

## GRACE AND THE SEARCH FOR THE HUMAN: THE SENSE OF THE UNCANNY

### I. INTRODUCTION

The relatively little attention accorded the doctrine of grace in contemporary Christian theology is a curious phenomenon. After the explosion of articles on grace in both the Catholic and Protestant contexts in the forties and fifties of this century, the attention of theologians moved elsewhere to other symbols, other doctrines, other images needed to enlighten our common search. In one sense this relative silence is understandable: the Thomist paradigm of nature-grace in Catholic theology and the neo-Orthodox (especially the Barthian) paradigm of sin-grace in Protestant theology no longer play the dominant roles they once did. Thus the centrality of the "triumph of grace" as the clue to the human unmistakably resonant in the later Karl Barth or early Karl Rahner no longer dominate theological attention.<sup>1</sup> It is not the case, of course, that either Barth's or Rahner's theologies of grace or the traditions of Aquinas and Calvin informing them are forgotten. Rather they still serve as classical resources disclosing in ever new modalities the sovereignty and the triumph, at once primordial and final, of grace for a properly Christian understanding of the human.

Indeed, I shall suggest in this lecture, grace remains a signal key to the Christian search for authentic humanity: for grace discloses at once the radicality of the Christian vision of God as the very power of love and the gift and demand, the event and the promise, of a human self-transcendence beyond the sentimentalities and the gravity of an exhausted humanism and beyond all our own human, all-too-human fears and desires, designs and controls. As I shall also suggest, the doctrine of grace can now illuminate our common search for authentic humanity only by the journey through the profound negativities of our own situation: only, in sum, by a journey through the many expressions of what can be named the emergence of the uncanny in our contemporary common search for a transformed humanity. Only, as Hegel once reminded us, through the pain and seriousness of the negative does real affirmation come.<sup>2</sup> Yet it is also true (as Barth, as Rahner, as Hegel

<sup>1</sup>In the Catholic context, recall, as representative, H. Rondet, *Gratia Christi* (Paris, 1948); K. Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace," *Theological Investigations* (Baltimore, 1961), Vol. 1, pp. 297-317; W. R. O'Connor, *The Eternal Quest* (New York, 1947), H. de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Etudes historiques* (Paris, 1946); for the relevant passages in Barth, see G. C. Berkouever, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, 1956). For an excellent comparison of Rahner and Barth here, see J. M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* (Chicago, 1978), pp. 111-26.

<sup>2</sup>See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller, (Oxford, 1977), pp. 21-24 for *locus classicus*.

himself in their very different ways remind us) that finally the theologian seeks the truly human for her/his time only by searching in the situation for the expressions—however hesitant, however uncanny, even however negative—for the reality of the more than human power given to us as a sheer gift, stark event: the grace of power recognized as not our own to become fully human beings. As Christian theologians we may, indeed we must, share the route of the pain and seriousness of the negative and of the uncanny in our era. Yet we cannot forget that precisely through those routes lies the singular insight of Christianity into the human: beyond all our lies and distortions, beyond all error and illusion, beyond even our madness, our inhumanity and our sin is the power of God's graciousness—God's own reality as the unbounded power of love itself. That must be recognized anew in our situation. Grace comes to us as the sheer gift, promise and command to live a life that defines for us the human—a life of faithful trust, of hope, of agapic love: that life we recognize as not of our own making but given to us as our ownmost possibility and command to become really human beings. If we are to have an adequate Christian doctrine of the human, we may have as radical a doctrine of the negative, of the uncanny, of sin itself as we wish and need as long as our doctrine of grace is equally radical. Without the first, the route of negative and the uncanny, we may be tempted to too easy affirmations, too relaxed a humanism, too "cheap" grace. Without the second, the radical doctrine of grace, we will see the uncanniness of our dilemma but will not discern in and through that very uncanniness the hope for the always-already/not-yet humanity given to us as the power of grace in the uncanny itself.

For what has changed most, I believe, for all of us in any attempt to reflect upon the reality of the human in the light of a radical doctrine of grace is not merely a shift in dominant theological paradigms. It is rather a shift in the cultural situation which affects all analysts—both theological and secular analyses of our common search for a truly human mode of life. The rest of this lecture will be devoted to that shift in the understanding of our situation and its implications for a search for the human in the light of the doctrine of grace. I will, in sum, attempt to sketch some moments and movements—both theological and non-theological—in our present cultural situation where the sense of the uncanny and of the negative is disclosed and, in that very disclosure, the power of the reality our tradition names grace is suggested as the true hope for our present inhumanity.<sup>3</sup>

Every theology lives in its own situation. The creative and liberating resources of the tradition (here the doctrines of love and grace) provide a horizons of questions which theologians bring to bear upon their own situation. In this move, theologians are no different from other cultural critics who bring their own orientations, questions and possible,

<sup>3</sup>I realize that this present lecture remains little more than a sketch. Readers interested in the fuller picture (and documentation) might wish to consult chapters 7-9 of my forthcoming book *The Analogical Imagination* (New York, 1980) from which this present "sketch" is adopted. I have kept the present footnotes to a minimum since that larger work contains the fuller documentation needed.

probable or certain modes of analysis and response to the situation encompassing us all. Sometimes, theologians tend to speak of this aspect of the properly theological task as the role of the "world" in theology or, less globally, as the attempt to "discern the signs of the times." "Discernment" seems an appropriate word, for it bears an image of tentative groping, of risk-bearing alertness, the self-exposure of an authentically spiritual sensitivity to the anxieties and fears, the possible presence of promising kairotic moments and demonic threats, a refusal to accept timidity or to refuse the risk of uncovering certain fundamental questions—questions the very attempt to formulate, however hesitantly, is clearly worthwhile.

Yet even discernment of the signs of the times seems too self-secure an image for the radical risk of self-exposure to the other which any attempt to analyze our present cultural crisis must involve. For no critic—not least the theologian—dwells in some privileged place from which to view what is happening "out there." Like all those creatures who dwell not on but in the sea, we are all in this culture and this particular history: affected at every moment of our lives and thought for good and ill; groping at every moment to understand, to discern in order to live a worthwhile life in this place and this moment. With the prophetic passion of a Jeremiah, Isaiah or Amos we may confront and denounce our age but we do not thereby escape it—nor does the authentic prophet wish to. With the foolhardiness of a truly misplaced concreteness we may announce that the ever elusive now of the present and the all-encompassing I of our own insatiable egos is all that matters. Then, struggling to live not in but on the sea, we drown: having remembered nothing, hoped for nothing, risked nothing. With the pathos of a Miniver Cheevy we may long for a better, a clearer, a cleaner age but, even if such ever existed, we know it is not ours. The worlds of classical Greece, early Christianity, the medieval mirage, a self-confident pre-World War I Europe, an innocent pre-World War II America—all still have classical resources to be retrieved for our time and place. Yet all are gone and will not, cannot return. We are in our own contemporary situation: itself soon to be yesterday, soon to receive its own inadequate label; soon to receive the judgment and—God help us—possibly even the nostalgia of later generations and ages. We are responsible for retrieving the authentic past in our memories and our tradition for the present; we are responsible to the future in our hopes and our promises to those future generations. If memory and hope, nostalgia and fantasy are to live at all, they must live as real, live options for the situation which encompasses us.

Yet what is the "situation" from a theological perspective? With Tillich, we must remember that the situation is only one of two major tasks for the theologian.<sup>4</sup> Yet, again with Tillich, it remains a major task incumbent upon all who would allow the tradition to live anew. To understand our situation we may well turn to social scientific analyses of the macrostructure enveloping us all or the microstructure of our own

<sup>4</sup>P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago, 1957), pp. 3-28.

psyches. Both, to be sure, are indispensable conditioning factors to every cultural analysis. Each must serve a corrective role to any cultural analysis.<sup>5</sup> Yet, in keeping with an understanding of the systematic theologian as interpreter of the religious classics of the culture, we must turn elsewhere for the heart of a properly theological analysis. Then, with Tillich, we turn to the notion of the situation as the creative self-interpretations of existence: interpretations which are carried on in every period of history under all kinds of psychological and sociological conditions. The "situation" certainly is not independent of these factors. However, theology deals with the cultural expressions in practice as well as theory and not with the conditioning factors as such.

Tillich's more familiar position can be reformulated for present theological concerns. In place of the more general term "cultural expression," let us search for the classical interpretations of contemporaneity.<sup>6</sup> In place of Tillich's "ultimate concern," let us search for the forms of those worthwhile, fundamental questions about the meaning of existence disclosed in those classics. Unlike the "situation" in Tillich's own period, as we shall see below, there is in our era no one dominant question which our situation poses to us: even the sense of meaninglessness, of absurdity, of the radical threat of non-being of Tillich and his existentialist contemporaries may now be viewed as one fundamental and permanent question in the situation. That formulation of the question by Tillich may well have been an appropriate formulation of the driving concerns of the classics of early twentieth-century inquirers. Conditioned by the threat to "real individuality" from the leveling powers of mass society, the classical expressions of creative self-interpretation in that period of "classical modernity" from Eliot's *Wasteland* and Picasso's *Guernica* to Tillich's own beloved German expressionists evoked the bleak and frightening image of an ever more fragmented, more privatized self, struggling for an ever elusive authenticity amidst the demonic outbursts in our history (Nazism, Stalinism, Hiroshima, Auschwitz, the Gulag) and the overwhelming societal forces of a levelling technologization outside the self; a frenzied conflict within the self; a damaging nihilism beneath them all—the destruction, through societal and historical forces, of traditional Christian and humanist notions of the human. Before these visions of existentialist genius became the "canned goods" and cant words of the intellectuals like ourselves—"alienation," "absurdity," "authenticity"—Tillich and many others saw and spoke for his situation in a brilliant series of analyses of the focus of our fundamental questions today as the threat of meaninglessness, of non-being itself.<sup>7</sup> Anyone who has since

<sup>5</sup>For an example of that "corrective role," see A. M. Greeley's critique of the "modernization" model so often used by theologians in *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 31-35.

<sup>6</sup>For a brief defense of this reformulation, see *inter alia* in "The Public Character of Systematic Theology," *Theology Digest* 26, 4 (Winter, 1978), pp. 400-11. The more theoretical defense may be found in chapters 3 and 4 of *The Analogical Imagination*.

<sup>7</sup>The best examples remain in Tillich's individual essays, for example, those collected in the volume entitled *The Protestant Era* (Chicago, 1948).

that time become a really "authentic self," who has mastered the threats and promises of increasing technology, who has understood and appropriated the demonic, if not satanic, non-meaning of Auschwitz and the Gulag, is free to dismiss these early existentialist classics of post-modernity and their disclosure of our still present plight.

The rest of us must recognize the enduring truth of those disclosures, the continuing import of those existentialist concerns. We honor them best as we honor all classical disclosures of the search for a real humanity—by attempting to reformulate their disclosures in our own situation.

The distinguishing mark of our situation is, perhaps, a conflictual pluralism of worthwhile questions on the very meaning of the human.<sup>8</sup> The distinct dilemma of our time is the seeming inability of many to ask the question of the human at all, to be able to watch and listen amidst a babel of voices for a saving word, a gift of hope, a worthwhile question. We live as intellectuals culturally in a situation at once post-Christian and post-modern.<sup>9</sup> As theologians we share the explosive hopes and ideals of the Christian tradition with explicit conviction. Yet we also recognize that for many in our culture these ideals are shared, if at all, without even knowing them—or wishing to. The seemingly more "human" hopes and ideals of the Enlightenment—*aude sapere* (dare to think and be an autonomous individual and thereby a human being)—still seems daring and meaningful as a demand against all authoritarian systems. Yet it has become for many ever more brittle as the dialectical character of the Enlightenment achievement comes more and more clearly into view. The first Romantic and later existentialist cries for an authentic solitary self seem still true but increasingly hollow and too individualist as we struggle to recognize our responsibilities to others and with others, as we struggle to aid an emergence of an authentically global consciousness and as we struggle against the anthropocentrism of our culture disclosed in its aggressive domination of nature itself.

As neo-conservative critics never tire of reminding us, all "liberal" intellectuals and theologians suffer in our situation from "overload": how many more responsibilities, how much more guilt, how much more hope for equality, how many more questions on what the truly human is can we bear? The myth of progress now seems yet one more curiosity of our Victorian forebears—as dangerous to other cultures and to nature itself as their sexual repressions were to themselves. The overwhelming self-confidence of an earlier liberalism and its definitions of the human as purely autonomous and rational now seems contemptible. Even the well-earned, dusk-ridden, dialectical, restless self-confidence of Hegel seems at once entirely admirable and completely impossible. The triumphs of technology still do provoke wonder—witness the "earthrise" from the moon, the smile of Truffaut in *Close*

<sup>8</sup>For examples of this conflict, see P. Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston, 1973).

<sup>9</sup>The phrase "as intellectuals" is crucial. I make no claims here on the wider culture, but rather on the Western secular intellectual culture.

*Encounters of the Third Kind*, the wondrous delight of a Jacques Cousteau. And yet we know that Technology—and the age it defines—is a racially ambiguous phenomenon whose obvious liberating possibilities occur hand in hand with profound negative actualities: privatization, environmental pollution, population explosion, false economic hopes of continual growth—and, looming over all as our immanent technological final solution, the threat of nuclear holocaust.<sup>10</sup> Even science, the last secular hope, can either prove the last refuge of a Western arrogance leveling all traditions, or a new, ever new, hope for liberating possibilities: witness the conflict between the scientism and positivism of much official philosophy of science of the early part of this century grounding the self-satisfaction of many scientists as distinct from the self-transcendence in scientific inquiry grounding the chastened and liberating formulations of a nature-participatory, non-spectatorial, value-concerned emerging “post-modern” science of a Toulmin, Ferré, Lonergan, Polyani.<sup>11</sup>

The necessary empirical work of social scientists and psychologists moves forward to allow us all some better, empirical vision of the conditioning facts in and of our cultural situation. Yet the situation itself—the creative self-interpretations of what a decent, self-respecting, responsible, even loving life; what the human may be; what orientations and options those conditions enhance or threaten; what focus for our fundamental questions of existence those conditions demand—for this, with some notable exceptions, we must turn elsewhere. Yet where? In keeping with theologian’s task, to those classic activities of the human spirit willing to risk responsible generalizations beyond the specialties because willing to ask a worthwhile fundamental question i.e. to art, religion and philosophy. To those disciplines whose only contribution to the wider culture is not to ask further questions on the conditions (and, sometimes, causes) of our situation, but to ask the question of the situation itself and the fundamental questions that situation provokes. Here the theologian joins other cultural critics—artists, critics of art in all its forms and philosophers—to ask that kind of question of the human in and to that situation.

There is no doubt that the horizon of any cultural critic for asking those questions will be further conditioned by the implicit or explicit value-orientations, by the voluntary and involuntary memories of classical events, texts, images, symbols, explosive or muted hopes—utopian or eschatological—for a better culture, by sensitivities to and convictions on what is possible or impossible for the human spirit by openness to, listening for, willingness to observe a possible *kairos*, a demonic path, a liberating word, a power not one’s own. Any cultural critic possesses some combination of all these orientating discernments. The Christian

<sup>10</sup>For a recent study of these questions, see W. Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique: A Search for Meaning in a Technological Civilization* (Garden City, 1978).

<sup>11</sup>The phrase is employed explicitly by Frederick Ferré and Stephen Toulmin (in soon to be published articles on theology and science); the presence of the reality if not the label in Lonergan and Polyani is well known in their classical works *Insight* and *Personal Knowledge*.

systematic theologian focusses her/his value-orientations in explicit dependence upon and with an explicit new interpretation of that complex phenomenon we all too easily believe we grasp when we utter that disclosive word ever in danger of becoming an empty label, "Christianity." The theologian's own interpretation of that complex tradition, let us recall, is itself conditioned by and partly determined by the same "macro" and "micro" conditions and the same cultural situation which encompasses all. Was Augustine's journey uninfluenced by the cultural crises and social-economic-political conditions of late classical antiquity? Was Barth's *Romans* uninfluenced by the general cultural collapse of European self-confidence in 1918? Are Jacques Ellul's denunciation of modern technology as "satanic" occasioned only by his interpretation of the Bible?

Thus does the wider culture have the right to turn to the artists, philosophers, critics and to theologians to aid it in understanding the contemporary struggle to define an authentic humanity, to help us to ask—in our own time—those worthwhile, indeed perennial questions which we must ask to lead a truly human life, to formulate some response: a less mean metaphor, a better, more honest symbol, a more striking, even if terrifying image, a concept which has not lost the power of negation, an affirmation which is neither cheap nor forced, an expression of faith in a revelatory gift, a happening, a break-through, a grace not our own. The necessary correctives provided by the specialized disciplines, the inevitable presence of the conditioning factors upon all interpretations, the yet more inevitable demands of each person's experience of life itself can be depended upon to challenge, confront, enhance or transform the claims to recognizable truth of any theological interpretation of the situation.

## II. ORIENTATIONS, OPTIONS, FAITHS: THE UNCANNY

The classical works of post-modernity, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Heidegger, serve as George Steiner reminds us, as after-theologies even as post theologies.<sup>12</sup> To claim this is not merely to note the obvious post-doctrinal and systematic elements in their thought: the messianic-prophetic and eschatological strains in Marx; the stoic, even Augustinian pessimism on the human being in Freud; the deliberately post-Christian doctrines of the will to power, the "overman" and the "eternal recurrence" in Nietzsche; the tonalities of Augustine, Luther, Pascal and Kierkegaard in the analysis of the human in the early Heidegger, the pietist even mystical strains in his later releasement where thinking becomes thanking. More fundamentally, one may note that the tonalities of the works of our post-modern classics disclose a vision of the human bearing genuinely religious import. All four classical masters of our situation, it is important to note, appeal back to the classical myths and symbols of the classical Greeks and Persians, not the ancient Jews: Oedipus, Prometheus, Zarathustra, the "gods."

<sup>12</sup>Most recently in his cultural analyses of Heidegger in the *Modern Masters* series (F. Kermodé, general editor), *Martin Heidegger* (New York, 1979).

The images and symbols, the thoughts and myths of ancient Greece become for our secular post-modern spirit a golden age of origins. Yet we know that, however powerful our retrievals of the disclosive and transformative power of ancient Greece by our contemporaries (retrievals directly comparable to the retrievals of classical Judaism and Christianity in the theologians), we are all engaged in radical reinterpretations, translations from a pre-Enlightenment, pre-scientific and pre-technological age to our own radically different situation. Like the best Jewish and Christian theologians of our era, these "post-theologians" are engaged in a series of negations of present alienation, oppression, repression, and an often desperate, always brilliant and healing retrieval of an alternative *mythos* for our culture—a non-Jewish, non-Christian, non-scientific *ethos* disclosed for them among the ancients, paradigmatically among the Greeks.

Yet even these retrievals of an alternative symbol-system than that of Judaism and Christianity do not occur without the memory, partly eliminated yet still powerful as an undertow, half-forgotten yet jarred by involuntary memories of the great Jewish and Christian myths, symbols, and ethos which informed and formed our common understanding of the human. The prophetic strain in Marx explodes into the explicit retrieval of the power of apocalyptic, Messianism, eschatology and Utopia in Ernst Bloch and in the dangerous memory of the suffering of the oppressed in Walter Benjamin only to be transformed anew into the political theology of Metz and the liberation theology of Gutierrez. The ancient Jewish refusal to name God or give an image of future paradise informs the demand for a purely negative dialectic towards the present in Adorno, in Horkheimer only to be born anew in Moltmann and Sobrino. The Kabbalistic tradition retrieved by Gershom Scholem returns to complicate almost beyond recognition the mysteries in any single text in the brilliant Marxist and Jewish cultural criticism of Benjamin only to resurface in modern Jewish theologies. That explosion of ancient pagan self-confidence we call Augustine comes to provide the tone, the attunement, the very form of the sturdy pessimism of Freud and Heidegger, of Niebuhr, Tillich, Bultmann and Rahner. The figure of Moses, once transformed by Michaelangelo is retransformed by Freud into a daring conquistador of the spirit alive to the uncanniness of our moment: however "Egyptian" the theory, the spirit of Freud's Moses remains profoundly Jewish. And where Freud hesitated, Jung advanced—to strike a demand for the retrieval of all the religious symbols of East and West, to demand that the archetypes return to consciousness to help heal our fragmentation and liberate our global humanity. Where Jung hesitated, the theologians amongst us committed to retrieve our mystical heritage advance to show new ways to be, to become a human being.

Heidegger may repeat, over and over again, that he is not a theologian, that he has nothing to state for or against Christianity. Yet even his Greeks come to us with evangelical tones, even his "mystical" utterances bear a familiar pietist ring of unexpected grace, even his and Holderlin's "gods" cannot seem to loose themselves of the eclipse of the only God we know. His theological interpreters—Bultmann,

Rahner, Ebeling, Fuchs, Ott—embrace his method of retrieval but move on to retrieve the secrets of a humanity in the disclosure of that God in Jesus Christ. It is not that the theologians have allowed philosophy to take over their search for the human. Rather, with Nietzsche, the real secret, as always, is released: "the Protestant minister is the grandfather of German philosophy." And from the stern and strenuous Protestant tones of Nietzsche's chief existentialist successor, Karl Jaspers, to the Jewish and French Catholic tonalities of laughter, of dance, of light-hearted anti-gravity and anti-existentialist seriousness in Nietzsche's chief successor, Jacques Derrida, the disturbing music of the Jewish and Christian symbols join the harmonies of ancient Greece and Persia to provide new resources in our post-modern search for the human.<sup>13</sup> It is true, of course, that the functions which theology once played for the wider secular culture—a function which, since the Enlightenment, seems ever more unwelcome—was once provided by the Romantics who secularized the Christian redemption into their grand harmonies with nature and history.<sup>14</sup> Now, when even Romantic affirmations seem impossible to many, the power of the negative returns in our post-modern situation to disclose the possibilities of the human in our situation.

In one way, of course, it matters very little: theologians may continue to be ignored by the wider culture in its search for authentic humanities as long as the post-theologians are still listened to—as Benjamin understood:

A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard place on a large table. . . . Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat aside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called "historical materialism" is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.<sup>15</sup>

What then in our theologies and the post-theologies of the wider culture is our fundamental question today? Where is the situation we seek: nowhere—no one place; everywhere—every place we live where, as the traditions set loose by our post-modern classics show us, the experience at once of the uncanny and what the Christian recognizes as the sheer event of grace awaits us. Our very homelessness provokes an evocation of that not-at-homeness which is one—perhaps the central—experience of our situation. For some this experience will focus upon the not-yet of some future, some Utopia, some apocalyptic let loose to empower our negation of present alienation and structural oppression, to shatter our present human, all-too-human affirmations and in that

<sup>13</sup>For examples, see the contributions of Derrida and others in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* ed. and introduced by D. B. Allison, (New York, 1977).

<sup>14</sup>See M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, 1971).

<sup>15</sup>Quoted in M. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950* (Boston, 1973), p. 200.

very disclosure of our sin to disclose the always-already reality of the uncanny and of God's grace in our midst. As we retrieve that reality in the utopian visions and the apocalyptic movements of our religious heritage, as we experience the empowerment of the experience in the visions of the present for a better future and the great movements of real praxis for concrete liberation in our time, as we allow memory to work its liberating function and recall the dangerous memories of the traditions of suffering in our prophetic heritage, as we embrace the power of the negative in all great art and all prophetic religion, we release ourselves to the empowerment of an experience of inhumanity.<sup>16</sup> Yet where the force of the not-yet discloses, to be sure, our present bondage, in that very disclosure we find as well an always-already hope and our grounds for that hope in present hiddenness of God and our not yet human face—a hope sheerly there—given: we may know not how or by what or why but given as gift, as threat, as promise in an ineradicable, always-already power that we recognize in Christ Jesus as the shock of God's gracious presence and which is given to us only for the sake of the hopeless.

For others, this experience of the uncanny will emerge as the not-yet of our homelessness in history and nature evoking the astonishing always-already reality of the sheer wonder of existence at all. As we reflect on the reality of our ordinary, everyday lives—of the wanderings, meanderings, conflicts, contradictions, preconscious and conscious feelings and thoughts, loyalties and hatreds, ideals and practice, voluntary and involuntary memories, pleasures and fears—all jumbled together in a confusing stream whose shore seems for the moment nowhere, all chaos where only a thread of order seems to stand for a moment—we may recognize with Joyce, or Buber, or Marcel, as the uncanny extraordinariness of the ordinary itself.<sup>17</sup>

As we reflect, with the authentic conservative, on the no-longer of the presence of the liberating classics of our real traditions, the no-longer of real community and thereby humanity and non-authoritarian authority, the no-longer recognizability of the mystery, of enchantment and of origins, the no-longer classical recognition of limits by our Promethean wills and our Protean consciousness, the no-longer of a conversation which should not have been broken, we are all in those moments conservatives as we experience the reality of our homelessness and in that experience of absence the presence of a graced existence in which we live and move and have our being. As we attempt to retrieve some fragments to shore up against our ruin, as we lash out against Weber's iron cage of disenchantment, we do so with the dual recognition that the no-longer of our pain and confusion releases us to the always-already reality of our giftedness, the "hint half-guessed, the gift half-

<sup>16</sup>For the most recent theological development of these themes, see J. B. Metz, *Faith and History in Contemporary Society* (New York, 1979).

<sup>17</sup>Note how a sense of what I call here the "extraordinariness of the ordinary" is developed in the best pastoral theologies. For two examples, see the work of M. G. Durkin and J. Shea in *Towards Vatican III: The Work That Needs to Be Done* (New York, 1978), pp. 179-88 (Durkin) and pp. 188-96 (Shea).

understood." In the unyielding wave of negativity towards modernity of the true conservative, the brilliant bitterness of the world of Evelyn Waugh, the authentically humanist, the quiet civilized, firm "no" of a Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Urs Von Baltasar, we recognize the presence of an always-already undertow of the sheer gift of our real participation beyond all homelessness and observe in a history which is also a heritage, a fate which can become a destiny, a culture which does release us through its very negations to the gift and wonder of a grounding at-home-ness in the wonder of the sheer gift of existence itself and the amazing grace of the graced history of God amongst as in Jesus Christ.

As we move with the modern spirit of scientific inquiry beyond the theories of positivism and scientism to the post-modern participatory science symbolized in ecology and grounded in the self-transcending, self-structuring immanence of the pure, detached, disinterested desire to know, we recognize with J. B. S. Haldane the uncanniness of our own discovery: "Nature is not only stranger than we imagine; it is stranger than we can possible imagine."<sup>18</sup> We will check our disoriented and dominating wills, as we throw aside our ladders and try, at last, to "look, not think," we begin to sense, with Wittgenstein, the uncanny truth that "the world is is the mystical." In our wintry mood where the myth of entropy has replaced the vacuum left by our embarrassment at the collapse of the myth of progress, we sense that values can be discerned again beyond their imprisonment after the long night of positivist dismissals of their purely "emotional," "private," "personal preferential" status. We begin to believe that, perhaps, after all, the global consciousness set loose by Western science and technology may yet yield to an interdependence of a truly human technology for the planet earth. Prometheus, Faust and Proteus, Oedipus and Narcissus have played their uncanny roles; it is time for new myths.

As that global consciousness which Western science, Western technology and Western imperialism have released returns home to the West, the unnerving and possibly emancipatory resources of the other cultural and religious traditions begin to play their uncanny role on our consciousness. Nor is the mystical so outside our horizon—for as Wittgenstein sharply insisted, as Whitehead with his urbane British suggestion of the importance not of the clear but of the vague suggested, as William James in his generous American way democratically and pluralistically hurried to embrace, as Heidegger with his unnerving combination of violent, energetic speech shaking us to release ourselves and our language to the uncanny non-violence present in von Gogh's painting of a peasant's shoes, as Rothko imaged for us as a sacred void, as those masters of retrieval of the hidden, despised resources in our own tradition, Jung and Eliade, and all those now recovering our humanness in the mystical tradition repeat over and over again, the routes of negation in the spiritual traditions await our entry to work their releasement upon us from the terrors of our own history in order to show

<sup>18</sup> As quoted in W. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

the face of a true humanity. To pass through the sacred void of our own moment disallows any easy, clever, "canny" refusals of the route of the *nihil* in our uncanny nihilism. And yet, like the great spiritual traditions of the East, like the negative theologies, the hermetic and mystical traditions in our own tradition, we may yet learn to unlearn our too easy dismissals of "mysticism" and allow its uncanny negations to release us to the whole and to the human. It may be possible. In the meantime, in our religiously musical or unmusical ways, we can at least try to learn to listen again, to wait, and in the final paradox internal to our curious dilemma to try to let be; to try to care and not to care. For some, the full uncanniness of the mystical traditions has, it would seem, already exploded.<sup>19</sup> For the rest of us, we must be content to allow our present negations of our former negations of "all that" suffice, as we catch a glimpse—no more, but no less—of the astonishing always-already gracious reality that there is anything at all: "that the world is is the mystical."

For still others, there are no texts, no traditions, no symbols, no images, no methods of interpretation or reconstruction which can stand in the presence of the overwhelming absence of all meaning disclosed in those events of our age which are satanic explosions of anti-Spirit paradigmatically expressing our inhuman situation: the Holocaust, the Gulag, Hiroshima. These events—classical negative events seeking for an always inadequate classical text—become the final *caesura* to our fated journey of domination. Our task is to try to face the nameless horror they disclose with a lucidity which embraces their uncanniness, with an honesty which allows their *tremendum* power to call into question all our former questions on the human. We must learn to wait, to tell the story, to give voice to those who have no voice, to face the non-identity of our actuality to reason, to spirit, to reality, to despise as obscene any easy grasp for meaning in such meaningless events. We must not allow these paradigmatic events to fixate our attention but rather to free our spirits to hope and action—to discern the affirmations left to us in the songs and stories of the enslaved black, the struggle for even minimal survival of the countless voiceless, wretched ones of the earth everywhere. We pray now because they saw fit and see fit to pray. We accept the uncanny gift of hope in survival itself as a grace sheerly given to us by God through them because we know that we have been given that hope—that grace of hope—only for the sake of the hopeless; we must tell their story because it cannot be forgotten; we seek the releasement of its dangerous and uncanny memories upon our all-too-canny illusions of our already achieved humanity.

The journeys to and from the experience of the uncanny in our situation are as diverse as the classical paradigms chosen to focus our ever-wandering pluralistic, often homeless, exiled attention. The elective affinities between contemporary theologies and these secular post-theologies demands more attention from us all. In the meantime, this

<sup>19</sup> Surely the most valuable indication of this development is the series *The Classics of Western Spirituality* published by Paulist Press

much, amidst the pluralism become the conflict of interpretations, perhaps even the cultural chaos expanding as rapidly as the desert itself expands each year on this planet, seems clear: we must keep alive the sense of the uncanny as a truly religious sense of our situation; we must fight all temptations to canniness—to those bogus affirmations, those principles of domination, those slack feelings which tempt us beyond mere error and even illusion to the final distortions of sheer indecency.

The self-respect of each demands the intensified focussing upon one's own focal meaning, one's own paradigmatic experience and expression of the uncanny. If the self is not to scatter itself into the void of sheer fascination at our pluralistic possibilities, then the *tremendum* power of the always/already/not yet uncanniness of our homelessness—with ourselves, others, history, society, nature—must first be lived through and only then reflected upon. My own paradigm, my own focal meaning, is an explicitly Christian formulation I call the analogical imagination.<sup>20</sup> And yet if any paradigm, any focal meaning becomes a journey only of intensification of its own particularity without the constant self-exposure to the other, it finally loses its own focus and scatters itself amidst the clutter of our present with a self-imposed deafness and blindness to the reality we all face. Each focal meaning,<sup>21</sup> each journey of intensification, each post-theological and theological expression of the uncanny, each theological expression of grace and sin, grace and nature, God and the human, can become a focus for a vision of the concrete only if it realizes that the concrete is not merely the particular but, in through the particular focus, the whole. Each can because each does in fact throw out an expanding series of somehow ordered relationships to try to hear and learn from the really other. We understand one another if at all through analogies to our own experience. Each recognizes that any attempt to reduce the authentic otherness of another's focus on the human to one's own with our cherished common habits of domination only ends in destroying us all, only increases the leveling power of the all-too-common denominators which makes no one at home. Conflict is our actuality; conversation is our hope. Where that actuality is systematically distorted, conversation must yield for the moment to the techniques of liberation via suspicion classically expressed in Freud, Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger. Where that conversation is possible—on the other side of all techniques of explanation—lies the hope of understanding in the continuing conversation of the classics of religious heritage heard anew and reinterpreted in our present situation.

In the meantime there may be some way to formulate our common hope and our uncommon experiences of the uncanny into the rubric of an analogical imagination. For then the journey of intensification into the particularity of one focal meaning will be encouraged, the reality and

<sup>20</sup>For a formulation of this reality in the Catholic theological tradition, see my article *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 234-45.

<sup>21</sup>For the "focal meaning" theory of analogy, see D. Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven, 1971).

power of the negative will be demanded, the search for some order—a code, a story, a theory, a vision, a ritual, an image, a dance, above all a life—will be enhanced. Then the demand imposed upon each to try to hear one another once again, to allow all our paradigms, all our most cherished traditions, all our classics to expose themselves as themselves in all their intense and focussed particularity to the other as other may occur. This journey too—the journey of an emerging analogical imagination in our culture—has its own experiences of the uncanniness of and in our situation. It finds that those fundamental questions we must ask because they command our attention by their very worthwhileness are focussed no longer in any one place. The questions, like ourselves, are both no-where, no single place, any longer and everywhere. Everywhere, perhaps, above all through the somewhere of each one's own focussed particularity in a classical religious tradition and its paradigm of grace, while at the same time—and as the uncanny peculiarity of our own contemporary situation—through the “no” of our common no-where, our sensed not-yet-at-homeness in this time and place given to us. Any affirmation that will come to any of us will come in and through the power of some “no.” For we do sometimes sense—in authentic conversation, in real explanation, in story, in thinking, in laughter, in image, in ritual, in prayer, in sacrament and in action for a cause greater than the self—that we may be coming home to the unanswerable but always-already questionable reality in which we live and move and have our being. We know that we may not be able to answer those questions and yet we re-pond. In the uncanny sense of a reassurance between the unknown depth of the self and the unknowable depth of history and nature alike we begin to recognize in the theological classics some always-already reality of affirmation in and through their very negations. We recognize it only because we finally sense some reality, vague yet important, which we may not be able to name but which is, we know, not of our own making. We recognize it because it is there in the first place. We recognize it when we name it—as has our tradition—by the most honored name of all—the sheer event and gift which is grace; the grace which is at once the disclosure and concealment of a loving God and the emergence of a vision of the always-already not yet possibility of a trusting, hoping, loving—and thereby human—being.

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