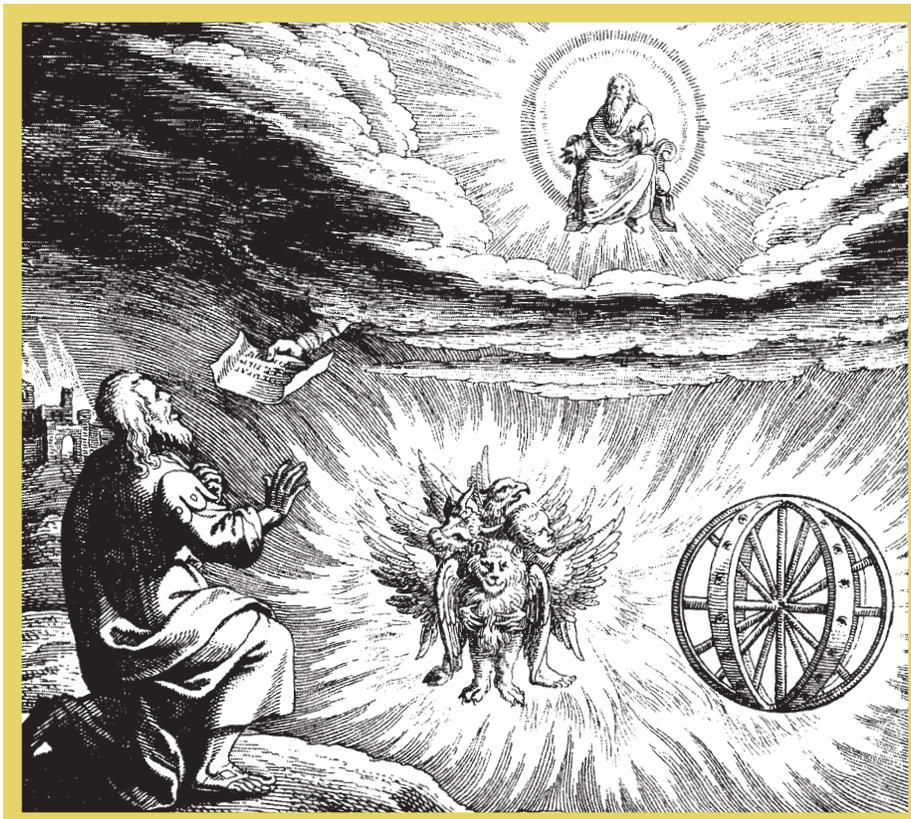


CRITERION

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DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS—

This winter 2004 issue of *Criterion* opens with Michael Lieb's essay "Above Top Secret': The Nation of Islam and the Advent of the 'Mother Plane.'" Delivered at an autumn-quarter Wednesday Lunch in Swift Common Room, the talk explores the "visionary" dimensions of the Nation's theology. Those dimensions find expression in what members of the Nation refer to as the "Wheel" or the "Mother Plane" or "Mother Wheel," drawn from the biblical prophecy of Ezekiel. Lieb's fascinating study considers the visions of the Nation's founder, Elijah Muhammad, and the adoption of them by his student, Louis Farrakhan.

Next is an essay by Clark Gilpin entitled "Testimony: The Letter from Prison in Christian History and Theology," delivered originally as the Burke Library Lecture at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The essay is part of a book-length study Gilpin is conducting on the cultural and theological history of English prison letters from approximately 1530 to 1700. While attending to the specific historical contexts and purposes of individual letters, Gilpin employs the concept of testimony to relate them to one another, to draw out their theological significance, and to situate them within the longer Christian literary tradition.

Following is an essay by David Albertson entitled "Out of Time? The Return of Origenism in Our Culture of Haste," based on Albertson's Senior Ministry Project, which he presented at a Wednesday Lunch in Swift Common Room last spring. In the essay, Albertson analyzes the famine of time that plagues contemporary society, attributing it to a return to an Origenist cosmology. He draws on the writings of the sixth-century Byzantine monk and martyr Maximus Confessor, who offered a correction to the Origenist picture of the world, to propose a return to liturgical thinking as a possible solution to our culture of haste.

Concluding this issue is a sermon by Dean Rosengarten entitled "At Death's Door," based on a passage from I Corinthians 15:50–58. The dean uses the concept of middle age—the point at which one assesses the span of one's life by looking backward rather than forward—to understand Paul's interpretation of death and the resurrection. He concludes that, truly to value life, we need to live not in middle age, but in some proximity to death's door.

I hope you enjoy this issue,

JENNIFER QUIJANO SAX, *Editor*

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“ABOVE TOP SECRET”:

THE NATION OF ISLAM AND THE ADVENT OF THE “MOTHER PLANE”

Michael Lieb

Anyone who ventures down to the Nation of Islam territory on the far South Side of Chicago will be struck by some imposing landmarks, especially the Final Call Administration, the nerve center of the Nation. Across the street from the administrative headquarters is one of the Respect for Life bookstores. This is where I first met Brother Sidney Muhammad, a most gracious and well-informed steward of the various books and tapes on display, especially those produced by the Messenger of Allah, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad,

and his student, the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan. It was Brother Sidney who introduced me to a book that the Nation holds in high regard: *Above Top Secret: The Worldwide UFO Cover-Up* (1988) by Timothy Good. As the title clearly suggests, conspiracy theories abound when it comes to UFOs. On the UFO front, the phrase “above top secret” finds expression in a letter that the late Senator Barry Goldwater wrote to Shlomo Arnon of the UCLA Experimental College. Dated March 28, 1975, the letter openly reveals that the subject of UFOs had interested Goldwater for over a decade. Upon attempting to gain access to classified government information on the subject, Goldwater was informed by government officials responsible for the collection of such information that it had been classified “above top secret,” a catchphrase devised by the U.S. government to designate documents accessible only to those who have received the highest clearance.¹ The phrase should not be taken lightly.

As the documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) make abundantly clear, the United States government has engaged for generations in what might be called “clandestine activities” regarding the verifiability of UFOs. One need only go online and visit the Electronic Reading Room hosted by the FBI through the FOIA to con-

firm this fact. Accessible for downloading are the notice of the mysterious crash at Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947; a small portion of the so-called Project Blue Book, conducted by the U.S. Air Force in the 1960s; and a 1,600-page document entitled “Unidentified Flying Objects,” dating back to 1947. Supplementing these documents is the *Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects* (1968), a book-length report that is the result of the efforts of Edward U. Condon, under contract with the United States Air Force.² Because such projects were commissioned by the United States government, they enjoy a certain “legitimacy” that might be otherwise unavailable were they initiated by a self-appointed seer or abductee (of whom there are plenty). The sign of legitimacy is no less evident in the roll call of notables who over the years have faithfully endorsed the possibility that UFOs actually exist. These include not just Barry Goldwater but Herman Oberth (the father of modern rocketry), Werner Von Braun (that legendary rocket engineer), General Douglas MacArthur, a slew of well-known astronauts, the inimitable J. Edgar Hoover, and, of course, Jimmy Carter.³ To this day, interest in the phenomenon continues unabated, especially among

Professor Lieb delivered this talk on October 15, 2003, at a Wednesday Lunch in Swift Common Room.



The Vision of Esdras. Matthaeus Merian (the Elder)



. . . the Mother Plane is the vehicle to which Elijah Muhammad first bore witness at the very outset of his career.

those committed to the notion of conspiracies and cover-ups. Despite its determination to disavow even the possibility of UFOs, the U.S. government has paradoxically fostered the conviction that Big Brother does, indeed, know something he is not telling us. In short, the government has its X-Files, and as both Mulder and Scully would most certainly concur, “The truth is out there.” It requires no Men in Black to confirm such a credo. What, then, does all this have to do with the Nation of Islam? In a word: everything.

For the Nation, conspiracy theories (especially those that focus on the FBI or CIA) are the order of the day. When I first paid a visit (almost a decade ago) to what is known as CROE, the Coalition for the Remembrance of Elijah Muhammad, I felt it rather disconcerting that I was looked upon with suspicion (imagine!). Reinforcing that feeling was the policy that all conversations be recorded and indeed videotaped. The ostensible purpose was to preserve such conversations in the archives of CROE, but beyond that there was no doubt a certain degree of healthy distrust. Those whom I interviewed wondered, at least initially, about the true motives of this white, bearded, Jewish, middle-aged “professor.”⁴ Might he be a government agent of some sort? Is he an informer? I was naive to think that their attitude toward me would be anything less than trusting. For the Nation of Islam has been plagued throughout its existence by the indignities wrought by a history of surveillance. All one need do is glance at the FBI files readily available through the Internet and other venues, to see the extent of subversive espionage to which not just Elijah Muhammad himself but the Nation as a whole was subjected under the heading of “national security.”⁵ Under J. Edgar Hoover, in fact,

a branch of the FBI known as COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Programs) set about to spy on, and if possible “neutralize,” radical political organizations and other dissidents who might share the views of these enemies of the state.⁶ The Nation’s distrust of outsiders, then, is a way of life essentially justified by practical experience. I emphasize this fact because it is of crucial importance to the “visionary” dimensions of the Nation’s beliefs and, indeed, its very theology.

Those dimensions find expression in what every member of the Nation calls the “Wheel” or the “Mother Plane” or “Mother Wheel.”

At the very heart of this conception lies the vision of God that inaugurates the prophecy of Ezekiel. Almost impossible to summarize, this vision is crucial to the Nation’s theology, ideology, and sense of self. Grounded in Ezekiel’s vision, the Mother Plane is the vehicle to which Elijah Muhammad first bore witness at the very outset of his career. In his account of being shown the vehicle in those early days, he describes it as “a destructive dreadful-looking plane that is made like a wheel in the sky today.” Unlike the delineation provided by the prophet Ezekiel, Elijah Muhammad’s is quite matter-of-fact. The vision is clearly domesticated into a “thing.” This is not to say that it is any-the-less awesome in its own way. It is simply to observe that it is somehow “there,” somehow

“present,” to those equipped to see it. In fact, it is actually measurable, an “object” with a “fearful symmetry” all its own. Thus, it measures “a half-mile, by a half-mile square.” From a distance, one might suggest that it is “undetermined square or round”; depending on one’s perspective, it is both. At the same time, it is what Elijah Muhammad calls “a humanly built planet.” Lest we doubt, he reassures us that



The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and His Supreme Captain, Raymond Sharrief, St. Louis, Missouri. From Lieb’s Children of Ezekiel, p. 137, courtesy of CROE Archives, 2435 West 71st Street, Chicago, Illinois 60629.



*Ezekiel may have thought that he was seeing the very Throne-Chariot of God,
but what he really saw was the Mother Plane.*

“it is up there and can be seen twice a week; it is no secret.” In fact, he says, “Ezekiel saw it a long time ago.” That is, Ezekiel may have *thought* that he was seeing the very Throne-Chariot of God, but what he really saw was the Mother Plane. Its purpose is clearly stated: “It was built for the purpose of destroying the present world.”⁷ What does all this mean? I shall attempt to elucidate.

First is the extent to which the visionary is transformed into an actual vehicle. For the members of the Nation, the Mother Plane is “real” and ever present as a true wonder of technology. This point was brought home to me by Brother Munir Muhammad during my many visits to CROE. I continued to refer to the Mother Plane as a “vision” until Brother Munir politely but firmly corrected me by insisting on the “thingness” of the phenomenon. To a certain extent, Ezekiel would most probably not have found such a correction all that troublesome. Despite the complex elusiveness of Ezekiel’s vision (or, more accurately, “visions”), this phenomenon possesses a quality that does, indeed, prompt one to view it in terms that suggest its “thingness.” What Ezekiel admires so much about it is its “workmanship” or “construction” (1:16): the brilliance of the substances that compose it, the intricacy of its mechanical parts, the complexity of its movements. “Submerged within the mystery of the unknowable vision is that which cries out for *objectification*, for individuation, for the bestowal of a name.”⁸ Granting this impulse to concretize, one is hardly surprised to learn that the vision comes to be known as the *merkabah* or “chariot.”

What of the reference to the Mother Plane as a “humanly built planet”? Aside from the homonymic quality of “plane” and “planet,” the association of one term with the other suggests how the great size of the vehicle comes into play. In fact, its planetary vastness points to the cosmic dimensions of the concept as a whole. Like a planet, it is sighted on various occasions. Indeed, we are informed that it appears twice a week to those equipped to behold it. The Mother Plane is, therefore, “no secret.” As such, it is not only a “real” entity but also one that can only be described as “in your face.” Watch out for the Mother Plane: it is coming to get you. The milieu out of which it arises is downright

apocalyptic, as the awesome vehicle of vengeance swoops down to destroy the oppressor and to reclaim the oppressed. Every follower of Elijah Muhammad knows that the “promis’d end” is upon him. Members of the Nation await the destruction of civilization with bombs, poison gas, and finally with fire, all stemming from the Mother Plane.⁹ This notion is a centerpiece of black consciousness extending back to the period of the slave spirituals, many of which traditionally celebrated Ezekiel’s wheel as a source of apocalyptic awakening and ultimate liberation among those subject to the trammels of the slave master.¹⁰ In today’s world, a corresponding outlook is reflected in the funk lyrics that constitute mothership connections of various sorts, as well as in the expressions of outrage that constitute rap. The culture of protest has not disappeared: it has assumed renewed impetus in contemporary forms.¹¹

So much for the cosmic dimensions and apocalyptic bearing. What about the fact that the Mother Plane is “humanly built”? This aspect bears directly on how members of the Nation of Islam conceive their God. Crucial to the theology of the Nation of Islam is the tenet that God is a human being: Master Fard Muhammad. For the members of the Nation, he is not only the Mahdi or Savior but also the true Allah who appointed Elijah Muhammad to be his Messenger.¹² It is this sense of God as human that underlies the concept of the Mother Plane as “humanly built.” As such, it is a vehicle that has all the characteristics of a machine. Although imbued with an aura of that which has been miraculously fashioned, the Mother Plane is still a manufactured vehicle, a testament to the triumph of research undertaken in the name of science. Various accounts of the manufacture of the Mother Plane exist, including what might be called the account that conceives the Mother Plane as the product of an “Asian connection.”¹³ This account views the Mother Plane as having been constructed in 1929 by Japanese scientists. Along with the aid of “Black, Brown, and Red” scientists, the Japanese had recourse to the “finest steel in Asia” to undertake so immense a project.¹⁴ According to a former member of the Nation, the Mother Plane as a vehicle of retribution may already have had its day. On



. . . *the Mother Plane became a recurrent theme in the secret surveillance activities of the FBI and of its offshoot COINTELPRO.*

December 7, 1941, the unthinkable happened. “The War of Armageddon that Elijah Muhammad had believed in since Bible school, the race war that he had feared as a young man in Macon, and the cataclysmic destructive power of the Mother Plane that [Master] Fard had preached about in his final sermon moved nightmarishly close to reality: the Japanese—‘Allah’s Asiatic army’—bombed Pearl Harbor, the U.S. base, in Hawaii.”¹⁵ In short, the Nation places its ideology of visionary experience squarely in the arena of the *actual*, the *political*, the *historical*, and the *apocalyptic*.

Such is the story of the Mother Plane as both a phenomenon crucial to the theology of the Nation of Islam and as a product of what I would call the Nation’s apocalyptic sensibility. To be sure, this is a phenomenon upon which many of us might well be inclined to look askance. When Elijah Muhammad’s own son Wallace assumed control of the Nation after his father’s death in 1975, the new chief minister made clear his intentions of ridding his people of what he called “all this spiritual spookiness.”¹⁶ The Mother Plane was, of course, included in that ban. Should we be inclined to adopt that view, we might well pause before dismissing the matter out of hand, if for no other reason than that Uncle Sam accorded the Mother Plane high priority. During the time of Elijah Muhammad, the Mother Plane became a recurrent theme in the secret surveillance activities of the FBI and of its offshoot COINTELPRO. The FBI files on Elijah Muhammad confirm this observation. Now available on microfilm, as well as through the Internet, the various memos, letters, and reports that resulted from the surveillance of Elijah Muhammad make for fascinating reading, especially when it comes to the Mother Plane.¹⁷

The FBI files on Elijah Muhammad are such that the Mother Plane becomes time and again the subject of close scrutiny. In the lingo of the terrorist mentality that prevails today, we are prompted to observe that the Mother Plane qualifies as a WMD, that is, a Weapon of Mass Destruction. One need only glance at the sky periodically to behold the most devastating WMD of them all. Elijah Muhammad knew it was up there, and even made mention of the fact that the FBI confiscated drawings of the Mother Plane that

he had placed on a blackboard in an attempt to delineate it to his followers.¹⁸ Now that the FBI has the Mother Plane on its radar screen, it can go about its business of helping to foster homeland security. One suspects that there are aspects of the Mother Plane that the FBI continues to keep under wraps.

If the scenario I portray borders on madness, we hardly need remind ourselves that we are all living during a time of madness, a time when we are practically strip-searched whenever we wish to board an airplane. During the Reagan years, the acronym MAD (mutually assured destruction) was used to describe the rush to arms. A votary of Ezekiel, Reagan was born again into an awareness of the dangers of MAD. Such dangers he attempted to counter with a plan to arm the heavens through the implementation of the SDI or Strategic Defense Initiative, also known as Star Wars, which is alive and well today. Between Reagan’s (and now Bush’s) Star Wars and the Mother Plane of Elijah Muhammad, I would opt for the latter. That, of course, is hardly the view of the FBI, which sought to discredit, if not destroy, the Nation of Islam in any way possible.¹⁹



Although the entire set of beliefs concerning the Mother Plane was rendered untenable after the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, allegiance to his principles enjoyed a new life with Louis Farrakhan’s rise to power in 1978. Minister Farrakhan’s adoption of the concept of the Mother Plane became a crucial aspect of his quest for identity, as well as his sense of vocation. While the Mother Plane certainly represented a reality for Farrakhan, he also internalized his experience of it to the point that the actual and the visionary overlapped. As Farrakhan conceived the Mother Plane from the very outset of his administration up to the present, this vehicle is not simply an object “out there” to be beheld on set times. Rather, it is a vehicle both visible to Farrakhan and active in his mental landscape. This fact is made evident in Farrakhan’s various addresses, principally ranging from 1986 to 1995, all of them on videotape. To follow



. . . Farrakhan found himself transported to the Wheel both in body and in spirit,
there to participate in his own visionary drama.

the immensely complex account of what transpired during those years would be an exercise in futility. Besides, I have already attempted to untie that subtle knot in my book *Children of Ezekiel* (1998).²⁰ Here, I shall confine myself primarily to an address called “The Great Announcement: The Final Warning,” which was delivered at a press conference on October 24, 1989, at the J. W. Marriott Hotel in Washington, D.C. I choose this address because it represents Farrakhan’s first public announcement before the press and the world at large concerning his take on the Mother Plane. This promised to be an announcement of major import indeed. As those conversant with the Qur’an know well, the term “announcement” is not invoked arbitrarily; rather, it is to be found as the title of the seventy-eighth chapter or surah in the Qur’an.²¹ There, the title “An-Naba” (“The Announcement”) alludes to the judgment upon those who will be resurrected and those who will be damned. As such, the title of the seventy-eighth surah suggests the potentially incendiary nature of Farrakhan’s own announcement, which describes for the first time at a public gathering both his experience on the Wheel and the significance of that experience. “Experience” is the operative word here, because Minister Farrakhan maintains that he did not simply “see” the Mother Plane, as Elijah Muhammad had. Rather, Farrakhan found himself transported to the Wheel both in body and in spirit, there to participate in his own visionary drama. As such, the event represents for him a primal scene in his religious calling as the student and follower of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

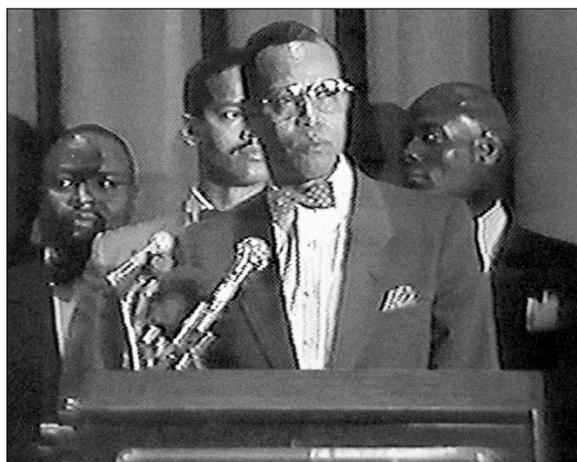
As I observe in my own earlier account of Farrakhan and the Mother Plane, all his speeches on the subject assume the form of performances, that is, dramatizations of visionary experience

through the medium of taped audio/video delivery.²² It is the performative dimension of Minister Farrakhan’s bearing witness within the space of enactment that defines his message and its mode of delivery. Thus, in his press conference, the vision is conceived as enactment or high theater: the public forum becomes the theater of that event. Both in the *Final Call* and in the subsequently published pamphlet, *The Announcement*, Farrakhan appears in a photograph proclaiming his message. He is seen standing at the midpoint of a long table flanked on either side by family, friends, and colleagues, including the Reverend Al Sharpton, Kadijah

Farrakhan (wife of Farrakhan), and others of importance to his administration. Marshaled in a row behind Farrakhan are members of the Fruit of Islam (the Nation’s paramilitary defense force); and on a wall behind them hangs the Nation of Islam flag with its crescent and star. Before the table and facing Farrakhan are photographers and members of the press. In the videotape of the press conference, the event is brought to life. The camera first pans the entire room to provide a sense of the size and scope of the affair. With the audience waiting in hushed

expectation, the room becomes a receptacle for the drama of oratory that is about to unfold. All eyes are on the speaker, whose deportment, gestures, and vocal intonation reinforce the compelling nature of his message. After the speech is concluded, the speaker invites no comments or questions. The oracle has been issued, the speaker and his retinue depart, and the rest is silence.

So what exactly does the speaker say he has experienced? Here is his story. Having delivered an address before a vast audience at the Los Angeles Forum in September of 1985, Minister Farrakhan feels the need to retreat to a site



“The Great Announcement: The Final Warning,” October 24, 1989, J.W. Marriott Hotel, Washington, D.C. From *Lieb’s Children of Ezekiel*, p. 202, reproduced from *Final Call Tapes* (Chicago: Final Call, Inc., 1989).



. . . *the prophetic calling that Farrakhan received
on the Wheel is part of his very being.*

he has visited before: Tepoztlan, an Aztec village ten to twelve miles northeast of Cuernavaca in central Mexico. There, he finds the solace needed to meditate and pray. This pilgrimage will allow him to escape the accusations leveled by the press in Los Angeles that he is nothing but an anti-Semite, a bigot, and a hate-monger. Because his attempts to rectify these charges are “too little, too late,” the retreat to Tepoztlan comes at precisely the right time for him. He is especially fond of climbing a mountain in Tepoztlan he has climbed several times before. On the evening of September 17, he begins the climb again with a few close companions. It is during his climb that he has his vision of a wheel-shaped transport vehicle that is one of the myriad of smaller vehicles stationed within the Wheel of Wheels, the Mother Plane. A voice from the vehicle calls him to board, whereupon a thick and heavy beam of light transports him into the vehicle itself. The vehicle then returns to the Mother Plane. After disembarking from the transport vehicle, he is led through dark tunnels to a room within a room, a veritable sanctum sanctorum. At the center of the ceiling of the enclosure, he sees a speaker that emits a voice he immediately recognizes as that of Elijah Muhammad. As the voice speaks in short cryptic sentences, a scroll with writing rolls down before his eyes. Like the prophet of old on the shores of the Chebar, Farrakhan ingests the scroll with its message as a sign of his prophetic mission. It is his calling, after all. The message itself is as follows: “President Reagan has met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to plan a war. I [Elijah Muhammad] want you to hold a press conference in Washington, D.C., and announce their plan and say to the world that you got the information from me on the Wheel.” Once again, the vision of the Mother Plane is steeped in conspiracy. This time, however, the issue appears to be that of a government conspiracy that the seer of the vision is charged to make public.²³

It would be an understatement to say that the public found Farrakhan’s account of the Mother Plane of interest. From Thursday, March 1, to Saturday, March 3, 1990, *The Washington Post* carried stories and editorials concerning both the Mother Plane and the message that Farrakhan had delivered in *The Announcement*. At a two-hour breakfast

meeting with the editorial staff of the *Post*, Farrakhan alleges that one of the editors asked in scorn, “What about this ‘Wheel’ business?” Farrakhan responded not only by listing all the U.S. presidents who had seen it but also by providing additional evidence of its existence, to which one of the editors in attendance whispered excitedly to a colleague seated with him: “He knows, he knows, he knows!”²⁴ In the account that the *Post* offers, the element of scorn is essentially erased, but the questions remain, nonetheless. In any case, the “Wheel’ business” assumes front-and-center importance. After citing all the notables who have expressed interest in the subject for over fifty years, Farrakhan comments that for the U.S. government, the subject has been “above Top Secret, not just Top Secret, but above Top Secret.” He then traces the history of the Mother Plane to the Nation of Islam by recounting Elijah Muhammad’s statements about it. Sensitive to nomenclature, he says with a certain pique, “You call them Unidentified Flying Objects. They’re not that to us. They’re referred to in the writings of Ezekiel the Prophet as the wheel within a wheel.” This is what Farrakhan not only beheld but experienced firsthand in Tepoztlan. Recounting the complex history of the Mother Plane as the very object that Ezekiel beheld in the sixth century BCE, he pauses to reflect on the textual foundations of the vision. “My mind goes to scripture because that’s my orientation,” Farrakhan remarks.²⁵ It is an orientation that has remained with him his entire career.

From the perspective of that career, one is tempted to observe that the prophetic calling that Farrakhan received on the Wheel is part of his very being. He is haunted by wheels that follow him on his various journeys, whether domestic or international. In response to the presence of these wheels, he does not hesitate to observe: “I am telling America that wherever I am the Wheel is!” He is connected to the Wheel; he receives his energy from it, his power from it, his authority from it, his “juice” from it. Lying in bed, he hears far-off voices and beholds transcendent sights, all emanating from the Wheel. He is not a drunken man, he declares; he is not a crazy man. We all have had dreams, some foolish, others real. His dream is a vision, one that gives him purpose



. . . *Minister Farrakhan provides a new animus for the anger reflected in his speech by focusing on the Jews.*

and shows him the way. During the years following the onset of his vision, he speaks before the representatives of eighty nations at the Second Mathaba Conference in Tripoli. There, he warns Mu'ammarr Ghadafi of an impending attack by the U.S., and, at the same time, issues a warning to President Reagan and Secretary of State George Schultz not to bomb Libya. Refusing to heed the warning, the United States launches its attack shortly thereafter. All during the confrontation on the Gulph of Sidra, it is reported in the press that a bright orange object has been sighted over the Mediterranean. That orange object, of course, is the Mother Plane. Is this the event that should have prompted Farrakhan to hold a press conference? Apparently, it is not, for it is not until four years after the original vision that he understands the full weight of his charge, which is to disclose a new conspiracy, one that involves not Reagan and Schultz but Bush and Powell. Thus, at the press conference recorded in *The Announcement* he says, "I am here to announce today that President Bush has met with his Joint Chiefs of Staff under the direction of General Colin Powell, to plan a war against the black people of America, the Nation of Islam and Louis Farrakhan, with particular emphasis on our black youth, under the guise of a war against drug sellers, drug users, gangs and violence—all under the heading of extremely urgent national security." The particular object of this denunciation is, of course, the FBI, which has been attempting to destroy the Nation of Islam since 1940.

With its so-called anti-terrorist task force, the FBI has long sought the undoing not just of the Nation of Islam but of Louis Farrakhan himself. It has launched a covert "attack on Louis Farrakhan with the purpose of discrediting, embarrassing and ultimately causing the death of Louis Farrakhan."²⁶ Underlying Farrakhan's press conference message is a theme that runs throughout all his discourse. It is a theme that involves not just the conspiratorial dimensions already discussed but what might be called the persecutorial dimensions reflected in Farrakhan's outlook. Those dimensions embrace not simply the U.S. government and society at large but what Farrakhan calls "the Jewish community," a community with which he has been struggling for years. That struggle,

in fact, frames his experience of the Mother Plane in a way that it never had for Elijah Muhammad. At the center of this struggle is Louis Farrakhan's sense of self. It is a selfhood born of struggle, forged in controversy, and desperately attempting to find a peace that surpasses all understanding.

The best way of gaining insight into the struggle is to consult a taped speech that Farrakhan delivered at Mosque Maryam on April 26, 1992. Titled "The Shock of the Hour," the speech derives its impetus from surah 22:2 of the Qur'an ("The great upheaval of the Hour will indeed be terrible"). There is no way of softening the message of this speech, the tone of which is strident and disturbing. It is no doubt among Farrakhan's most "apocalyptic" performances. Toward the end of the speech, even he is prompted to observe that he has "never talked like this before." At the center of the speech is the Mother Plane, which will descend upon the white race at the end of time to destroy all in its path. Although this kind of thing is a staple of Elijah Muhammad's thinking, Minister Farrakhan provides a new animus for the anger reflected in his speech by focusing on the Jews. Farrakhan fires off allegation after allegation in a series of salvos against the Jews who have been seeking to undermine him. Claiming that the Jews rule the currency and control the banks, he maintains that it is even possible to see the Star of David embedded as a secret sign in the depiction of the eagle on the dollar bill. Disclosing the "conspiracy" between the United States and Israel, he declares that "the real Israel is over here." It is called "the United States of America, run by Jews." It was the Jews, he says, who fought against Nat Turner, who worked against Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—"Jews in the government, in the Justice department, Jews that worked against the prophets of God," and Jews who are now seeking to undermine Farrakhan. "I have greater enemies against me in this movement," he alleges, "than Moses had against him, than Jesus had against him, than the Prophet Muhammad had against him. My enemies," he declares, "are greater than all their enemies combined."²⁷ It is against these enemies that he takes up arms, that he calls upon the Mother Plane to eliminate. It is in the spirit of this kind of



*The incendiary quality of Farrakhan's struggle with the Jews
remains alive and well even to this day.*

rhetoric that the Mother Plane assumes a bearing that is entirely apocalyptic and destructive. In dealing with the history of the Mother Plane, one must be aware of this dark and disturbing side of a personality constantly in a state of struggle. The question is whether the man who delivered the address called "The Shock of the Hour" a decade ago is the same individual who continues to oversee the Nation of Islam today.

Although there is no definitive answer to this question, there are certain signs that appear to suggest the emergence of a sadder and wiser man. These signs include such events as the reconciliation between Louis Farrakhan and Betty Shabazz, widow of Malcolm X, in 1995; and between Louis Farrakhan and Warith Deen Mohammed, a son of Elijah Muhammad, in 1999. The Million Man March of October 16, 1995, marked a significant moment in the history of outreach and the desire for rapprochement on the part of Minister Farrakhan. Publicized among members of the Nation as "The Day of Atonement," this became a holy day of sorts, with its roots in the traditions of Yom Kippur. In his speeches around the country to build support for the Million Man March, Farrakhan made a point of emphasizing the Judaic basis of the event as the occasion for atonement. For our purposes, it is also significant that in every major address Farrakhan gave, he talked in detail of his experience on the Mother Plane. To a great extent, that experience helped to focus and legitimate the rationale for undertaking a project the magnitude of the Million Man March in the first place. Following the March, however, Farrakhan undertook a controversial eighteen-nation tour of Africa and the Middle East in 1996. As part of the tour, he visited nations such as Iran and Libya, viewed as anathema by the United States government. All this did was fan the flames among those determined to see Louis Farrakhan as a hate-monger and as public enemy number one.

Recently, Farrakhan's seventieth birthday was celebrated at a major gala in Chicago. The gala served not only to commemorate the "Farrakhan years" but also to help support the Louis Farrakhan Prostate Cancer Foundation. Among those who offered testimonials, Cornell West declared that

Minister Farrakhan is his brother and his partner. "Most of America doesn't realize how sweet and gentle [Farrakhan] is," Dr. West observed, "but we know."²⁸ The kind of knowledge to which Cornell West refers is essentially "privileged," in the sense that it is available only to those who have had the opportunity to speak one-on-one with the Minister. This opportunity presented itself to me, in fact, when Farrakhan and I talked for some three hours at his Kenwood, Chicago, residence on Tuesday, May 20, 2003. During our meeting, I found a man who appeared genuinely to wish for reconciliation between himself and those with whom he has been doing battle all these years. I was left with the impression that he wants to be known as a good person, one whose legacy will be celebrated, rather than one whose reputation will be constantly reviled. Having suffered greatly as a result of his own illnesses, this is a man who maintains he is in a "health condition" that has left him "pierced" by the surgeon's knife, a trauma tantamount to having a "near-death" experience. Such an experience can certainly transform one in many ways. The question is whether this change of perspective is true in the case of Louis Farrakhan.

Judging by the tenor of recent occurrences, I am obliged to report that it is not. The incendiary quality of Farrakhan's struggle with the Jews remains alive and well even to this day. The anniversary of the Million Man March, with its emphasis on atonement, might have provided an occasion for an expression of reconciliation. But the message Minister Farrakhan issued at Mosque Maryam on October 16, 2003, hearkened back to the incendiary rhetoric last heard in the "Shock of the Hour." Although the Minister's message on the whole was moving and constructive, aspects of it—especially those that recalled the ongoing struggle with the Jews—gave me pause and, quite frankly, proved disturbing.²⁹ What prompted this return to the invective of a bygone era is difficult to say. The struggles of the past appear to haunt Farrakhan as sorely in today's unsettled environment as they had many years ago. Whatever the reason for the resurgence of the animus in Farrakhan's recent pronouncements, there is no doubt that the old wounds remain open. The "piercing" of those wounds is as painful now as it ever was. At our



. . . the Wheel is as crucial to Louis Farrakhan now as it was
to Elijah Muhammad almost thirty years ago.

meeting this past May, the Minister confided in me his determination to return to the Wheel.³⁰ There, he believes, he will no longer be vulnerable to the sufferings that result from the “piercings” of the enemy. Whether Farrakhan will ultimately find peace of mind on the Wheel remains to be seen. What is certain is that through the workings of the Mother Plane, we can continue to gain access to the Minister’s most intimately held convictions, his longings, and his perception of his calling. As such, the Wheel is as crucial to Louis Farrakhan now as it was to Elijah Muhammad almost thirty years ago. □

ENDNOTES

1. Timothy Good, *Above Top Secret: The Worldwide UFO Cover-Up* (New York, N.Y.: William Morrow, 1988), 1.
2. For the Electronic Reading Room Web site, see <http://foia.fbi.gov>. For the Condon report, see <http://www.ncas.org/condon/>.
3. See Tim Edwards, “Famous People Talk about the UFO/ET Issue” (November 1, 1997), <http://www.rense.com/ufo/famousquotes.htm>.
4. As it turns out, my many trips to CROE proved to be a godsend, and I owe my understanding of the Nation, its founding, and its beliefs to Munir Muhammad, for whom I have the deepest respect, admiration, and affection.
5. Especially revealing is the “FBI File on Elijah Muhammad” (three microfilm reels, along with a guide), microform BP223.Z8E454 (1995). See also the FBI Internet site, indicated above.
6. See, in particular, the directive setting forth the mission of COINTELPRO, available online at <http://www.cointelpro.org>. According to a confidential memo from the director to his field offices, dated August 26, 1967, “the purpose of this new counterintelligence endeavor is to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist, hate-type organizations . . .” (in the COINTELPRO site).
7. *Message to the Blackman in America* (Philadelphia, Pa.: House of Knowledge Publications (1965), 17–18.
8. See my discussion in *Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, UFOs, the Crisis of Race, and the Advent of End Time* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 10–11.
9. *Message to the Blackman*, 17–18.
10. See my treatment of slave spirituals in *Children of Ezekiel*, 145–149.
11. Funk, rap, and hip-hop have all served as forms of outrage that are grounded in the cultural milieu represented by Ezekiel’s vision, especially as it is manifested in the Mother Plane, Mother Ship, or Wheel. For an illuminating study of these forms in connection with Ezekiel, see Kelefa Sanneh, “The Secret Doctrine: A Conversation with Killah Priest,” *Transition* 74 (1997), 162–182. The Killah Priest interview is especially enlightening in the ties that it draws not only between rap and biblical prophecy but between rap and the nature of the Mother Plane or Mother Ship. See also Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 285–301.
12. See, among many sources, Elijah Muhammad’s *Our Savior Has Arrived* (Newport News, Va.: United Brothers Communications Systems, n.d.), 15–17, and *passim*. See also *Message to the Blackman in America*, 6.
13. The vehicle, we are informed, has a speed of up to 9,000 miles per hour. Within the Mother Plane are 1,500 small circular planes, each of which carries three bombs. Weighing two tons each, the bombs are designed to drill into the earth upon contact and to explode as a sign of the vengeance of Allah. These are only a few of the physical characteristics of a plane that is the product of a mentality totally committed to the view of God himself as human and of the work of his hands as a machine to end all machines. (My source is the Web site <http://www.thenationofislam.org/themotherplane.html>, which contains a copy of Master Fard’s volume, *The Supreme Wisdom*.)
14. Noticeably absent are the scientists of the “white race,” for this is the enemy.
15. Karl Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad* (New York, N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1999), 130–131.
16. Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel*, 178–179.
17. In a confidential file dated July 8, 1957, the FBI cites the work of its informants (with names deleted) to the effect that we need to pay close attention to the apocalyptic beliefs of the Nation, including the conviction that “we are now living in the days of judgment.” Under the heading *Destruction of the World*, the file cites the statement: “Allah [has] pointed out to us a dreadful looking plane that is made like a wheel in the sky today. It is a half-mile by a half-mile square. . . . Ezekiel saw it a long time ago. It was built for the purpose of destroying the present world” (CG 100–6989, 18–19). Similar kinds of information are accorded high priority elsewhere in the FBI files. Thus, in a memorandum, dated 1971, the Chicago office of the FBI warns J. Edgar Hoover that the Nation of Islam has been instrumental in fostering the belief that a time of judgment is upon us all and that the destruction of the world is at hand. Finally, in a confidential

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TESTIMONY:

THE LETTER FROM PRISON IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

W. Clark Gilpin

The letter from prison is a long and variegated Christian literary tradition that reaches from the Apostle Paul to such twentieth-century figures as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dorothy Day, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Such letters are—on one level—extraordinarily dramatic documents of personal history, which may be addressed to government officials in protest, to religious communities in encouragement, to other prisoners in solidarity, or to parents, spouses, and children in consolation. But, however they were originally addressed,

these personal documents have frequently been transformed into highly charged public declarations. Smuggled from behind prison walls, they are copied, printed, and widely circulated as affirmations of religious faith and enunciations of political protest. Published prison letters, in short, transmute the conventions of personal correspondence into acts of testimony, a bearing of witness by persons who believe themselves to be unjustly incarcerated for their fidelity to conscience and religious principle.

The English Reformation under Henry VIII initiated an extraordinary flowering of the letter from prison as a genre of English religious literature, as successive generations of dissidents refused to be incorporated within the changing boundaries of the officially established church. Notable early letters issued from the Tower of London in 1534 and 1535 bearing the signature of Sir Thomas More, and were followed, in the next century and a half, by hundreds of politically and theologically freighted prison epistles from both eminent and socially obscure men and women: Protestants during the reign of Mary Tudor, sectarians and Catholic priests during the reign of Elizabeth, democratic pamphleteers and religious visionaries during the English Civil Wars, and Roman Catholics, Quakers, and Baptists after the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660. By the

end of the seventeenth century, nearly 3,000 letters from prison had been printed and circulated as acts of conscience and political resistance.

Using resources from Burke Library's McAlpin Collection of British History and Theology, the book I am writing will be a cultural and theological history of these English prison letters in the years from approximately 1530 to 1700. While attending to the specific historical contexts and purposes of individual letters, I will employ the concept of testimony to relate them to one another, to draw out their theological significance, and to situate them within the longer Christian literary tradition. As a group, the English prisoners were well aware of the literary lineage in which they wrote, and they traded on the authority of the epistolary form. They thought the New Testament letters to the Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon had been written by Paul during imprisonment; they had studied the accounts of imprisonment and martyrdom in the Acts of the Apostles; and they

Professor Gilpin delivered an earlier version of this essay as the Burke Library Lecture at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Quotations from sixteenth-century sources come from the holdings of the McAlpin Collection of British History and Theology and are made available by courtesy of Burke Library.



Sir Thomas More and daughter going out of window. © Bettmann/Corbis



*English letters from prison during the early modern period dramatically embody
the characteristics of courtroom testimony.*

took varied lessons from Revelation, as a visionary letter from exile during a time of persecution. Beyond the New Testament, a much larger orbit of prison writing encircled the English letters, and Ioan Davies has observed in his book *Writers in Prison* that much of the most influential literature of the West, from the Jewish and Christian scriptures to Plato's dialogues, reflected conditions of imprisonment or involuntary exile. "It is arguable," Davies writes, "that it is impossible to understand Occidental thought without recognizing the central significance of prison and banishment in its theoretical and literary composition."¹ My book explores this proposal with respect to the theoretical and literary composition of Christian theology.

During the 170 years of English history traversed in this book, the entire relationship of religion to the political and social orders was dramatically transformed. At the beginning of the era, the overwhelming consensus of English and European thought presumed that society could not survive and flourish without a common understanding of human nature, destiny, and conduct. It further assumed that the institution charged with inculcating this common understanding was the established church, whose rituals, doctrines, and moral standards were protected by the force of the state. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, John Locke was enunciating a quite different idea of the church, as a voluntary association of like-minded individuals, which, so long as it did not endanger the common welfare, ought to be free to pursue its beliefs, even its errors, in a climate of toleration. The intervening decades witnessed sharp disagreement concerning the true form of religion and the relations among competing versions of religious truth. The English prison letters figured prominently in this long contest over the place of religion in the public sphere. In the process, they played a crucial role in the debate over religious toleration during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and they addressed important, more strictly political issues, such as due legal process and freedom of the press.

This evening, however, I want to step back from the shifting political and cultural contexts in which persons wrote letters from prison, in order to focus on some persistent features

of the letter from prison as a literary form. To do so, I shall first introduce the concept of testimony, then suggest four points of view that we can adopt for interpreting the prison letter, and conclude by returning to the idea of testimony.

TESTIMONY

The Yale literary theorist Shoshana Felman has defined our own era as "the age of testimony." Like other scholars who have thought about testimony, Felman begins her analysis with the term's legal context, a courtroom that requires testimony from witnesses because events are in doubt and the narrative connections among them are in question. Contending interests elaborate alternative interpretations from differing points of view, and a judge, a jury, an arbiter must make an appraisal and arrive at a decision. But Felman wishes to move beyond the contested narratives of a courtroom, in order to propose a second, and more fundamental, sense in which ours is "the age of testimony." The most searching testimonies of our era, she writes, "seem to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference." For her, the definitive, twentieth-century instance of overwhelming event is the Holocaust. Testimony to occurrences "in excess of our frames of reference" shares the situated and perspectival features of testimony in general, but it also calls attention to a more general crisis of truth, in which traumatic events have so thoroughly disrupted the culturally received frames of reference that both the witness and those who hear the witness's story find themselves either without clear criteria of appraisal or with criteria that fail to assimilate and interpret crucial pieces of information.² The cultural courtroom is in ethical disarray.

English letters from prison during the early modern period dramatically embody the characteristics of courtroom testimony. They bear witness regarding contested events, and they make a claim on their readers to take



*These illegal books advanced the “Separatist” argument that
the Church of England was utterly corrupted . . .*

responsibility for an appraisal of what is happening or has happened. The question of whether or not the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were an “age of testimony,” in Felman’s more radical sense of a crisis in the criteria by which witness is appraised, is a question that must await the detailed historical analysis of the book as a whole.

A letter of April 4 or 5, 1593, from the Elizabethan religious radical Henry Barrow to an anonymous, influential kinswoman (perhaps Anne Russell, Countess of Warwick³) nicely illustrates the principal features of such testimonial letters. At the time he wrote from London’s Newgate Prison, Barrow had already been incarcerated nearly six years. But now the situation had changed for the worse. On March 23, he and four colleagues—John Greenwood, Scipio Bellot, Robert Bowle, and Daniel Studley—had been condemned to death for writing, printing, and circulating books judged to be seditious and defamatory of the queen’s majesty. These illegal books advanced the “Separatist” argument that the Church of England was utterly corrupted in its manner of worship, ministry, governance, and membership—that it was, in short, a false church from which the faithful must flee into their separate congregations. Against this background and under the shadow of execution, on April 4 or 5, Barrow wrote his kinswoman, both to state his case and to request her aid.

Barrow opened his letter by contesting the official judgment that his imprisonment and condemnation were just punishment for seditious publications. On the contrary, Barrow argued, he was a devoted subject of the queen’s government, suffering unjust persecution for conscientious objections he had raised against administration of the English church. Only through the “instigation” of vengeful prelates, resentful at “seing the axe thus layd to the roots of the tree of their pomp,” was he now “indicted, arraigned, condemned, and readie to be executed by the secular powers, for moving sedition.” Such suffering for conscience incorporated him into the long lineage of religious suffering exemplified in the lives of Christ and the apostles, and he observed that it will be “no new or strange doctrine unto you, right honorable and excellent Ladie,” that in this life “the crosse should be

joyned to the gospel.” The twin notions that resolute adherence to Christian faith carried with it suffering for conscience and that suffering gave evidence of resolute faith had been classically enunciated by the great Henrician biblical translator William Tyndale in his *Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528). And this joining of cross and gospel had achieved dramatic form in John Foxe’s voluminous narrative of English martyrs, *Acts and Monuments of these latter and perillous dayes* (1563), which the bishops themselves had directed to be made available in every cathedral church. Suffering for the true faith was “no new or strange doctrine” either to Barrow or to the countess.

But, Barrow continued, it might seem strange—indeed “almost incredible”—that in a professedly Christian land the church’s own ministers should work “crueltie” on “the servants of Christ for the truth.” The unlikelihood of such a thing, he admitted, made it difficult for “otherwise wel affected” persons not to presume that the prisoners were at fault. But, he countered, if the “true causes” of “our sufferings” were duly considered in relation to scripture, “their malice and our innocencie should easily appear to al men,” despite the fact that the bishops now sought to obscure the facts “by adding slander unto violence.” Due consideration of both history and the present circumstances would make clear that Christ and the apostles “suffred like usage under the same pretence of sedition.” The faithful of all ages have struggled and suffered in the long warfare between Christ and Antichrist, and Christ “shal not cease this warre” until Antichrist is cast utterly from the church. Against the historical backdrop of this line of martyrs and witnesses to the truth, Barrow then rebutted the charges against him by insisting that his writings had consistently acknowledged “all dutie and obedience to her Majestie’s government, as to the sacred ordinance of God.” He had directed his polemic only against “this false ecclesiastical government.”

Following these scriptural justifications for his position, Barrow shifted the tenor of his letter by narrating the events of the days since his condemnation on March 23. On the morning immediately after the judgment, Barrow wrote, he and John Greenwood were brought up out of the



*The English letters from prison may be approached from a variety of perspectives,
each of which yields somewhat different cultural and theological meanings.*

Newgate dungeon, guards removed their shackles, and they were “ready to be bound to the cart” for delivery to Tyburn’s scaffold, when the queen’s order of reprieve arrived. Seven days later, Barrow continued, he and Greenwood “were very early and secretly conveyed to the place of execution,” where, with the nooses around their necks, they were permitted to speak a few words to a crowd of onlookers. “We there, in the sight of that judge that knoweth and sercheth the hart, before whome we were thence immediately to appear, protested our loyaltie and innocencie towards Her Majestie . . . and this whol state.” Barrow and Greenwood also “exhorted the people to obedience and hartie love of their prince and magistrates.” Just as they were concluding, once again, came the queen’s reprieve. There was “exceeding rejoysing and applause of all the people, both at the place of execution and in the wayes, streets, and houses,” as the two were led back to Newgate Prison.

Having thus twice benefited from “Her Majestie’s princely clemencie,” Barrow turned to his kinswoman. He hoped that “God shall move your noble hart, right vertuous Ladie,” and, “for the love and cause of Christ,” lead her to inform the queen that “our intire faith unto God, unsteined loyaltie to Her Highnes, innocencie and good conscience towards all men” made Barrow and Greenwood deserving of a pardon or, failing that, removal to a less onerous prison. This appeal from “the poor condemned prisoners of Christ” was not without its prophetic edge: “I hope I need not so much, as to stirre up that good gift and grace of God which is in you, not to neglect or put from you this notable occasion sent unto you from God, to shew forth the naturalnes of your faith unto him, of your fidelity to your prince, of your love to the members of Christ in distresse, whom as you succour or neglect herein, so assure your self will Christ in his glorie esteme it as done or denyed to be done by you to his own sacred person.” With a final appeal to his kinswoman’s “diligent indeavour” and a declaration of God’s “mighty hand” in both life and death, he signed himself “condemned of men but received of God: Henry Barrowe”

Whether or not the letter reached its intended recipient, we do not know. Barrow and Greenwood were executed on

April 6, 1593. Meanwhile, the letter itself circulated through the Separatist congregations and was published in anonymous and unauthorized tracts sometime between 1593 and 1595, in 1604, and again circa 1681.⁴

THE LETTER FROM PRISON: FOUR FRAMES OF REFERENCE

The English letters from prison may be approached from a variety of perspectives, each of which yields somewhat different cultural and theological meanings. Employing the 1593 Barrow letter and selected other Tudor prison letters as illustrative reference points, I will explore prison letters in terms of politics, sociology, traditions of religious devotion, and the epistolary form itself. These approaches of course overlap, but distinguishing among them illuminates both the violently clashing religious commitments and the richly textured religious meanings that adhere to this remarkable literary form. Furthermore, each perspective accentuates a different aspect of the general theological theme of testimony.

THE POLITICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

Scholars who have investigated the concept of the witness or martyr in early Christian literature note that the term only gradually acquired the connotation of one who suffered death in witness to his or her faith. Indeed, it was the continuance of two prior meanings of the term that gave force to this later connotation. The first of these was the idea of the witness to events, who spoke from personal knowledge. The second was the witness who emphatically championed the truth of a conviction and consistently expressed it through his or her conduct in adverse circumstances.⁵ Both of these meanings of the witness who bears testimony were commonly at work in the writing and reception of English prison letters, whether or not the writer had been condemned to death or would later die in prison, and both shape the political purposes of the genre.

Throughout the period from the 1530s to 1700, the prisoner faced the daunting political problem of making a



The rhetorical power of the prison letter came from interweaving the prisoner's personal narrative with the grand narrative of Christian martyrdom . . .

persuasive case that incarceration had resulted from innocent acts of piety, which were not covert acts of sedition and public disruption. The distinction was characteristically drawn in a letter reporting a visit to prisoners in a London jail, who had been discovered on January 1, 1554, in illicit worship together at a private home. The visitor reported to John Hooper (also in prison) that the group was apprehended while “upon their knees in endyng of prayer (wherin they gave God thanks, prayed for the magistrates and estates of the Realme, and requyred thinges necessary at his bounteful hands).” When the arresting officers transported them to jail, “they humbly obeyed: for they came not ther weaponed, to conspire or make any tumult, but onely like Christians, Christianly to pray, and to be instructed in the vulgar tonge, by the reading and hearing of Gods word, as their conscience did enforce them.”⁶ This, as we have seen, was also the strategy of Henry Barrow, who sharply distinguished between his “obedience to her Majestie’s government” and his polemic against “this false ecclesiastical government.” The difficulty in such arguments, of course, was that precisely the statutes of parliament and queen to whom Barrow claimed obedience had established the “false ecclesiastical government.”

Compounding the difficulty of challenging the regnant assumption that directly connected religious deviance to political disruption, prison writers faced a second, practical difficulty: prison isolated religious dissenters in order to silence them. In its political frame of reference, the published letter from prison intended to circumvent this purpose. It appealed to the authorities directly, and to a wider public indirectly, to consider the injustice of corporal punishment or to appeal for mercy in its administration. These appeals characteristically began by contesting the official narrative, which had publicly justified imprisonment as appropriate punishment for heresy, sedition, or the disruption of public order. Indeed, the prison writers regularly claimed, they were the ones who were pursuing the true interests of church and commonwealth.

This counter-narrative operated at two quite distinct, but interactive, levels. At one level, it identified the prisoner’s

plight with the grand drama of salvation history as a whole. Suffering for conscience incorporated the prisoner into the long lineage of religious suffering that, looking backward, was exemplified in the lives of Christ and the apostles, who suffered in the righteous battle against larger-than-life forces of evil. The faithful of all ages had struggled and suffered in the long warfare between Christ and Antichrist, and the present age was perhaps the culminating epoch of this cosmic conflict. Resolute witness to Christian faith thus carried with it suffering for conscience, and suffering gave evidence of resolute faith. This grand narrative had both its Protestant and its Catholic forms, and the struggle over the ramifications of differing interpretations will comprise an important theme of the book as a whole, but the presence of grand narrative, explicit or implied, was indispensable to the public function of the letter from prison.

At a second level, the prison letter spoke from personal knowledge of very specific events, providing a vivid description of the injustice, terror, and pain of the prisoner’s own incarceration. Henry Barrow’s dramatic account of the two occasions on which he was prepared for an execution that was then delayed provides a compelling illustration of a characteristic narrative strategy. Careful attention to detail gave verisimilitude to the letter’s claim that it provided a true account that counteracted slander and misrepresentation issued by the ecclesiastical regime. Typically, the prisoner’s counter-narrative further dramatized its denial of sedition and social disruption by contrasting official violence with the peaceful intentions and behavior of the prisoner.

The rhetorical power of the prison letter came from interweaving the prisoner’s personal narrative with the grand narrative of Christian martyrdom, in order to incorporate the prisoner’s tale in the historic testimony to the truth of the gospel. So, for example, the young Jesuit Alexander Briant, who would be executed along with Edmund Campion on December 1, 1581, wrote from the Tower of London to “the Reverend Fathers of the Societie of Iesus.” During his torture on the rack, he informed them, the thought fixed in his mind to “ratifie” his vow to the society. Afterward, perhaps miraculously, “though my hands & feete were violently



The tensions between social solidarity and religious fidelity were never far below the surface of the prison writer, whose hours were alone with fate.

stretched,” he found himself clear headed, without pain, and “in quietnesse of hart, & tranquilitie of mynd.” Returned to his cell, Briant meditated on the suffering of Christ, and “me thought, that my left hand was wounded in the palme, and that I felt the blood runne out: but in very dede, there was no such thing, nor any other payne that did greeue my hand.”⁷ In letters such as Briant’s, a “first-hand account” gave a singular, irreplaceable character to testimony, which no one other than the prisoner could deliver. Through the combination of grand narrative and particular narrative, the prisoner represented suffering as evidence of injustice, as certification of religious authenticity, and as an act of solidarity with community members under threat from the authorities. The letter aimed to align the prisoner’s testimony with inexorable powers moving within history, the divine engines of providence and redemption. Frequently employing the Pauline trope of human weakness displaying divine power, the prisoner’s letter represented a voice of the powerless in the face of arbitrary power. As John Frith wrote from Newgate in the week before he was burned for heresy, why should one side have “all the words,” and “the other be put to silence?”⁸

THE SOCIAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

The prison writer who believed that he or she had been unjustly imprisoned for cause of conscience invariably made common cause with some wider group in the society. This community of solidarity might be as tiny as Henry Barrow’s Separatist conventicle or as expansive as the allegiance of the Leveller leader John Lilburne (1614?–1657) to the “free-born people of England.” Letters called on the community to maintain its commitments, despite the governmental actions that had led to the writer’s own imprisonment, and one of the most prominently recurring themes was the bond of personal affection and common loyalty to a cause that linked the prisoner to those beyond the cell. The bonds of solidarity also reached back to the prisoner, whose daily welfare depended on the community that sent letters, made visits, and provided food, clothing, and other physical needs. Without this tangible support, both the prisoner and the prisoner’s family could quickly fall into desperate straits,

and such physical acts of consideration conveyed a more general sense of care that letters celebrated with gratitude.

Prisoners recognized the fragility of both the bonds of common cause and the bonds of common life. John Bradford wrote to his mother from the Tower of London in the autumn of 1553 to assure her that “I fynde God my most sweete good god alwayes” in the chastising blessings of prison. Fearful that, confronted with persecution, his mother would lapse from his Protestant faith back into the traditional religion of her upbringing, Bradford wrote, “perchance you are infirmed & weakened of that which I haue preached, because god doth not defend it (as you thinke) but suffereth the olde popish doctrine to come agayne and preuaile: but you muste knowe good Mother, that God by this doth proue and trye his children and people whether they will unfainedly and simplie hang on him & his woord.”⁹ The visceral fear that his mother’s lapse would effectively deny the meaning of his life and preaching led Bradford to support fragile family solidarity on unflinching solidarity with Christ: “death nor life, pryson nor pleasure (I trust in God) shall be able to separate me from my Lord God and his Gospel.” This poignant communication underscored one of the perennial features of testimony in all ages, namely, the responsibility of bearing solitary witness. “If someone else could have written my stories,” Elie Wiesel has written, “I would not have written them. I have written them in order to testify. And this is the origin of the loneliness that can be glimpsed in each of my sentences, in each of my silences.”¹⁰ The tensions between social solidarity and religious fidelity were never far below the surface of the prison writer, whose hours were alone with fate.

In its social aspect, the prison letter also bore witness to acts of representative suffering, undertaken in behalf of others, who were threatened not only by human adversaries but cosmic powers of evil and sin. In a letter of consolation to fellow prisoners being held in another jail, John Hooper encouraged them with the favor God showed them in their sufferings for conscience: they were “placed in the forefront of Christes battayle . . . a signe that he trusteth you before others of hys people. . . . Remember what lokers upon you



*The prison letter, in other words, is an important,
if neglected, genre of Christian spirituality.*

haue, to see and behold you in your fight: God and all hys holy Angels, who be ready alway to take you up into heauen, if ye be slayne in this fight. Also you haue standing at your backes al the multitude of the faythfull, who shall take courage, strength and desire, to follow such noble and valiant Christians, as you be.”¹¹ Testimony, in this frame of reference, did not simply argue for a truth but persevered in exhibiting a way of life that would encourage “al the multitude of the faythfull” to follow. It was precisely this sense of the witness’s representative solidarity that led the faithful to move near the pyre or the scaffold in order to hear and record the last words of the martyr. The ubiquitous feature of the woodcuts in Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* was the pennant of pious text, issuing from the mouth of the martyr consumed in flames for the truth, and Catholics and Protestants alike collected and preserved relics of their martyrs.

Unlike many recent writers from prison who are unsure of their readership and whose perception of audience “is frequently a shot in the dark at posterity,”¹² the English prisoners for conscience wrote out of a vivid image of the community beyond the cell. As a consequence, this literary act of solidarity had a pronounced tendency to distance or separate the prisoner from his or her fellow prisoners, who were presumably in jail because they belonged there. This sharp distinction was tellingly enunciated in interrogations conducted by the bishop of London in 1567:

Dean of Westminster. ‘You are not obedient to the authoritie of the Prince.’

William Wh. ‘Yes that we are: for we resist not, but suffer that the authoritie layeth upon us.’

Bishop. ‘So doe theeves suffer, that the lawe layeth upon them.’

William Wh. ‘What a comparison is this? They suffer for evill doing, and you punish us for seeking to serve God accordinge to his worde.’¹³

By contrast, in other historical settings, solidarity with one’s fellow prisoners has been represented as a moral and religious affirmation, which, in its literary and symbolic aspect, construes

the prison as a microcosm of the wider society. In short, prison writing entails a social ethic, which can take different and sometimes contradictory forms.

THE DEVOTIONAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

Prison has long served as a metaphor of life in the world and occasioned meditation on transience, fate, release from the bondage of sin, and the meaning of religious freedom. A common trope, for instance, is the notion that it is the prisoner who is becoming truly free, while those outside the walls remain “chained” by fear, conformity to social convention, or hypocrisy. The English prisoners for conscience stood squarely within this meditative tradition. The physical space of the prison, the suffering endured there, and seemingly minor occurrences of daily existence acquired symbolic force in their writing, which represented the prison as a preeminent place of moral discernment, including self-discernment. The prison letter, in other words, is an important, if neglected, genre of Christian spirituality.

Among the many salient meditative themes of the English prison letters, perhaps the most important—as well as the most ambiguous—was humility. On the one hand, the rhetoric of humility fit squarely within the aristocratic hierarchies of early modern society. Thus, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer wrote Queen Mary from the Oxford prison, “I submit myselfe most humbly unto your majesty, acknowledging mine offence wyth most grevous and sorowfull hart, and beseching your mercy and pardon.”¹⁴ On the other hand, humility was a theological virtue, and in this rhetorical context carried quite different implications. Humility was thought to regulate the whole of the virtuous life by submitting it to the true order of being, in which the person accepted the fact that existence and human good were dependent on God. Humility entailed the fateful judgment that human resistance had accomplished all that it could; that life was now entirely in God’s hands; and that the final hours of existence should not be consumed by anger toward oppressors or despair at one’s fate. Humility thus opened the self to the infinite, and its opposites were pride, independence, and self-sufficiency. Throughout the epoch, distinguishing between



. . . *the letter bore witness to religious truth not simply as doctrine . . .*
but as an entire theologically informed way of life . . .

the act of submitting to the authorities and the act of submitting to the invincible will of God proved central to the prison meditation.

When William Allen, in exile at Rheims, collected and published information about the martyrdom of Elizabethan Catholics, he included a letter by Ralph Sherwin who was executed for treason in 1581, along with Briant and Campion. Although Sherwin consistently resisted the efforts of authorities to extract information or recantation, his letter from the Tower to friends was a model of humble self-composition before God, in preparation for death: “truth it is I hoped ere this, casting off this body of death, to have kissed the pretious glorified woundes of my sweete Saviour, sitting in the throne of his Father’s own glorie. Which desire, as I trust descending from above, hath so quieted my minde that since the Iudicial sentence proceded against us, neither the sharpnes of the death hath much terrified me, nor the shortnes of life much troubled me. . . . God graunt us humilitie, that we following His footsteps may obtaine the victorie.”¹⁵

John Hooper invoked this theological dimension of humility, as utter reliance on God, in a letter of exhortation to fellow prisoners. When the shepherds were visited by the angels and left to see Christ in Bethlehem, said Hooper, “they dyd not reason, nor debate with them selues, who should kepe the wolfe from the shepe in the meane tyme, but did as they were commaunded . . . So let us do now we be called, commit al other things unto him that calleth us. He wil take hede that al things shalbe wel. He wil heale the husband, he will comforte the wife, he will guide the seruaunts, he wil kepe the house, he wyl preserue the goodes: yea, rather then it should be undon, he wil wash the dishes, & rocke the cradle. Cast therefore all your care upon God, for he careth for you.”¹⁶

THE EPISTOLARY FRAME OF REFERENCE

The epistolary form itself had three theologically significant features for English prison writers. First, it symbolized the theme of solidarity by connoting a material link between the writer and the recipient, despite the physical separation created by imprisonment. This was, of course, literally the

case with the original letter, as when Lady Jane Grey—ever so briefly Queen of England through the ill-fated plot of the Duke of Nothumberland—shortly before her execution in 1554 inscribed a letter in the back of her Greek New Testament to her younger sister, Katherine. “Although it bee not outwardlye trimmed with golde,” she wrote in the testament, “yet inwardly it is more worth then precious stones. . . . and if you with a good mind read it, and with an earnest minde do folow it, it shall bring you to an immortall and everlasting life. It wil teache you to live, and learne you to die.”¹⁷ The prisoner was made present through her letter, and, when prison letters were printed, the physical appearance of the text sought to communicate this epistolary quality, with salutation, date, place of writing, and signature quite frequently set off in distinctive type to symbolize the personal “hand” of the writer. As the editor of letters by Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer explained, “forasmuche as these their scrolles and writynges wer by goddes good providence preserved, and as it were, rased out of the ashes of the authors,” they can perpetuate the ministry of their authors, and “as in life, they profited the[e] by teaching, and in death by example, so after death, they may doe the[e] good by writing.”¹⁸

Second, the letter was believed to convey the character of its author in a manner that other types of writing could not accomplish. Thus, when Miles Coverdale collected and published letters of the Marian martyrs, he introduced them by approving quotation of an observation by Erasmus that, whereas in Augustine’s many writings one may learn aspects of his life and thought, in Augustine’s letters “thou shalt knowe whole Augustyne altogether.” These letters, said Coverdale, show “ye blessed behaviour of gods deare servantes . . . yea what the verye thoughts of their hartes were,” in prayer or when visited by the hand of God.¹⁹ In short, the letter bore witness to religious truth not simply as doctrine, nor even as personal experience, but as an entire theologically informed way of life, and it did so through a literary medium that underscored the first person singular.

Third, the letter from prison, precisely by being a letter, shaped the cultural meaning of theological ideas by organizing



Facing death, the prisoner spoke in the disinterested and fully truthful way that would satisfy the eternal judge who searched hearts for their hidden motives.

these ideas within a literary form of direct address to the reader. The prison letter tacitly claimed a “reply,” a decision from the recipient, who had received an embodied and personalized theological message. Nicholas Ridley’s letter of farewell thus counseled his extended family not to be “amased” at the manner of his death. He himself gave thanks that God had chosen him, “a synneful and vyle wretche . . . unto this hygh dygnitye of hys true Prophetes, of hys faythfull Apostles, and of hys holye electe and chosen Martyrs, that is to die and to spende thys temporall lyfe in the defence & mayntenance of hys eternal and everlastyng truth.”²⁰

TESTIMONY OF THE ABSOLUTE

When a prisoner, such as Nicholas Ridley, presented his or her suffering as the literal embodiment of the truth of Christianity, the prison letter became an instance of what philosopher Paul Ricoeur has called “testimony of the Absolute.”²¹ That is, the letter did not call on its recipient simply to decide about the facts of a particular case or the justice of an individual jail sentence. More than that, the letter called the reader to decide whether or not this prisoner’s particular tale of being persecuted because of faithfulness, in fact, revealed the truest meaning of life and thus placed an absolute religious claim on the faith and conduct of the reader. Ricoeur usefully distinguishes between testimony as act and testimony as narrative. Testimony is first rendered by real acts of devotion up to death. But this testimony evokes a second testimony, in which a person bears narrative witness to the witness that she or he has seen. Ricoeur draws a sharp distinction, one might say, between the witness as martyr and the witness as observer. A witness gives a sign, perhaps without knowing or intending to do so. Another person gives narrative interpretation of this sign as “testimony of the Absolute.” Much of the rhetorical power, as well as much of the moral and theological ambiguity, of the letter from prison lies in the form’s tendency to collapse these two “movements” within testimony of the Absolute.

This tendency is particularly evident in the idea that the prisoner who is about to die spoke with a singularly dispa-

sionate voice that penetrated to the true state of affairs. As we have seen, Henry Barrow’s 1593 prison letter provided a particularly dramatic representation of this idea by reporting what Barrow thought was his final speech on the scaffold, before learning that the queen had delivered a reprieve. Just as some persons today might build religious claims on a near-death experience, so Barrow could build on a near-death oration. Even though Barrow began his letter with a fully interested—even biased—account of contested narratives between him and the authorities, the rhetoric of the scaffold raised his speech beyond the political fray. Facing death, the prisoner spoke in the disinterested and fully truthful way that would satisfy the eternal judge who searched hearts for their hidden motives. In effect, this introduced God as Ricoeur’s second, observing and narrating, witness in the “testimony of the Absolute.” In the way that one might say colloquially, “as God is my witness,” Barrow wrote the Observer into his own narrative of witness. The letter’s reader faced the decision of whether God was present on the scaffold as eternal witness for Barrow.

CONCLUSION

As political, devotional, and social documents, the English prison letters used the epistolary form to make a powerful claim for the prisoner’s physical embodiment of Christian life and truth. Doctrine and theological reflection were paramount throughout these writings, but theology was never abstracted into a system. Instead, these documents were instances of what today might be called practical theology, the use of religious thought to interpret the concrete challenges, aspirations, and inevitabilities of human life. This aspect of theology—its full participation in the claims and contests of a culture—suggests the fruitfulness of the prison letter for exploring not so much “theology of culture” as “theology in culture.” The dramatic qualities of both the letters themselves and the conditions under which they were produced make these documents singularly useful case studies in the role that religious ideas and commitments

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OUT OF TIME?

THE RETURN OF ORIGENISM IN OUR CULTURE OF HASTE

David Albertson

To suggest that contemporary American life suffers from a “time famine” was once controversial. It is no longer. The phrase names for most everyone a fact of life in the twenty-first century, the mention of which, I have found, provokes regretful nods of recognition. The culture of haste has soaked deep into the fabric of everyday life, changing at a fundamental level how we eat, work, love, decide, and perceive. :: According to a 1996 survey by the Wall Street Journal, 40 percent of Americans say lack of time is a larger problem for their

lives than lack of money. In the late 1970s the Department of Labor found that over 80 percent of respondents would forego some future income if they could gain additional leisure time—a result which is not surprising, considering that one major poll has calculated an average decline of 40 percent of that leisure time since 1973.¹

By the early 1990s, sociologists, economists, and psychologists began studying the time shortage in earnest, and the issue became visible in the national media. But the phenomenon itself gained its current momentum only in the early 1970s. As late as 1964, *Life* magazine ran an issue with the headline: “Americans now face a glut of leisure. The task ahead: How to take life easy.” In the late 1950s, institutions as varied as the *Harvard Business Review* and the American Council of Churches fretted over how the country would handle the coming “onslaught of free time,” the “crisis of leisure.” Said the *Harvard Review*: “Boredom, which used to bother only aristocrats, has become a common curse.”²

Today the “crisis of leisure” means something quite different: not having too much, but having too little. Whatever leisure

time remains shifts toward increasingly passive entertainment in opposition to the manic pace of life. We hurry to work so that we can relax in more luxury, but we need “down time” to stomach getting back to work. Life devolves into a shallow cycle of rushing and relaxing, reality thins, and days slip past unnoticed.

It would be easy to write off the “time famine” as a trivial matter, a passing interest of those who have the leisure to reflect on why they do not have more. But the recent spike in time acceleration, in the very pace of our haste, brings with it a series of dire side effects, which as a set are politically frightening—and not a bit alien to our national experience over the last three years. One observer in 1990 listed the following effects of chronic time-shortage: numbness to the outside world, a reactionary simplification of events, nostalgia for an imaginary past, a drastic narrowing of experience, and a certain short-termism in decision making.³ One does not have to look far to see the international consequences of such a mindset.

WHAT IS GOING ON?

When we speak of the “time famine,” we speak of a cluster of phenomena that many intuitively feel but few can name. For this reason it is valuable

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production and consumption more quickly.*

to review briefly some of the explanations forwarded by contemporary social theorists. Five effects of late-modern capitalism appear to be hastening our loss of time.

ACCELERATION. Over the long term, capitalism appears prone to overaccumulation, even in a consumerist society, as production chronically outstrips consumption and leaves too many goods in the system. When this happens, there are three ways to reschedule the impending crisis. Goods can be depreciated in value, reducing the burden of the unconsumed excess (inflation); the state can absorb the excess by regulating monetary policy (Keynesianism); and, as the social theorist David Harvey has emphasized, the spatial and temporal limits of capital's expansion (limits revealed by the surplus itself), can be further displaced to make room for further accumulation.⁴

Spatial displacement occurs when capital opens new places for the distribution of excess goods, zones often enforced by the state's monetary and perhaps military policies; yet, ultimately, market saturation and the resulting international tensions impose limits on this solution. Temporal displacement, however, poses no such limits, at least in principle. If one could alter the experience of time, making temporal room for further consumption, then excess goods could be better absorbed. The more quickly capital is circulated, the more its turnover time (from expense to profit) is decreased, and the fewer goods are left as unconsumed surplus. So to ward off overaccumulation, capitalist economies tend to drive their participants to greater and greater speeds of life, as if for the economy's own survival. As Marx once noted: "economy of time: to this all economy ultimately reduces itself"

According to Harvey, time seems accelerated when our speed of travel increases, that is, when space becomes compressed. As events are squeezed into shorter intervals, we can accelerate production and consumption more quickly. It is no accident, then, that the preeminent technological achievements of the last century have been those that annihilate space through time, that compress space and time: the railroad, automobile, and jet engine; the telegraph, radio, and telephone; the fax machine and cell phone; and, above all,

the Internet. Perhaps most recently, the speed of electronic financial transactions has increased to breathtaking extremes. According to David Korten, one international banking firm spent \$35 million to own a supercomputer that would grant them a two-second advantage in currency trading—and that was ten years ago.⁵

DEMATERIALIZATION. Acceleration is promoted by dematerialization. When capital remains concrete and localized, it circulates slowly. Over the last century, and especially in the last three decades, we have shifted from a more material economy to a more immaterial, ephemeral economy, what Baudrillard calls the economy of the sign. Instead of buying products, which linger on through time, we tend to buy services, experiences, images—events which can all be consumed (and thus desired again) more quickly. Anthony Giddens calls this drift into greater abstraction the "disembedding" of objects, and subjects, from the material world.⁶ Fixed locales and specific moments—the private bookseller, the neighborhood craft fair—become fascinating relics whose appeal relies upon their very obsolescence. In the dematerialized economy, the same Wal-Mart or Amazon.com aisles can be browsed every hour of the year in every city in the country. The actual where and when of product and buyer become practically irrelevant.

DESYNCHRONIZATION. Acceleration is also aided by flexibility. Capital circulates faster when it can circulate flexibly along ever-changing circuits, finding the optimal path at the last second. David Harvey chronicles how flexible production fueled the recovery from the global recession of the 1970s and set the stage for what we experience today. Despite demanding longer hours, employers now make shorter-term commitments to workers; flex-time hours and just-in-time inventory ensure that economic organization remains as fluid and flexible as possible.

But flexibility also means contingency and unpredictability, and hence it brings with it effects of desynchronization. When individuals obey the erratic, last-minute demands of the flexible economy, their private rhythms



*As our motion becomes faster, our times of rest
slow down to counterbalance the haste.*

become desynchronized from others in their communities. What Giddens calls the “life calendar” or “time narrative” of the individual is disengaged from the standard clock time that ordered common life in past generations. The greater the rifts between individual life rhythms, the weaker the cohesion of families, civic organizations, religious communities, and other voluntary associations that build up the public sphere. When the same household contains two or three different work schedules, common meals give way to eating alone, eating out, or eating fast. We place a new premium on “quality” time precisely because “quantity” time has been desynchronized.

INSTANTANEITY. Acceleration gives rise to desynchronization, which in turn dissolves the regularity of “clock time” into two extremes: instantaneity and timelessness. The present moment, the ephemeral now without past or future, dominates the American lifestyle. Disposable products are discarded as if they have no history or future. Twenty-four-hour news channels require (and in fact count on) the most minimal span of memory, since new stories have to break every morning. A pervasive short-termism fuels our decisions, whether we consider impulse purchases, relationships, credit financing, or plans for war. Recent conflicts have even marked the advent of “instant war”: rapid destruction, “shock and awe,” managed in short time frames through tight control of information and images. But this is only the peak of a longer trend: the duration of armed conflicts has steadily declined over the last half-century, such that the average length of conflict in the 1980s is only a third that of the 1960s.⁷

TIMELESSNESS. Sociologist Manuel Castells contrasts the “instant” with the “epoch,” twin faces of the same durationlessness that characterizes what he calls the “network society.”⁸ Opposed to the moment and the self stands the undifferentiated span of timeless network. According to Castells, globalized society is a space governed no longer by places as much as “flows.” In the “space of flows,” the relative network between two locations is more important than the concrete places themselves. The centrality of these network flows

alters our experience of time, since the instant speed of the network enables nearly durationless transit between places. But if time is the “order of succession of things” (Leibniz), then the disorder generated by desynchronization has disrupted the usual succession of time. Our social time is no longer governed by the sequencing mechanisms of the past: biological and ecological rhythms, and the time-discipline of labor. The sequence of time’s succession, time’s flow, is disrupted and disseminated across multiple spaces, spread out until it nearly halts, like the end of a river delta.

Castells points out that “timelessness is the recurrent theme of our age’s cultural expressions.”⁹ This dictum holds whether one turns to the virtual fantasy worlds of digital entertainment, or the ubiquity of “sampling” the past of every aesthetic form, from architecture to pop music to film. Around the globe, the most popular electronic music cycles through a static phrase with minimal variation. Timeless, unaging youth is adored, the elderly are banished with embarrassment from the public stage, and death is resentfully sanitized.

THE RETURN OF ORIGENISM?

It is important to see how the confluence of these trends marks the rise of a new orientation of self, world, and the divine in contemporary experience. At its heart, our new situation can perhaps best be grasped in terms of motion and rest and the curious relationship that now obtains between them. As our motion becomes faster, our times of rest slow down to counterbalance the haste. Leisure activity, rather than offering a period for restorative motion, devolves into dead spans of largely private distraction. But this is only half the story. Work traps our bodies in the sphere of mundane activities—waiting, traveling, washing, and feeding. Meanwhile, the content of our leisure has become increasingly fast in content; its very speed is a relief after sitting in traffic. We flip on the news and hear the day’s events summarized in sixty seconds. We see action movies edited at a breakneck clip. The Internet introduces us into a realm of relatively effortless flight, immediately conformable to our interests, with only minimal constraints of earthbound



. . . our tendency to haste amounts to
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slowness. So we live in a strange situation. The public world of work, caught amidst obstacles of slowness, takes up more and more of our time, while the little leisure we retain releases us into a private sphere increasingly liberated from materiality, a world where spirits and desires move ever more quickly.

Some Christian theologies have understood salvation as an escape from time and time's movements into the rest of eternity. But wiser guides have reminded us, in the words of Alexander Schmemmann, that Christians seek eternal life and not eternal rest. As Schmemmann wrote in the 1960s: "We Christians have too often forgotten that God has redeemed the world. For centuries we have preached to the hurrying people: your daily rush has no meaning, yet accept it—and you will be rewarded in *another* world by an eternal rest."¹⁰ If salvation means rest as opposed to motion, if we simply code earth as "motion" and heaven as "rest," then we risk two dangers. First, we identify motion with sinfulness; second, we valorize rest, peace, and quiet as if they were salvation *per se*. Motion soon becomes sinful; rest appears divine.

This is why I suggest our tendency to haste amounts to a return to an Origenist cosmology. "Origenism" refers not so much to Origen himself, the third-century church father, as to the rigorist monks who later developed his teachings (above all, the fourth-century ascetic Evagrius Ponticus). The term denotes a version of Christianity too heavily influenced by Platonism. For Plato, the eternal world of being is totally distinct from the temporal world of becoming. He contrasts the perfect stillness of the eternal forms with the perpetual motion of human life. The most corrosive varieties of Origenism, often in monastic circles, have tended to devalue creation by positing a perfect, eternal divine sphere—one that our present world certainly is not, and in comparison with which falls quite short. Salvation then entails a return to the original divine stillness from which the temporal world fell in creation. Because of this, to say something is in motion would be to affirm that it remains in sin. The rhythms of the physical world—growth, struggle, change, and decay—are not goods in themselves, because God lies beyond the sphere of movement. Christ comes to lead us out of time and into eternal rest.

A version of this dualism, I would argue, has returned with a vengeance, especially in the last thirty years in American culture (and, given the extent of that culture's reach, now increasingly around the globe). The central tenet of our Origenist spirituality can be stated as a double correlation: immateriality moves quickly and is valued highly, whereas materiality moves slowly and is valued less. Wherever the material world impedes our speed, the result is desynchronization. As acceleration progresses and we struggle to keep up, we grow to resent the limitations imposed by the inevitable remaining links to the human world. But for the weariness of laboring bodies, and the limits of our stomachs, the progression into more and more profitable rates of acceleration would be infinite. Things bound within the temporal register soon become objects of offense. Death and aging are denied to comical extremes (think Botox!), and the ecosphere suffers terrible neglect. Our appetite for consumption rejects the finitude not just of natural resources but of concrete times and spaces in general.

At the same time, we find ourselves increasingly fascinated with the immaterial sphere, where time can be overcome through speed. Desire becomes habituated to the free flows of immateriality: television, the Internet, e-trade, cell phones. Soon we find we can link these islets of freedom to catalyze the power they give us over time and space. Together they form a networked, synchronized counter-world of impressive appeal, scope, and power: the invisible electronic flows of high-speed capital, the global telecommunications circuit, and the standardized entertainment and media content it broadcasts. The potential transcendence it offers above the resented material sphere is attractive and, for many, rather effortless. The embodied, material world seems to grow duller through this constantly reinforced contrast.

MAXIMUS AGAINST ORIGENISM

If our experience of motion and rest indeed resembles Origenism, we should recall that as a vision of self, world, and the divine, this perspective has already been decided against in the Christian tradition. In the sixth-century



. . . *Maximus takes the greatest step toward discrediting Origenism
when he grasps that its God could not be loved.*

Byzantine empire, the monk and martyr Maximus Confessor (d. 662 CE) labored to correct the Origenist picture of the world. Maximus is known to historical theology as the champion of Chalcedonian Christology in his response to Monothelite and Monenergist heresies. But near the beginning of his efforts against imperial suppression, Maximus also formulated a brilliant response to those Origenist monks whose teachings had been censured formally a generation earlier.¹¹ For Maximus, Origenist cosmology fails to grasp the profound significance of God's incarnation in time. God harmonizes rest and motion in Christ and so makes both—motion included—into icons of divine love.

In an early work, Maximus states the Origenist perspective and presents his correction. Origenism views the world, he says, as *genesis—stasis—kinêsis* (becoming, rest, motion).¹² The world arises directly to a perfect form, God's stillness, with all souls subsisting in God. Only the Fall, then, disturbs the peace and occasions the decline into creaturely motion. But Maximus points out that the Bible locates God's rest at the end of time, as an eschatological event, and that the movement of yearning toward God constitutes our very creaturehood.

For these reasons, Maximus presents his correction of Origenism in the reordered triad: *genesis—kinêsis—stasis*. After the original *genesis* follows the *motion* of the present world, which is oriented toward a future, final *rest* in God—reversing the last two terms of the triad. This answer to Origenism is elegant, precise, and apparently unique to Maximus.¹³ Note how it reinterprets the meaning of motion. If *kinêsis* follows *stasis* and *genesis*, then motion in itself constitutes the Fall of creation and the cause of suffering. But if *kinêsis* bridges *genesis* and *stasis*, the motion of desire becomes the means by which creatures find their path to God.

But Maximus takes the greatest step toward discrediting Origenism when he grasps that its God could not be loved. According to Origen, our souls fell away from God because they were filled to bloating, to surfeit (*koros*), with divine goodness. The Fall becomes a kind of cosmic pushing away from the table. Maximus thinks this notion of "surfeit" is wrongheaded, since our desire for God should be perpetual and boundless. What kind of God can one grow weary of

enjoying? The God of Origenism is too static to bear the impulses of love, which are unending on account of our finitude. God is rest, but God must also be in motion, the perfection of motion toward whom our tentative advances are drawn.

Maximus pictures the Incarnation precisely as God's re-energizing of our faltering motion. God initiates motion toward us when we have fallen into lassitude—the very opposite of the Origenist picture! He writes: "Since then the human person is not moved naturally, as it was fashioned to do, around the Unmoved, . . . that which is completely unmoved by nature is moved immovably around that which by nature is moved—and God becomes a human being, in order to save lost humanity."¹⁴ Thus any adequate picture of divine love must incorporate motion and embrace love's dynamic conjugations of motion and rest. And from the standpoint of divine love, we can disassemble the insidious analogy that creature is to Creator as motion is to rest.

It turns out that Maximus' revised ontology of *kinêsis* not only drives this early intervention against Origenism, but also bears fruit later in his major works. Maximus uses God's incarnate love as a new principle for harmonizing motion and rest and to keep them from degenerating into opposing principles. It is the Church's liturgy that manifests this rhythm of divine love. In fact, the whole of Maximus' solution to the Origenist problem is consummated in his vision of the liturgy.

After Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus wrote the most important patristic commentary on the ancient rite. Having read his predecessor, he decided in his own work to apply a different lens. He focuses on the whole movement of the people through the rhythms of worship, not just the presiding hierarch, and on the whole flow of the liturgy, not just the eucharistic communion. His point is that the Church's whole life in liturgy reconciles every difference—rest and motion, individual and community, soul and body, male and female, sacred and profane—by uniting them in the harmony of love.

For Maximus, the Church praises God by mirroring back to God in its liturgy the movements of God's own love. In the liturgy, as Maximus writes: "the Lord . . . grants to souls who love him the movement proper for divine things."¹⁵



*Christian liturgy is the first place to look to redress the polarization of time
into haste and sloth, instantaneity and timelessness.*

Thus, in its total form, the liturgy manifests on earth the rhythm of divine love, reflecting the unity of movement and rest achieved in the Incarnation, and thus tuning the dissonant flux of our temporal life to the strains of the ever-life of God. Liturgy reveals the divine “timing” in a way that both regulates and illuminates our own sputtering rhythms. It communicates the presence of the Beloved, before whom time neither rushes away nor stagnates, but dwells. The Church’s life is nothing other than the movements of the liturgy, which, unlike extreme forms of capitalism, paces motion and rest according to love, rather than self-interest.¹⁶ Hence the major lesson to learn from Maximus is the signal importance of liturgical life—particularly in its total weekly and yearly rhythms, and not only Sunday Eucharist—for combating our own Origenist tendencies.

DOES LITURGY REALLY MATTER?

To contemporary ears, suggesting that liturgical prayer holds promise for changing our public culture may seem facile, if not delusional—a desperate nostalgia for antiquated practices. But one must not forget how the offices of daily prayer have been entangled historically with the development of capitalist time consciousness. At the least, Christians should be heartened at the prospect that the daily liturgy might renew the dialogue with its estranged stepchild, the regulated workweek. Their history is too closely linked simply to presume otherwise. Starting in medieval Europe around the twelfth century, and culminating in the institution of a global time standard in the mid-nineteenth century, the monastic daily office formed the substratum for our experience of time in the West. In many ways Christian liturgy is the first place to look to redress the polarization of time into haste and sloth, instantaneity and timelessness. A brief digression into that prehistory may make challenging our present experience seem more feasible.¹⁷

From the consolidation of medieval urban centers in the eleventh century to the rise of the merchant’s *Werkglocken*, time was kept in European cities by the Christian liturgy. Urban centers, with their monasteries and merchants, stood

out like curious “islands of timekeeping.”¹⁸ Monasteries lived by the peal of bells: to call out the seven hours of prayer, to assemble for meals, to order work and leisure. The first mechanical clocks used by monasteries were simple timers that could be set to wake up the monk in time for matins in the middle of sleep. Before the great shift in time consciousness took place, the steady stream of bells distinguished the monks as being peculiarly concerned with time.

In the early fourteenth century in France and Italy, textile merchants whose dyes required coordinated labor began to use bells to provide a public measure of the time. To transmit their sound citywide, they either used existing clock towers, enlisted civic governments to build belfries, or else built private bell towers themselves. These clock towers, often constructed opposite a church’s bell towers, instituted “clock time” as we still know it today. According to medieval historian Jacques Le Goff:

Instead of time linked to events, which made itself felt only episodically and sporadically, there arose a regular, normal time. Rather than the uncertain clerical hours of the church bells, there were the certain hours spoken of by the bourgeois of Aire. Time was no longer associated with cataclysms or festivals but rather with daily life, a sort of chronological net in which urban life was caught.¹⁹

The monastic hour of “Nones,” usually around 2:00 p.m., slowly shifted from the tenth century onward. By the thirteenth century, it had settled at 12:00 p.m. as “Noon,” subdividing peasant labor into the half-day. The rhythm of capital had replaced the rhythm of prayer. Clocks were above all the technological spectacle of the time, what the cathedrals had been to the early Middle Ages. Now every cathedral wanted a clock. It is hard to overestimate the significance of this trend for modern economic organization. Here is the root of fixed labor hours, of the extrinsic ordering of work-time and leisure-time, and of the demise of the liturgy as a unifying cultural force in the structuring of time.

At first, pockets of resistance were maintained. In the fourteenth century, a general of the Franciscan order could still argue the following:



*Liturgy is able to hold together, reconciled and restored,
what modernity has divided and lost . . .*

Question: is a merchant entitled, in a given type of business transaction, to demand a greater payment from one who cannot settle his account immediately than from one who can? The answer argued for is no, because in doing so he would be selling time and would be committing usury by selling what does not belong to him.²⁰

But the Church in the Middle Ages slowly conceded to the merchant by carving out a private world for his business affairs beyond ecclesial indictment. It was precisely the time-discipline of the monasteries that provided the model for merchants. Le Goff notes that governments that levied fines to tardy merchants only followed the example of superiors who punished monks late to prayer.²¹

In nineteenth-century England, the struggle to regulate time internationally replayed the parochial conflicts of the fourteenth century. In 1851, a symbolic struggle began when the national government required conformity to the Greenwich standard of the new railway confederation. The dean of Exeter Cathedral refused, fighting the mayor for the independence of the cathedral clock. By 1852 public opinion in local newspapers expressed the town's fear that it was being left behind. After a sustained campaign by municipal authorities, the dean of the cathedral bowed to the inexorable authority of Greenwich. Within three years, 98 percent of all public clocks in England were set by the Greenwich standard.²²

The point of these anecdotes is that the European organization of time began with the Church's liturgy. Our contemporary experience of time is a version of Christian liturgy that has undergone significant alteration, amidst contestation and controversy, and perhaps not for the better. Now as the "liturgy" of global capitalism reaches unprecedented extremes, and as its own labor discipline outstrips even the monk's initial example, the rhythms of the liturgy stand ready to provide a salutary check, a counter-discipline, back upon the workweek.

Such a "liturgical critique of modernity" has already been broached by the Anglican theologian Catherine Pickstock. Her reasoning is simple: if modern capitalism distorts the rhythms of liturgy, then authentic Christian liturgy

holds unique potential for critiquing modernity's shortcomings. Modernity itself, with its project of reorganizing time and space into controllable, enlightened regularity, is in fact a "parody of the liturgical," an "anti-liturgy." Modernity refuses liturgy, she writes, whenever it chooses to "discar[d] the differentiations of time and space, and to live in a perpetual virtual space of identical repetition." For what modernity fears above all is the passage of time:

Modernity is primarily characterized by an attempt once and for all to state the eternal structures of finitude. In this way, it erects space above time as a substitute for eternity. Above all, what it seeks is stasis and it fears the past because the passage of the past confronts one with the truth that spatial fixity is a fictional contrivance.²³

Liturgy is able to hold together, reconciled and restored, what modernity has divided and lost: work and enjoyment, aesthetics and politics, and even space and time. Modernity flees time and the threat of death; it tries to immobilize the shifting contours of language and knowledge in the attempt to gain certainty. But liturgy "temporalizes" space again, and returns difference to human movements—in the form of harmonies, non-standardized reticulations, intervals, inefficient refrains, and pure ornamentation.

Christian liturgy has its own rhythms that challenge, compete with, and even counteract the rhythms of contemporary life. It has the potential to restore more balanced forms of motion and rest and help us rethink how we conceive the relationship of our sphere and God's sphere. In Christian liturgy, God does not simply draw us into heavenly stillness, but activates us with a love that has harmonized rest and motion, a circulation of love that differs from the circulations of profit. In this way the liturgy begins to lead motion and rest away from their debased versions and to fulfill them in their true identity.

What are the rhythms that order our lives? What rhythms gather us together and send us out? What standards set the pace of our hurrying? What daily "liturgies" will command where we place our steps, what words we speak,

Continued on page 34

AT DEATH'S DOOR

Richard A. Rosengarten

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal

shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written,

Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory?

The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

I COR. 15:50–58 (KJV)

In recent years, for reasons that neither entirely escape me nor are entirely clear to me, I have become attentive to the concept of “middle age.” I am reliably informed by a friend who makes his living as a psychologist (yet is not himself exactly middle-aged) that middle age is understood by his ilk not to be a number, but a state of mind: one knows, he explains, that one has reached middle age when one assesses the span of one’s life by looking backward rather than forward. In other words, you have reached middle age

when you think that more than half of your life has passed, rather than that more than half of it is in your future. Middle age is thus a matter of perspective. This is not exactly to say “you are as old as you feel”—it is meant to have more bite than that—but neither is it an Archimedean point you can graph on an X/Y axis. It is something of a rhetorical trick, but of the honorable variety. The aim seems to be to honor the subjectivity of the individual experience of time and aging, while nonetheless elucidating a common principle by which to understand all such experiences. Counselors hear enough about midlife crises to feel the need to speak about them with the authority that comes with generalization, but not with so much authority that they risk a “one-size-fits-all” posture.

Such mediation bespeaks a dilemma in counseling that has much in common as dilemma—but not, in the end, as answer—with what the apostle Paul faces as he engages in absentia in the profession of church-building with the manifestly fractious Christians at Corinth. Our reading is near the end of a rather long epistle that is largely concerned with debates among the Corinthians on a hefty list of practical

Dean Rosengarten delivered this sermon in Bond Chapel on October 22, 2003, in memoriam Harry and Hilda Rosengarten.





*The true yardstick of what matters is
the fact of the resurrection . . .*

matters: Paul must hold forth here on sex, on civil life and the procedures for resolving disputes, on marriage, on idol meats and their consumption, on hairstyles, on communion, on speaking in tongues, and, at the end of our passage, last but very definitely not least, on the meaning of the resurrection. On all these matters there are significant differences of opinion concerning standards of propriety and truth in witnessing to the Gospel.

Paul's dilemma is to address each of these disputes as both a serious and important matter in its own right, yet finally as symptomatic of a larger problem that too much attention to the particulars can obscure. The general message is an appeal to unity as the great principle, and through unity to a building up of community. Put aside your differences, Paul counsels, by focusing your attention on the really important matter of your unity as children of God in Christ.

What Paul well understands, and what we desperately need to recognize, is that the power of this appeal can only fully be revealed when its true basis in the resurrection is established. So Paul leaves last things for last. Up to this point in the letter, there is much of the debater's "thrust and parry"—summarizing arguments, anticipating objections, rehearsing point and counterpoint; proclamation of the Gospel (casuists of the world, forgive me) is less prominent. In our passage, however, the resurrection is finally and decisively front and center: "Behold," Paul tells us, "I shew you a mystery"—in the end, there will be no death and no grave. Whether alive or dead at the second coming, "in the twinkling of an eye" we shall all be transformed. So absolute is this fact that it matters not whether

we are, at that moment, in the grave or on the ground: all will be shriven; all will be incorrupt; all will be immortal. Sin will be no more. It follows from this that we will then be steadfast and immovable, for our souls will rest with God. It is in this light that all that has preceded and caused division will be removed. When we remember this, we are surely chastened about our differences. The true yardstick of what matters is the fact of the resurrection, expressed in the magnificent poetry of the triumphal realization in which Paul apostrophizes death, depriving it of its sting, of its finality—of its hold over us.

This proclamation is not mere rhetoric. But it must also be said that it is not exactly where we are today, in the middle age of Christianity, approaching the light that emanates from a dimly perceived but definitely present door that belongs to our friend, death. It is noteworthy that we cannot imagine death's door without something beyond that illuminates it. I want to return to that paradox momentarily. But we do not, indeed cannot, apostrophize death so readily as does the Apostle, even when bolstered by a well-articulated and judicious platform for communal unity. Put differently, we are easily distracted by the sorts of disputes that so vexed the Corinthians.

The yardstick Paul establishes is, in this context, as unmistakable as it is bracing: if it is not a matter of the resurrection, it is not a matter worthy of division. It extends Paul's regular recourse to the crucifixion: we die and we rise in Christ. If we spend middle age in our own particular Corinth, we are missing out on this insight.

But getting ourselves out of Corinth involves facing down the inexorable: death. In their finest moments, modern





. . . to honor fully the dictum of Paul means to live as constantly as we can,
not in middle age, but in some proximity to death's door.

theologians and philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur ask us to stare searchingly—it is not a matter of abstraction—at the phenomenon of death. In doing so, they have elucidated what I submit is a helpful and eminently practical diagnostic for our middle-aged days and ways. It is a complement to the Pauline injunction: we must learn to think, at one and the same time, the finality of death and the possibility implied in our capacity to think beyond death into some future. As humans we react to death with senses of both finality and possibility: of the end, and of the fact that it may not be the end. When, we inevitably ask ourselves, is an end *the* end?

There is, for me at least as I enter middle age, and perhaps by extension for the Christian community in what I am calling its middle age, no denying the sense of finality. Yet the denial has as its inevitable, uncanny accompaniment that sense of what is beyond the door, and what makes it possible to see the door in the first place. I can offer no better personal illustration of this juxtaposition of finality and possibility than the occasion of my grandmother's death, at the time when my older daughter, Nora, was three years old.

Nora had known and felt deep affection for her great grandmother, whose passing marked Nora's initial encounter with death. We did not wish to sugarcoat this fact—Nora was in any case already too shrewd to allow it—and so we explained that her great grandmother had died, and that this was a normal part of life. The inevitable questions ensued, and in answering them we provided Nora with the classic exposition: Great Grandma's soul had gone to heaven, and our job now was to celebrate the fact that

her soul was with God by doing justice to her body that remained behind.

Flash forward two rather hectic and emotional days to the burial. As the hearse left the church for the cemetery, one of Nora's parents was heard to utter: "There goes Grandma." To which my three-year-old promptly and solemnly demurred: "No. There goes Grandma's body. Her soul is with God, in heaven."

My point is not to resurrect some new rendition of Art

Linkletter's old dictum that "kids say the darndest things." It is rather that, in facing the death of a loved one, I and others who survived negotiated regularly this dual sense of finality and possibility—and with it the sense that, absent the possibility, the finality would not be fully grasped.

It seems to follow that, for us, to honor fully the dictum of Paul means to live as constantly as we can, not in middle age, but in some proximity to death's door. This is not a rhetorical trick, honorable or otherwise, and it is decisively not an Archimedean point: rather, it is precisely the point at which our theological X and Y meet. It is, finally, the great articulation of that glorious oxymoron that so eloquently and beautifully expresses the

ambivalence of death's door—"eternal life." I wish you all—middle-aged or otherwise—in this here and now, not the eternal life that Paul assures us we shall have, but the fullest possible awareness that it is, indeed, coming—an awareness we can only have if we honor the essential and urgent finality of that approaching doorway. □



when we stand or sit, praise or scorn, and how we walk alongside others? There are many liturgies and many rhythms, countless synchronies and repetitions we engage every day. Which of them should have the power to control the rhythms of human life? In the *Timaeus*, Plato suggests that musical harmony and cosmic revolutions were given to humankind “as a heaven-sent ally in reducing to order and harmony any disharmony in the revolutions within us.” “Rhythm too,” he notes, “was given us from the same heavenly source to help us in the same way; for most of us lack measure and grace.”²⁴ If our paces of late have lacked “measure and grace,” we cannot, with Plato, simply consult the movement of the heavens. But we could do worse than to pause our steps for a moment, and listen again for the rhythm of a different strain. □

ENDNOTES

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3. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 286–287.
4. For the account that follows, see Harvey, 141–197.
5. David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (San Francisco, Calif.: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1995), 197.
6. Anthony Giddens, cited in Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1994), 34. Cf. Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990) and *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991).
7. Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, vol. 1, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 458.
8. *Ibid.*, 463.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000), 65.
11. The errors of Origenism were only understood systematically by the Church over time, but the Edict of Justinian in 553 CE formulates a list of anathemas proscribing several Origenist tenets. See Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Herder, 1955).
12. See Sherwood’s discussion of the crucial Ambiguum 15 in *Earlier Ambigua*, 25ff.
13. According to Sherwood’s investigations, there is no clear precedent in ancient philosophical literature for Maximus’ solution.
14. Andrew Louth, ed., *Maximus the Confessor* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1996), 158–159 (Amb 41.1308CD).
15. George C. Berthold, ed., *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1985), 162 (CT II.70).
16. Maximus explicitly contrasts the expanding motion of charity and the contracting motion of tyrannous self-interest in his famous treatise on love, Epistle 2. See Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 85ff.
17. For the account that follows, see Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Nigel Thrift, “The Making of a Capitalist Time-Consciousness,” in *The Sociology of Time*, ed. John Hassard (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin’s Press, 1990); David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).
18. Thrift, “The Making of a Capitalist Time-Consciousness,” 107.
19. Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, 48.
20. *Ibid.*, 29.
21. *Ibid.*, 48.
22. Thrift, “The Making of a Capitalist Time-Consciousness,” 125–127.
23. Catherine Pickstock, “Radical Orthodoxy and the Mediations of Time,” in *Radical Orthodoxy?—A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2000), 63. See Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
24. Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 1965), 65 (47C).



ALUMNI NEWS

KENNETH ATKINSON, M.Div. 1994, assistant professor of religion at the University of Northern Iowa, published *I Cried to the Lord: A Study of the Psalms of Solomon's Historical Background and Social Setting* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004). The book examines a collection of poems documenting the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE. It compares these Greek poems with contemporary classical texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and archaeological evidence.

ROBERT BENNE, M.A. 1963, Ph.D. 1970, director of the Roanoke College Center for Religion and Society and Jordan-Trexler Professor Emeritus, published a newly revised edition of *Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2003). The first edition was in print from 1988 to 2002.

PRESTON M. BROWNING, JR., Ph.D. 1969, associate professor emeritus of English at the University of Illinois at Chicago, organized a symposium entitled "Spirituality and the Ecological Crisis" with his wife, Ann. The symposium, which drew over eighty people from as far away as Boston and northern Vermont, took place in the summer of 2002. Last winter, Mr. Browning gave a talk to Episcopal students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, entitled "Toward a Politics of Justice, Compassion, Sustainability and Hope." In the spring of 2004, Mr. Browning will present a revised version of this talk at his alma mater, Washington and Lee University, as well as at Mount Holyoke College. In late March 2004, he will read a paper at the meeting of the Virginia Humanities Council entitled "General John Hartwell Cocke and the Settlement of Liberia." The spring 2003 issue of *The Ecozoic Reader* contains his essay "American Global Hegemony Versus the Quest for a New Humanity."

WALLACE B. CLIFT, Ph.D. 1970, Canon Theologian Emeritus at the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado, was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California, on October 9, 2003.

PETER D'AGOSTINO, M.A. 1987, Ph.D. 1993, assistant professor of history and Catholic studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, published *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

THOMAS J. DAVIS, Ph.D. 1992, now serves as chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI). He was recently awarded an Indiana University President's Arts and Humanities Initiative Award for 2003–2004 for his project "Circumscribing Bodies, Human and Divine: The Eucharistic Controversies of the Sixteenth Century in the Context of Renaissance Art Theory." He also continues his work as managing editor of *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*.

MARY POTTER ENGEL, M.A. 1975, Ph.D. 1985, a Calvin scholar who studied under Brian Gerrish, published *A Woman of Salt* (New York, N.Y.: Counterpoint, 2001).

TAMAR FRANKIEL (a.k.a. Sandra Sizer Frankiel), Ph.D. 1976, professor of comparative religion and Hasidic thought at the Academy for Jewish Religion in Los Angeles, California, a trans-denominational rabbinical seminary, was appointed assistant dean of students at that institution in the fall of 2003. In the spring of 2003, she published "The Cross-Cultural Study of Christianity: An Historian's View," in *Religion* 33 (2003): 281–289. Her most recent book is *The Gift of Kabbalah* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001).

EUGENE V. GALLAGHER, M.A. 1974, Ph.D. 1980, Rosemary Park Professor of Religious Studies at Connecticut College, was named the Connecticut Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Gallagher joined Connecticut College in 1978, and founded its Center for Teaching and Learning in 1996. The Center, where Gallagher is now a faculty fellow, serves as a resource for college professors to hone their

teaching skills. Gallagher is coauthor of the book *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1995), and author of *Divine Man or Magician? Celsus and Origen on Jesus* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982) and *Expectation and Experience: Explaining Religious Conversion* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990). He received several awards acknowledging his teaching success, including the American Academy of Religion's Excellence in Teaching Award in 2001, the Connecticut College John S. King Teaching Award in 2002, the Connecticut College Student Government Association Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1993, and the Sears Roebuck Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Campus Leadership in 1991.

NORMAN GIRARDOT, M.A. 1968, Ph.D. 1974, University Distinguished Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Lehigh University, won two awards for his book *The Victorian Translation of China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002): The AAR Award for Excellence in Historical Studies (November 2003, Atlanta), and the American Historical Association John King Fairbank Award for the best book on East Asia (January 2004, Washington, D.C.).

MATTHEW GOFF, Ph.D. 2002, published *The Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom of 4QInstruction* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), a study of a Dead Sea Scrolls text.

PENNY S. GOLD, who served as a faculty fellow at the Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion (now the Martin Marty Center) from 1997 to 1998, published *Making the Bible Modern: Children's Bibles and Jewish Education in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

NANCY A. HARDESTY, Ph.D. 1976, professor of religion at Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina, published *Faith Cure: Divine Healing in the Holiness and Pentecostal Movements* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, November 2003).

DAVID HEIN, M.A. 1977, is professor of religion at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, where he also has served as chair of the department of religion and philosophy for sixteen years. Recently he completed two full terms as a member of the board of trustees of his alma mater, St. Paul's School in Brooklandville, Maryland. On January 4, 2004, *The Living Church*, an independent weekly magazine for Episcopalians, published his essay "What Has Happened to Episcopal Schools?"

KEVIN LEWIS, M.A. 1969, Ph.D. 1980, associate professor of religious studies at the University of South Carolina, was interviewed in the fall 2003 issue of *Christian Networks Journal* in an article entitled "Understanding Terrorism." Mr. Lewis is the only Fulbright fellow ever to teach for a semester at the Islamic University of Gaza (fall 1998), an institution which leans toward Hamas, where he taught American Literature while his wife, Becky, taught as a volunteer. The interview can be accessed online at <http://www.cnj.org>.

BONNIE J. MILLER-MCLEMORE, M.A. 1980, Ph.D. 1986, was awarded the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Chair in Pastoral and Practical Theology by Vanderbilt University. She published *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2003) and coedited *Mutuality Matters: Faith, Family, and Just Love* (Lanham, Md.: Sheed & Ward, 2003) with Edward Foley, Robert Schreiter, and Herbert Anderson, and *Poverty, Suffering, and HIV-AIDS: International Practical Theological Perspectives* (London: Cardiff Academic Press, 2003) with PAMELA D. COUTURE (Ph.D. 1990).

PETER SCHINELLER, S.J., M.A. 1972, Ph.D. 1975, who spent the past four years in Abuja, Nigeria, as director of a pastoral institute, was appointed director of the library and professor of theology at Hekima College, a Jesuit Theological Center in Nairobi, Kenya.

LOSSES

MARY LAWRENCE HALL, M.A. 1932, formerly of Ashland and Quaker City, Ohio, died on December 27, 2003, in Bradenton, Florida, at the age of ninety-seven.

Born in Orland, Indiana, on July 4, 1906, Ms. Hall went on to earn her bachelor's degree from Hiram College in 1930, and her M.A. degree in practical theology from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1932. She was one of a small group of women enrolled in the Divinity School at that time.

In 1935 she married J. Gailard Hall. The Reverend Earnest Harold, a Divinity School friend, officiated at the ceremony.

An ordained minister, Ms. Hall was director of religious education at the First Christian Church in Ashland, Ohio, for twenty-three years before retiring and moving to Florida in 1978. An honorary member of Delta Kappa Gamma, she was active in the Altrusa Club of Ashland, which honored her as Career Woman of the Year in 1957.

Survivors include a son, Lindley L. Hall, and daughter-in-law, Marcia, of Concord, California. Mary donated her body for research to the University of Florida in Gainesville.

HELEN HAROUTUNIAN, spouse of former Divinity School colleague Joseph Haroutunian, died on November 16. Her daughter, Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, who teaches at Northwestern University, notes that her mother died almost thirty-five years to the day he did (he died on November 15, 1968). Her daughter can be reached for condolences at: The Master of Science in Education Program, 117 Annenberg Hall, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University, 2120 Campus Drive, Evanston, Illinois 60208; or by e-mail at shg@northwestern.edu.

MICHAEL C. D. MCDANIEL, M.A. 1969, Ph.D. 1978, former Lutheran bishop of North Carolina, died on December 18 in Hickory, North Carolina, at the age of seventy-four.

Throughout his life, McDaniel focused on building and strengthening ecumenical relations. He graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1951, going on to earn a bachelor of divinity from Hamma Divinity School (which later merged into Trinity Lutheran Seminary of Columbus, Ohio) in 1954. He was ordained by the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA). After serving as pastor of several Lutheran congregations in the South and Midwest, he went on to earn a master of arts in systematic theology (1969) and a doctoral degree in Christian theology (1978) from the University of Chicago Divinity School. He was a guest lecturer at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, from 1970 to 1971, and professor of religion and philosophy

at Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory from 1971 to 1982. McDaniel left academia to serve, first, as bishop of the North Carolina Synod of the former Lutheran Church in America (LCA) from 1982 to 1987, and, second, as bishop of the ELCA North Carolina Synod from 1988 to 1991. He was founding director of Lenoir-Rhyne's Center for Theology in 1991.

McDaniel is survived by his wife, Marjorie Ruth Schneider McDaniel, and a son, John.

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W. Clark Gilpin, *Continued from page 21*

play—for good and for ill—in social history. As a body of literature, the letters from prison represent a crucial intersection between the artistry of religion as a cultural form and the power of religion as a social institution. □

ENDNOTES

1. Ioan Davies, *Writers in Prison* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 3.
2. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1992), 5–6.
3. A modern edition of the letter appears in Leland H. Carlson, ed., *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1591–1593*, Elizabethan Nonconformist Texts, vol. 6 (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970), 242–252. Carlson's argument that the letter was intended for the Countess of Warwick appears on 238–242.
4. [Henry Ainsworth and Francis Johnson], *An Apologie or Defence of Such True Christians as are commonly (but unjustly) called Brownists* (n.p., 1604); *The Examinations Of Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, and John Penry, before the High Commissioners and Lords of the Council* (London: for William Marshall, [1681?]).
5. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), 4: 474–514.
6. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of these latter and perillous dayes* (London: by John Day, 1563), 1020.
7. *An Epistle of the Persecution of Catholickes in Englande* [1582], n.p.
8. John Frith, *A boke made by John Fryth prysoner in the Tower of London* ([London]: by Richard Jugge, 1548), 103 verso.
9. Miles Coverdale, ed., *Certain most godly, fruitful, and comfortable letters of such true Saintes and holy Martyrs of God, as in the late bloodye persecution here within this Realme, gave their lyves for the defence of Christs holy gospel* (London: by John Day, 1564), 291.
10. Cited in Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 3.
11. Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1021.
12. Davies, *Writers in Prison*, 49.
13. *A parte of a register, conteyning sundrie memorable matters, written by divers godly and learned in our time* [n.p., 1590 or 1593?], 27.
14. Coverdale, *Certain most godly . . . letters*, 2.

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15. [William Allen], *A Briefe Historie of the Glorious Martyrdom of Twelve Reverend Priests*, ed., J. H. Pollen (London: Burns and Oates, 1908), 41–42.
16. Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1021–1022.
17. *Ibid.*, 918.
18. Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer, *Certein godly, learned, and comfortable conferences betwene the two Reverende Fathers, and holy martyrs of Christe, D. Nicholas Rydley late Bisshoppe of London, and*

M. Hugh Latimer, sometye Bisshop of Worcester, during the tyme of their emprisonmentes (n.p., 1556), a1 verso—a2 recto.

19. Coverdale, *Certain most godly . . . letters*, n.p., from the preface.
20. *Ibid.*, 82–83.
21. Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995), 117.

memorandum, dated November 8, 1972, the FBI alerts the Department of Justice that “Allah is ready to attack America out of his universe.” The memorandum then goes on to disclose the secret of the Mother Plane as set forth in Elijah Muhammad’s speech to his congregants, dated July 14, 1972: “In the book of Ezekiel, there is prophesized about a wheel in a wheel. It’s up there now. The devil knows it’s up there. . . . This plane represents the Mother plane. . . . Ezekiel said he’d come out and drop a bomb . . .” (CG 157–5366, 6–7). This statement is then followed by a long and detailed description of the Mother Plane, how it operates and what it plans to do.

18. See Elijah Muhammad, *The Theology of Time*, ed. Abbas Rassoull (Hampton, Va.: UBUS Communications, 1992), 172–173. Although *The Theology of Time* was published posthumously, it reflects Elijah Muhammad’s full thinking on the matter throughout his career.
19. One way might have been to impugn Elijah Muhammad’s sanity. A confidential FBI memorandum, dated January 27, 1958, notes that “While serving a sentence at the Federal Correctional Institution, Milan, Michigan, in the 1940s for violating the Selective Service Act, [Elijah Muhammad] received a psychiatric diagnosis of Dementia Praecox, paranoid type,” a conclusion reiterated in a later memorandum. In the FBI files concerning the Messenger’s incarceration, Mr. Muhammad’s name is recorded as one “Gulam Bogans.” According to the memorandum, Bogans’s intelligence “was rated as inferior,” with an IQ of 70–79, and with the mental age of a twelve-year-old child. Bogans is said to have revealed that “in his early development, he had occasional enuretic episodes.” Moreover, he exhibited “a marked persecutory trend both against himself and his race.” He also revealed that he has experienced the feeling of being followed. “It was noted that BOGANS stated he still had visions and communications with ALLAH in visual and auditory form.” Accordingly, the prognosis for Bogans was “guarded” (CG 100–6989, 6). I raise the issue of madness

here not because I place any confidence in the findings of the psychiatric examination but only to suggest what I feel is the kind of hysteria to which Elijah Muhammad and the Nation were subjected from the very beginning. For Elijah Muhammad, the “visions and communications with ALLAH” were quite real, and the Mother Plane itself was (and still is) quite real. Who are we to say “no”?

20. Much of what follows is derived from my book *Children of Ezekiel*, 198–221.
21. References are to *Al-Qur’an*, trans. Ahmed Ali (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).
22. Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel*, 200–203.
23. *Ibid.*, 212–213.
24. *Ibid.*, 296 n. 37.
25. *Washington Post*, Thursday, March 1, 1990, A17–18.
26. Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel*, 215.
27. *Ibid.*, 216–219.
28. See the Web site http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article_782.shtml.
29. I voiced my concerns in an interview published in the *Final Call*, November 4, 2003, 6.
30. I refer here to the tape entitled “Minister Louis Farrakhan[s] Interview with Dr. Lieb, Delivered at the Palace, Tuesday, May 20, 2003.” I take this opportunity to thank Sister Claudette Muhammad (my “angel in high places”) and Sister Sophia for all their assistance in arranging this interview.

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