplation, a long loving look at the real.

Third, we who do find God in venerable institutions must be careful not to look down our tradition-honed noses at newer forms of religious experience. American Catholics have rarely worn God on their sleeves; we have consistently suspected the

emotional, the Holy Roller, dubbed such religion Protestant; and so we shy away from baptism in the Spirit, speaking in tongues, public witness, shouting in the streets our discovery of God in marriage encounter. But granted the need for discernment, the danger in identifying every psychological tremor with the wind of the Spirit, there is a comparable peril: We can strait-jacket the Spirit, confine Him to an antiseptic existence where He blows only as we will Him to. It might help the God-hungry if more of us could vent the agony and the ecstasy that God brings to those who are aware of Him alive in their hearts.

Which leads to my fourth and final challenge. In this eucharistic year, vast millions of the God-hungry will not find the Lord in the Bread of Life. But we who do eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood, will we be changed in consequence? So changed that our lives will cry out to the world with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20)? So changed that in the midst of death, racked on this world's cross, we can still chant the constant refrain of Eugene O'Neill's resurrected Lazarus:

Laugh with me!
Death is dead!
Fear is no more!
There is only life!
There is only laughter!

Only such Christians will attract those from whom God hides Himself; only such Christians can pose a problem for the Godless.

¹ *New Blackfriars* 46 (1965) 665-72.

² *Ibid.* pp. 670-71.

³ "The Faith of the Priest Today," *Woodstock Letters* 93 (1964) 5.

⁴ Quoted in Godfrey L. Diekmann, O.S.B., "The Reform of Catholic Liturgy: Are We Too Late?" *Worship* 41 (1967) 151.

⁵ *Time*, April 9, 1973, p. 93.

**BREAD FOR THE LIFE
OF THE WORLD
Hunger for Jesus**



7

IN THE six essays that have gone before, I sketched six hungers of the human family: hunger for food and for freedom, hunger for peace and for truth, hunger for understanding and for God. Each of these is a real hunger in its own right, and each demands to be satisfied on its own terms. And still it is true that, in the Christian vision, such satiety is not sufficient, should not be satisfying. The world's hungers ought to climax in still another hunger, hunger for a bread that is incomparably rich, bread that gives a unique life, bread that while it fills makes you ache for more, a bread that is a person. I mean, of course, the Bread of Life, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But if this Bread of Life is to be anything more than pious pap, you must ponder three problems: (1) What kind of life are we talking about? (2) In what sense is Jesus the bread of this life? (3) What significance has all this for the hungers of the human family?

I

FIRST then, what kind of life are we talking about? It is not sheer human existence, the joy there is in simply being alive. I am not downgrading this. After all, the Old Testament itself insists that life is a gift—a gift in which there breaks forth the mystery, the liberality, of a God who glories in the fact that He is a *living* God. The life of a man or woman is precious: It is the crowning point of God's creative activity in Genesis, and a long life is an Old Testament ideal. Fragile as life is—a wisp of smoke (Wis 2:2), a passing shadow (Ps 144:4)—the life of a human person is still sacred: It is specially infused by a gracious God, who is so jealous of His

gift that He can say sternly to Noah and his sons: “. . . of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in His own image” (Gn 9:5-6).

But sacred as it is, this sheerly human existence is not the life we are discussing. Life in our context is the life the Son of God took flesh to bring, the life Jesus gives in abundance (Jn 10:10), the life He calls “eternal life” (Jn 17:2), the life that *is* Jesus (Jn 14:6). That is why St. Paul can trumpet that thrilling sentence, “For me, life is Christ” (Phil 1:21). It is man’s sharing in God’s own nature, in God’s own life. It means that we can, as Jesus put it, “know the only true God and Jesus Christ” whom He has sent (Jn 17:3), can love God and His Christ, love every human person with a love born of God.

Eternal life, therefore, does not begin with death. It has its roots in the past, in the new life that sprang from Christ’s death. It looks to the future: ceaseless life with Him who *is* Life. And still it is a here-and-now reality; eternal life has its beginning now. “If anyone loves me,” Jesus proclaimed, “my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him” (Jn 14:23). Eternal life is a specially intimate presence, an indwelling of Trinity, where God-within-me is the source of my activity, transforms my thinking, trans-fuses my freedom—in a genuine sense, is my life. It is the mystery of grace—not some thing, but persons fused in love. In this profound sense, our living God is a “God of the living” (Mk 12:27).

II

SUCH, in brief, is the kind of life we are talking about. But in what sense is Jesus the bread of this life? Here the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel is incomparably rich—I mean Jesus’ discourse on the Bread of Life. The background, the context, is hunger. More than 5,000 have been fed on five barley loaves and a couple of dried fish. Many of these follow Jesus to the north shore of the Lake of Galilee. And Jesus chides them: “You are not looking for me because you have seen signs, but because you have eaten your fill of the loaves. You should not be working for perishable food, but for food that lasts for eternal life, food which the Son of Man will give you. . . . I myself am the Bread of Life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry . . .” (Jn 6:26-27, 35).

Two themes color this discourse; scholars call them the sapiential and the sacramental. Very simply, this means that Jesus presents Himself as Bread of Life under two forms, distinct but related: He feeds us with His word and He feeds us with His flesh. The "bread from heaven" which "gives life to the world" (Jn 6:33) is God's revelation and Christ's flesh. Each calls for comment.

First, the Bread of Life is God's revealing word. As so often in John, chapter 6 has an Old Testament background that helps the hearers of Jesus to understand. Their tradition prepared them to see in food or bread symbols of divine word and wisdom. In their hunger and in their search for Jesus, they might recall the words of the Lord God in Amos: "Behold, the days are coming when I shall send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but [a famine] of hearing the word of the Lord. . . . They shall run back and forth seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it" (8:11-12). Particularly pertinent are all those Old Testament descriptions of the messianic banquet with Yahweh or with His Messiah, a banquet which in John is at hand for those servants of Yahweh who believe in Him whom Yahweh has sent. Listening to Jesus, an Israelite might well be reminded of the Lord's promise in Isaiah: "As rain and snow *come down from heaven* . . . making the earth bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and *bread* to the eater, so shall *my word* be that goes forth from my mouth" (55:10-11).

The point is, Jesus announces Himself as God's revelation. Not only does He speak God's word; He *is* God's Word in flesh. Not only does He reveal God's secret life, unveil God's plan for sinful man; what He says finds its fullness in who He is: He *is* the word He speaks. And the response such revelation requires of us is belief: To eat this bread is to accept Jesus' word and the Word that is Jesus. It is of this bread that Jesus said to the Jews: "Indeed, this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks upon the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life. . . . Let me firmly assure you, the believer possesses eternal life. I am the Bread of Life. Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, that a man may eat it and never die" (Jn 6:40, 47-50). To say a total yes to Jesus, to all He says and all He is, this is to eat the bread of wisdom, the bread that is the revelatory word; this is what it takes to live

in Jesus now, to live with Jesus beyond the grave.

Second, the Bread of Life is Jesus' eucharistic flesh. As the sixth chapter of John's Gospel progresses, no longer are we told that eternal life comes from believing in Jesus; now it stems from feeding on His flesh and drinking His blood. Here the language of Jesus is uncommonly clear, terribly uncompromising in its promise of life and its threat of death:

The bread that I shall give is my own flesh for the life of the world. . . . Let me firmly assure you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. And I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood real drink. The man who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the Father who has life sent me and I have life because of the Father, so the man who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike those ancestors who ate and yet died, the man who feeds on this bread will live forever (Jn 6: 51-58).



There you have the mystery-laden promise that would find its first fulfillment at the Last Supper, where Jesus prefaced the supreme expression of His love, His death for our life, with two sentences that link us with Him in life and love forever. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to His disciples: "Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you." He took wine, gave thanks, gave it to them: "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:26-28; Lk 22:19).

Much theological ink has been spilled over the promise and its fulfillment; but few reactions over the centuries can rival in poetic power, can match for faith and love, the response of St. Thomas Aquinas, as we have it recaptured in the stunning version of Gerard Manley Hopkins:

Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore
Masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more:
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here a heart
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.

III

MY THIRD question: What significance has all this for the hungers of the human family, for our day-to-day living? In my chapter on hunger for truth, I dealt to some extent with the issue of faith. God's self-disclosure calls for a twin response: a total yes to the word that Jesus speaks and a personal self-giving to the Word that Jesus is. Let me focus now on the Bread of Life that is His flesh. Here several issues are crucial.

First, for the hungers of the Christian family the Eucharist is not a luxury, some sort of dessert, icing on top of our Christian cake. It is bread: The flesh of Jesus is our staple food. Not because I say so, but because Jesus proclaimed it: "If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man . . . you have no life in you" (Jn 6:53). I am not interested in arguing whether you can reach God without receiving Holy Communion. Moses did; and I am sure six million victims of the Holocaust did; and I would not be surprised if heaven has mansions for non-communicating Christians. The heart of the matter is not what is possible because our God is a merciful God who does not want the death of the sinner but that he should live, a God who saves in ever so many and strange ways. The point is,

here is a food which, in its potential for giving life, is unparalleled.

When you assimilate the food of the body, you change it into your own substance. That is not true of the eucharistic Christ. When He gives Himself to you as food, you are transformed into Him. In the words that Augustine of Hippo heard from on high, "I am the food of grown men: grow and you shall eat me. And you shall not change me into yourself as bodily food, but into me you shall be changed." So much so that you can cry out with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). In the felicitous phrase of Pius XII, "If you have received worthily, you are what you have received." In our ceaseless effort to build up Christ in us, the Eucharist is food incomparable; for the food is Christ, body and blood, soul and divinity.

Second, within Christianity the Bread of Life is not primarily an individualistic thing, a solitary supper, my private party. Its function is to form a community. St. Paul phrased it beautifully: "Because the Bread is one, we, though many, are one body; for we all partake of the one Bread" (1 Cor 10:17). The Lord who locks Himself in the tabernacle of my body is none other than the Lord who nourishes my next-door neighbor, the same Christ who feeds the Lebanese, the Japanese and the Thai, the African, the German and the Czech. Christ is not divided, Christ is not multiplied. There is one and the same body, one and the same Christ, for all. In His flesh we are one.

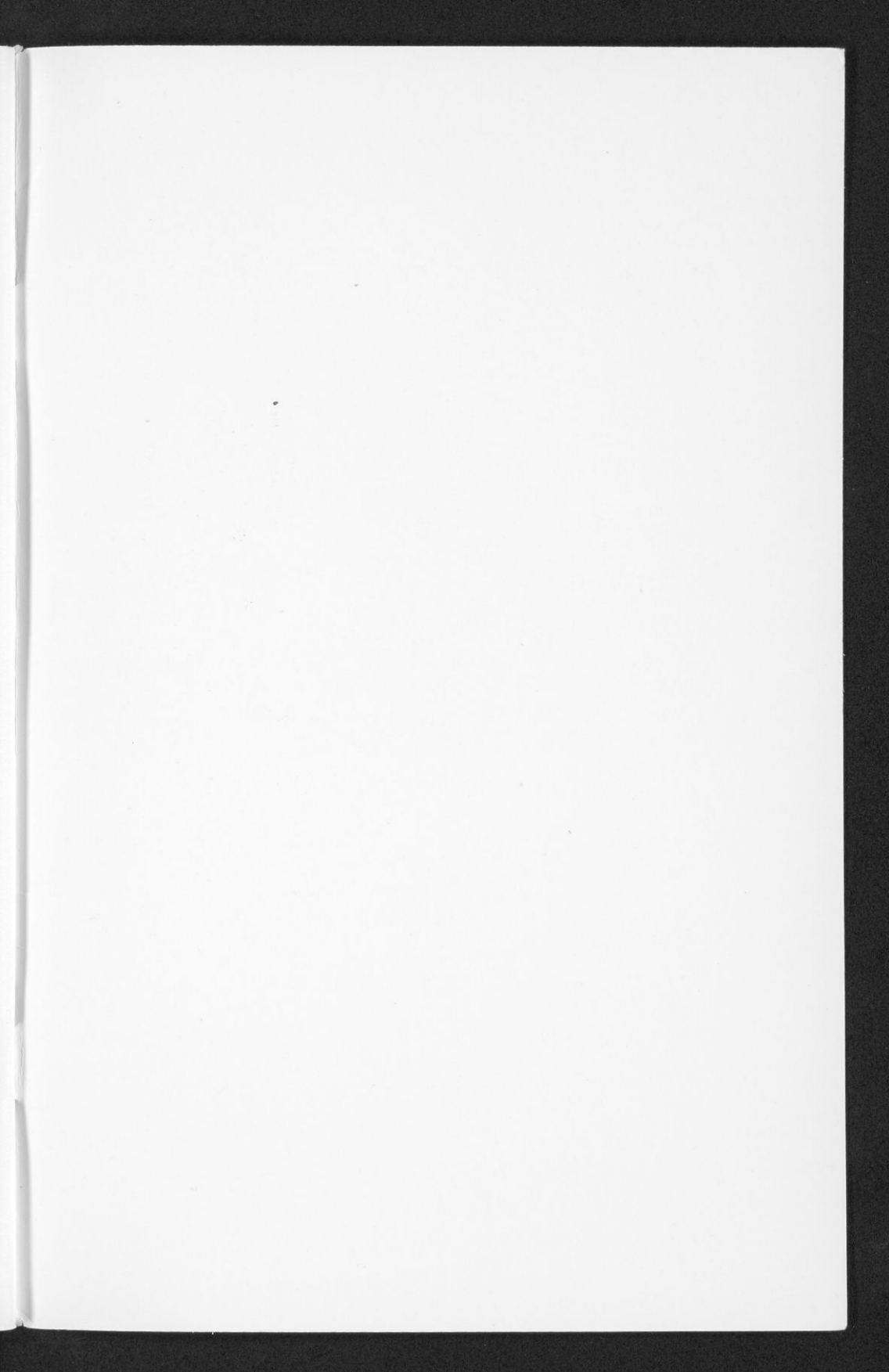
A peril within Catholicism today is that the Eucharist which should make us one threatens to divide us. Catholic communities are unchristianly rent by warring loves: Shall we stand or kneel, pray in an ageless Latin or an ephemeral English, receive Life in our hands or on our tongues, wish peace with a touch or a word, blare forth Bach from an organ or strum a Christian love song? For all too many, these are not academic debates or Christian options; they are life-and-death struggles—so much so that some Catholics will not worship with other Catholics save on their own narrow terms, even suicidally refuse the bread that gives life. Is it for this that the Word-made-flesh offered that flesh the night before He died: "This is my body, which is given for you"?

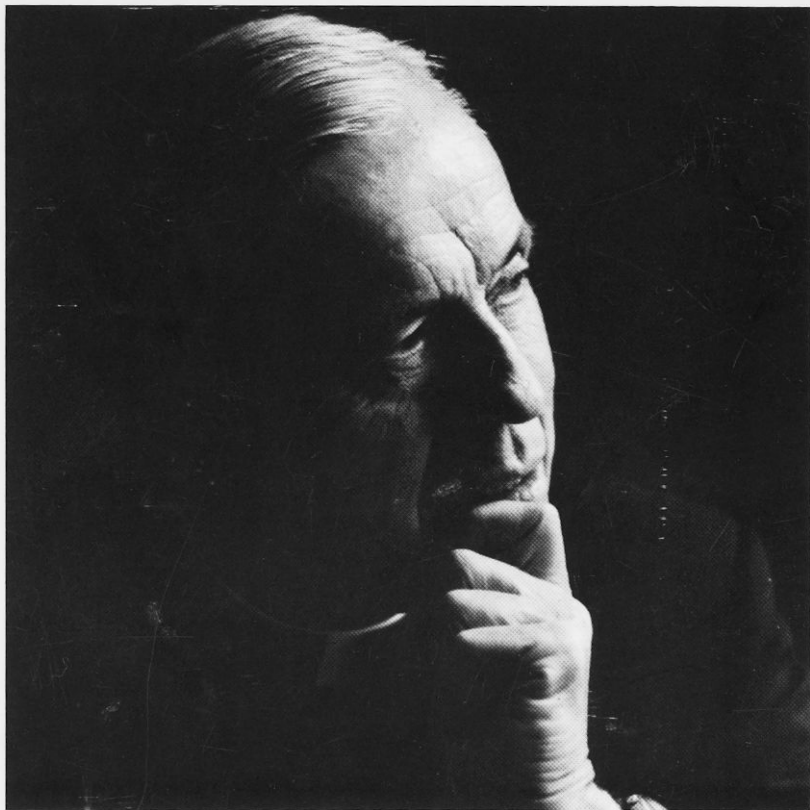
Which leads to a third issue: the world outside our altars. The Eucharistic Congress is not an occasion for narcissism, a

chance to fall in love with our own reflection. An encouraging facet of this celebration is that it has expanded our horizons, has forced us to focus on the hungers of the human family. In that context—millions of men, women and children struggling desperately to live human lives, struggling even to live—talk about the Bread of Life can sound awfully empty, suspiciously hollow. And it will be empty, will be hollow, unless we who feed on the eucharistic Christ are ourselves eucharists for the life of the world.

This is not insubstantial poetry. The Eucharist is central to Christians for a complex of reasons. It is a presence, a real if hidden presence, a presence without peer, a presence of Christ's whole person, a presence which leaps from love and leads to life, a presence which is a promise, a promise of good things which our eyes have not yet seen, our ears not yet heard, blessings it has not entered our minds to imagine. If I am to be a eucharist for the life of the world, my feeding on the flesh of Christ must take me from church to world. I must begin to be present to others, present where they are, present in ways that respond to their needs, to their hungers—for food or freedom, for peace or truth, for understanding or God. I must be really present—I, not merely my money or my mind—somewhat hidden at times but always totally committed, because as a Christian my life is love and only love can bring life, can light dulled eyes with hope, can promise somebody somewhere that tomorrow will be more human, will be worth living.

In closing this series of reflections on the hungers of the human family, I suggest that we should, each of us, put to ourselves one urgent question: Where I walk and work, where I play and pray, in the little acre of God I till, is there anyone who is less hungry because I am there?





Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.

Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., Professor of Patristic Theology at the Catholic University of America, was born in New York City in 1914. He earned M.A. and Ph.L. degrees at Woodstock College, where he was ordained, and a S.T.D. degree from the Catholic University of America.

Father Burghardt is editor of *Theological Studies*, a research associate at Woodstock Theological Center and a member of distinguished religious commissions, including the U.S. Dialogue Group, Lutheran-Roman Catholic Theological Conversations; Faith and Order Commission, World Council of Churches; and the International Papal Theological Commission.

The author of six books, Father Burghardt has lectured and published widely and holds six honorary degrees.