



The Voice

of the

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THE VOICE
of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

EDITORIALS

A SPECIAL ISSUE	1
"WHAT WILL THIS DO?" Or "IS THIS TRUE?"	2

ARTICLES

PASTARNAK — A CHRISTIAN POET? — Geo. Epp	3
FICTIONAL REALISM VERSUS CHRISTIAN REALITY — Grace Irwin	8
THE EFFICACY OF DISCUSSION — Henry Regehr	21
WE BELIEVE — John Regehr	24

EDITORIALS

A SPECIAL ISSUE

This volume of **The Voice** comes to you as a special issue, and this for two reasons. For one, its main concern is with literary production, rather than theological issues. We are deeply indebted to Miss Grace Irwin, outstanding Christian author, for permission to print a paper she presented at one of the sessions of the Writers' Institute, held at M.B. Bible College in October, 1968.

There is, however, another sense in which this issue is special. **The Voice** is undergoing a metamorphosis. After going through 17 volumes with only minor changes and modifications, it seems to us that the time has come to give this publication more contemporary and relevant form. **The Voice** is to continue, only its form and some of the details of its publication are to be different. As you will have noticed, during the past year or so, **The Voice** has had a difficult time of publication. A number of circumstances have combined to bring about this state of affairs. The faculty of M.B. Bible College does not want **The Voice** to succumb to these circumstances. So a way had to be found by means of which this necessary service to our constituency could be continued.

We believe that we have found this way. **The Voice** is now to appear quarterly, instead of 6 times per year, beginning with the summer quarter, 1969. To offset the lesser number of issues, the number of pages in each issue is to be increased from 24 to 32. The content will also be somewhat different. There will be fewer, but somewhat longer articles, permitting a more thorough treatment of the subject dealt with. There is also to be a section which brings helps and practical suggestions for preparation of sermons and the pulpit ministry in general. It is also to contain reviews of especially significant books, some reviews to be more extensive while other will be brief. Throughout, the treatment is to be challenging and scholarly, but the language to be non-technical and easily readable.

A committee of three faculty members is to be responsible for the publication of **The Voice**, headed by President Victor Adrian. It is our hope and prayer that with these modifications, **The Voice** will continue to serve its readers as a source of information, inspiration and challenge.

H. H. Voth

"WHAT WILL THIS DO?" or "IS THIS TRUE?"

In response to certain enquiries concerning her book *No Graven Image*, Mrs. Betty Elliot replied, "The single relevant question is not 'What will this do?' (e.g. to missions, to young people, to our theology, to any vested interest), but 'Is it possible?' or 'Could this be true?'. If the answer to the last question is 'Yes' then the reader must deal with the data according to his own perspective, faith and understanding The chips must fall where they may." (quoted in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, "A New 'Graven Image'", Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 233.)

It is not my purpose here to deal with the literary or Christian merits of the novel "No Graven Image" or whether Mrs. Elliot should have written the story the way she did or not. I would rather like to focus only on her statement of philosophy of writing, explicit in the quotation above. Do we agree that this is a Christian philosophy of writing? Can I as a Christian really say that my only and primary concern is that a thing should be true and then "let the chips fall where they may"?

I suppose there is another way of stating the issue. If "reality" and "truthfulness" or "honesty" are accepted criteria of artistic excellence, can these criteria ever come into conflict with Christian responsibility, and if so, which cause prevails?

It is clearly and repeatedly emphasized in Scripture that a Christian's life is one of purpose and responsibility, both in relationship to God and man. As Christians we are called upon to glorify God, to be constructive, to contribute to the upbuilding and the maturing of the Body of Christ and each individual member of that body. All that a Christian is and does stand under the searching question of his purpose and his responsibility. If this is the Biblical teaching, and certainly this is not a narrow sectarian interpretation of its teaching, then how can I as a Christian ever say, about anything that I do, that the question of "what will this do?" is not relevant for me? The answer, it would seem to me, is that a Christian can never say that.

A Christian writer may feel that there is a great need to expose sham, hypocrisy, artificiality, or "clicheism" within the Christian church or in a certain Christian profession. Such a writer may then seek for a way of achieving this goal and believe to find it in the characterization of a novel, in which the persons through what they are and do and say, incarnate the weaknesses to be dealt with, and thus directly or obliquely make the reader aware of these. Readers may be annoyed, angered or disillusioned, but still it would be right to say that as the author planned and wrote, he asked the question, "What will this do?" Hopefully it was his Christian concern

ARTICLES

PASTARNAK — A CHRISTIAN POET?

We may wonder in our materialistic age about trends in literature. Do we still have Christian poets? Surely the world does not encourage writers to produce Christian literature. But best literature was never brought into being by money incentives or even by an appreciative society. The most striking evidence for this can be found in our century. Most people are familiar with the name of T. S. Eliot. He is an outstanding writer,

for the brother or the cause of Christ that made him write the way he did. The destruction of the weakness of which he had become aware and which he believed to be sub-Christian would be the answer to his question "what will this do?" We may disagree with the way he answered the question, but as Christian I believe we would agree with his asking it.

Every Christian writer is first of all a Christian and then a writer. He must take his responsibility seriously. There are many things in this world (as Miss Irwin has so aptly and powerfully demonstrated in her address) that are not "expedient," not conducive to Christian growth or are downright destructive of faith or personal integrity and purity. To write about these because they are true can hardly be the Christian's task. This is no plea against realism, against truth in writing. The answer for a Christian is not in fabricating an unreal state of affairs or life. The answer to the question "What will this do?" when applied to such writing may reveal that it is just as detrimental to faith and integrity as writing about the seamy side of life. The answer to such conflicts is not artificiality, but silence.

"Let the chips fall where they may" seems in some way to echo the attitude of an earlier question "Am I my brother's keeper?" The only answer to this last question which seems to be even better than a resounding "Yes" is "No, you are his brother."

H. H. Voth.

literary critic and a poet with Christian convictions. Less known are a number of German writers who profess a profound Christian faith, and I am not thinking of Bonhoefer, Thieliicke and Barth . . . I am referring to those German poets who grew up in the Nazi-era, who were brought up in a Europe of terror and intellectual depression. These poets do not write in Milton's, Novalis' or Droste's style, but they communicate well to modern man. Their poetry is far from the Romantic trend. Yes indeed their Realism may even shock us at times, but they make an honest attempt to see the world as it is, an attempt also to open our eyes. Take for example Kurt Marti's "Der ungebetene Hochzeitsgast":

Die Glocken droehnen ihren vollsten Ton
und Photographen stehen knipsend krumm.
Es braust der Hochzeitsmarsch von Mendelsohn.
Der Pfarrer kommt! Mit ihm das Christentum.
Die Damen knie'n im Dome schulternackt,
noch im Gebet kokett und photogen,
indes die Herren, konjunkturbefrackt,
diskret auf ihre Armbanduhren sehn.
Sanft wie im Kino surrt die Liturgie
zum Fest von Kapital und Eleganz.
Nur einer fluestert leise: "Blasphemie!"
Der Herr. Allein, ihn ueberhoert man ganz.

Marti was born 1921 in Bern, Switzerland. There is not comfort to be found in this poem, but it communicates. Marti feels Christians need more than comfort today.

Western Europe has its Christian poets and in spite of the two World Wars we may feel this is quite natural, after all we are living in the "Christian" hemisphere. We may however find it unbelievable if somebody argues that the best Christian poetry of our century has been created behind the Iron Curtain, not in East-Germany, not in Poland—but in Peredelkino, the famous Soviet Russian artists colony, near Moscow.

The poet I am referring to is Boris Pasternak, author of *Dr. Zhivago*. Pasternak's fame rests on this novel, and few people realize that *Dr. Zhivago* is just one of his many works. Pasternak is first of all a poet, although his prose writings have been compared to Tolstoy's. Pasternak's background is quite interesting. His father, Leonid Pasternak was a famous painter and Professor at the University of Moscow. He and his wife accepted Christianity (they were Jewish) and little Boris was baptized in the Russian Orthodox church. Pasternak studied music and had been accepted as a rising star in this field when he changed his mind and studied philosophy. In 1913 at the

University of Marburg, Germany, a great future was predicted for him by the then famous professor Cohen. Cohen invited him to stay at Marburg and find his fame in philosophy. Pasternak however returned to Russia and devoted his life to the writing of poetry. He was a symbolist and followed the general trend of the time: poetry was not for everybody and good poetry had to hide its deeper meaning from the shallow mind. Like Goethe, who felt sorry for having written a poem which only created puzzles, Pasternak in his later life condemned the art which nobody understands. His late poetry is very simple. His word-power is unsurpassed in contemporary Russian poetry.

In 1917 Boris Pasternak was twenty-seven. He had published two volumes of poetry and had been acclaimed as one of the strong Russian symbolists. He tried to adopt the Revolution, but it was impossible for a man for whom violence was so alien. His friend Alexander Blok (Block), one of the world's leading symbolists was more successful. Blok wrote the famous poem "The Twelve." Well, revolutionary it was In "The Twelve" Blok sees the Revolution as an upheaval which creates chaos of immense proportions. The twelve (apostles of the Revolution) are marching through the snow storm, following a red banner. A figure is carrying this banner, but they do not recognize him. This figure is not stopped by the storm and no bullet can do him any harm, it is—Christ. A controversy arose over this poem. Nobody liked it. Rightists and the Church rejected this poem. Finally the Bolsheviks accepted it as a great epic of the Revolution, but they pointed out that unfortunately Blok was not able to free himself of "the symbols of bourgeois society." Blok defended himself: ". . . What do you ask of me, I registered a fact . . . I saw Christ in the storm . . . and if you keep your eyes open you too will see him . . ."

Pasternak struggled with his conscience and came to the conclusion that he could not take sides. Change was necessary, but violence was not acceptable for him. In the revolutionary year 1917 the young poet took his stand in a collection of poems "Poverx barrjerov" ("On the fence"). Reconciliation, not division, is the poets task. However Pasternak's position was not accepted in revolutionary Russia and in spite of his good will he soon found that he could not go along with the new Socialist Realism (do as you are told) in art. He saw the poet as a 'sponge' which absorbs and releases moisture without transforming it into some desirable juice. Truth and love are the two values he never gave up. When his moral values became "outdated" he stopped publishing poetry (he continued to write) and began translating works of art. He translated Goethe's

Faust (the best Russian translation according to Russian sources), and a number of plays by Shakespeare. He also translated Georgian poetry into Russian, and it is perhaps this work that saved his life. Stalin was very fond of Pasternak's translations. Then in 1956, after Stalin's death, the Soviet press announced the coming of the great novel, *Dr. Zhivago*. Parts of the novel were even published by a literary journal. Then the manuscripts were returned to the author—the “anti-socialist” stuff could not be published. It was printed in Milan in 1957, by an Italian communist, in spite of strong protests from Moscow.

The success of the novel was immediate. Unfortunately the West created an image of Pasternak which he resented as much as the one fabricated by his superiors of that time.

The worst that could have happened to Pasternak's novel was the commercializing of *Dr. Zhivago*. The millions who have seen the movie *Dr. Zhivago* feel that they know something about the great Russian, yet I am convinced that Pasternak would be horrified by this Hollywood product.

The key to *Dr. Zhivago* is to be found in the last chapter of the novel, which usually is not read. The last chapter of Pasternak's novel presents a collection of poems by Dr. Zhivago. The reader is under the impression that he has actually finished reading the novel and if he does not particularly like poetry he will not bother reading the chapter of poetry. In addition it must be borne in mind that the translation of poetry presents a problem and the last chapter of *Dr. Zhivago* has not found a competent translator as yet. But this is the most important chapter of the whole novel, it is the key to the story and to Pasternak's philosophy in general.

Every poem in that chapter has its significance, but for our purpose we shall briefly look at three of these poems.

The first poem of the chapter is “Hamlet.” For the Russians Hamlet is not a tragic figure who becomes a loser due to his procrastination. For the Russian reader Hamlet is the symbol of stoic if not of religious acceptance of the unavoidable. Hamlet is a hero—he accepts the judgement of God. This is a Russian reader's first reaction even before he has read Pasternak's poem. And Pasternak skillfully uses this Russian concept of Hamlet. In the poem he says: God, I know that thousands of eyes (the nation, the world) are watching me (the artist). If possible take from me this bitter cup (the responsibility). But, your actions are well planned, I know they must be carried to the end. I stand alone, while Pharisaism drowns everything.

Zhivago (Pasternak) feels deserted, helpless, but he sub-

mits to the will of God. Even in the chaos of the revolutionary years Zhivago clings to his faith in God's guidance.

The second poem of my choice is “Holy Week.” The novel “*Dr. Zhivago*” is a story of the immense suffering of Russia and the Russian people in the first quarter of our century. The hard lot of the working class, the immorality, the war, the revolution, the broken families—broken against their will . . . hopelessness, inhumanity . . . But! In “Holy Week” the poet says: dark shadows are all around us . . . Daybreak and warmth may still be a thousand years away . . . Then suddenly he hears singing and at midnight (in total darkness) men and animals sense the coming of spring . . . Wait, wait—death will be overcome through the power of resurrection.

In the last poem, and this is the closing poem of the novel, “Garden of Gethsemane,” Zhivago finds complete consolation. The problems of this world can not be cured with ‘iron’ (violence), Christ says to Peter . . . I accept suffering of my own free will . . . Take comfort from the fact that I shall rise and judge the centuries.

Here is a brief interpretation of the whole novel and it is presented by the author himself. Significantly, Pasternak considered these poems to be the best of all he ever wrote. The simplicity and the beauty of these poems is recognized even by those who do not like the Christians attitude of the poet. Soviet critics say: “Pasternak is unable to overcome his bourgeois past.” Some Western critics may point out that Christian imagery and symbolism do not make Pasternak a Christian. It is of course true that the use of the name of Christ in a poem does not necessarily make a Christian poem or poet. However, Pasternak has not left us guessing. He openly confessed to be a Christian. In 1958 a French writer asked him to explain to him the Holy Ghost. Pasternak wrote back and thus gave us a documented statement: I can not explain the Holy Ghost but I know he is present whenever I work . . .

George Epp

Our age is an age of moderate virtue
 And of moderate vice
 When men will not lay down the cross
 Because they will not assume it.
 Yet nothing is impossible, nothing,
 To men of faith and conviction.
 Let us therefore make perfect our will.
 O God, help us.

—T. S. Eliot.

Fictional Realism Versus Christian Reality

Our gracious sovereign lady, Queen Elizabeth, did something unusual at Expo last year: she startled people by seeming to enjoy herself tremendously, a break from the rather regal aloofness of which she has been accused. Everywhere she went she drove the security guards crazy by refusing to be bound by them, very brave conduct under the circumstances. She rode the minirail, providing a beautiful target for any trigger-happy person. And she captured all hearts by this very freedom from fear. I have my own conclusions as to why the Queen did this; I may be wrong, but I think that she had had enough of being called stodgy, conventional and religious; being blamed for being worldly and too keen on the race-track; for not allowing her daughter to dress mod, for allowing her son to have his hair long, for being a figurehead of the establishment, and for failing to curb a husband who speaks his intelligent mind with devastating honesty; having in addition seen one portion of her domain after the other, gaining the independence for which they have been uniquely trained, ungratefully declaring itself republican. It is my theory that she has reached the point where she takes any such situation in her stride, has decided to be herself; and by one of those paradoxes which should least surprise the experienced Christian, this very freedom from fear brought her the greatest acclaim she has ever enjoyed—especially since it has become fashionable to exalt the vulgar and disparage royalty.

Now, irrelevant as it may seem, I feel there is a lesson here for us Christians. I suspect that most of us spend far too much of our time being afraid or, if not being afraid, being on guard. Afraid not only with the holy fear of grieving our Lord and impugning our witness, but afraid of what we have been taught to call "putting a stumbling-block in the way of our weaker brethren," a fear which usually degenerates into letting the stronger brethren, often the moneyed brethren, dictate their concept of a stumbling block and our conduct to us. We've been afraid of ourselves and of our own judgment. We've gone to the other extreme and been afraid of the world and its opinion of our witness, unless we conform to current standards and fashions.

So, the years since my books were first published have seen an uneasy swing in Christian literature and art from ultra-pious and conservative to a flattering imitation of way-out—conversely called the in-thing (that may be out of date since I wrote this speech; I don't know, the vocabulary changes so suddenly that, as a schoolteacher, I'm almost afraid to voice myself in the class—

almost!). We eschew the lurid and pornographic, but we give a wistful sigh of admiration for the strong and gutsy or purely zany stuff, which just because it's modern, we have slavishly come to consider an improvement on classic tradition. I know of no trend less mature, no sign more indicative of naive acceptance of what C. S. Lewis calls "the great evolutionary myth of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century," than this unthinking, unquestioning acceptance of the superiority of the new. (And the word usually connotes the most recent trend, even when it may be, in the case of much psychological jargon, just the renaming of the old practices.)

I recently listened to an internationally known television interviewer, Pierre Berton, talking of the fiction of the future and the theatre of the future and rejoicing in the brevity, "the shorthand," he called it, of modern writing, as compared with the books of his childhood which he cannot be bothered reading now—especially Kingsley's *Waterbabies*. Similarly, he gloried in the gimmicks which have revolutionized the theatre from the structurally perfect three-act play from the proscenium stage. The non sequiturs of the theatre of the absurd, the use of moving pictures as part of the background in continuity, the audience involvement and optional ending, the multiplicity of mechanical devices for extraordinary effect that has crept into music—as in the symphony played for the first time in Toronto last year, where two typewriters were on the stage as part of the general sound effects with parts in the score for them.

It never occurred to Pierre to ask whether the very economy and restriction of the traditional drama might at least conceivably have resulted in a better play, both intrinsically and in its effectiveness, and it was obviously out of question that we should consider whether his youthful taste and his feeling for the beauty and power of words had become corrupted.

But we too are affected, if not awed, by the big battalions. We accept their ridiculous slogan, "Fifty million Frenchman, (critics, readers), can't be wrong," and the equally un-Christian dictum, "The voice of the people is the voice of God," that the majority is always right (while it seldom or never is). We have no faith in our own taste, our own criticism, our own reactions, perhaps because we know so little of people in the world that we acquiesce in the wretched picture given us, perhaps because we avail ourselves little of the riches both of the knowledge and wisdom as well as the essential rightness, the salt as well as the grace, available to us in Christ Jesus—with whom we are freely given all things richly to enjoy at that. And as a result we have no certainty in ourselves, no experiential assurance of the validity of the Christian ethic, the pragmatism of Christian psychology, the

strong and sure and unshaken foundation of the Christian faith, the practical dynamic of the good news of salvation.

What has struck me most forcibly in reading Graham Greene's fictional apologia for the church of Rome is this very lack of joyful, joy-filled, supernatural power. If any of you have read **The End of the Affair**, you will recall the heroine's miserable resignation when her acceptance of the Catholic status that she has long rejected, separates her from her lover and makes her prefer suicide by deliberate exposure to pneumonia, to existance bereft of a liaison which had been at best treacherous and wholly carnal. This seems a complete divorce from the concept of salvation and grace, from any conscious "health-ing", any objective renewing and redirection of mind and body, which is in the New Testament sense "salvation." "He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free": and that freedom (thank His ever-blessed name) can apply to the bonds of fashion, the current trend of dictated classification of physical and psychological needs: the sort of insidious propaganda that we are being fed through almost every media, against all true instinct, against the teaching of scripture, against the experience of the ages, and yet which we are brainwashed into accepting as the normal conduct requirements.

Now I'm advocating a return (or an advance) to the happy state of release from bondage, the assured poise and the glorious liberty of the children of God which will be in a sense unperturbed by the temporary or at least temporal denigration of our faith, which can assess (and if necessary, ridicule) what passes for knowledge and is promulgated as realism; and particularly the bland assumption that whatever is nasty and depressing is not only true, but the only truth.

I think the situation is bad: desperate enough, if you like, for us to be a bit hilarious; if the darkest hour is just before the dawn, we should be raising a shout for the imminent sunrise.

There was a time when we had to walk just so for fear of giving offence to those who, not being against us, might be for us. Now with a certain relief we can see that the issues are sharply joined. The day of lip-service to the values as well as to the dogma of Christianity is gone. (We are no longer to speak of Christian ethics for fear of offending those of other faiths!) Certainly, in Canada the revolution on every question of spiritual or moral authority is almost total. Any of you who have taken lectures in a secular university or read the secular press, still more those who follow the drama as a barometer of the temper of the time, know that no holds are barred any longer in the language used in the interpretations offered, in the subjects openly reported and discussed, in statements glorifying rather than just condoning every form of immorality, every aspect of blasphemy,

every defiance of authority. The liberal clergy have leaped on the bandwagon, under the misunderstood banner of **agape**, and, adopting the slogan "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em," are in the eager forefront of berators of the church. They love everybody except those who do not agree with them. To quote Tom Lehrer, "There are people who don't love their fellow human beings, and I hate people like that!"

I think if anything is needed to keep my generation—and perhaps I'm the only one of it here—from settling upon its lees the ebullient hot water in which it is, and particularly the evangelicals are, constantly being thrown, should effect that desirable mixture of metaphor. To cite a few examples from clergymen. "The trouble with Christianity is that their revelation is the only revelation. Why shouldn't an Indians concept of God "be as good as ours?" "Billy Graham is in effect dead although he is still around, in the sense that fossils are still around. He's trying to foist a primitive concept of God and a primitive concept of ethics on his audience." "Jesus was a rebel, listen to him: "It was said unto you—but I say unto you. He became a threat to the tradionalists and for that reason he had to die." "Moses is no more an authority on God than Martin Luther King. It is questionable that Paul of Tarsus was closer to God than Paul Tillich. The opinions of David may not be as relevant for the Christian man as those of U Thant." "Jesus leaned on a father-image to help him shape his philosophy and ideals. God is on the side of those who repudiate him, he is against those who believe in him."

And no-one seems to dare suggest disapproval of the most flagrant statements for fear of being thought to harbour a secret, nameless vice. An editorial-page columnist of one of our most respectable morning papers came up with this gem: "By all means lets us have sex education in our schools. But let it be taught by those who can say, and **prove** (*italics mine*), that they have a wide and varied sexual experience." Now that's a class one shouldn't miss! Just how this interesting fact of pedagogical requirement is to be proved to a class's satisfaction boggles an imagination like mine, which is admittedly inhibited. I think it's time we stopped looking shocked; perhaps it's time we stopped being angry at men who can write such irresponsible stuff; at doctors of divinity who not only liberally misquote scripture but who use howlers like these: "Regarding false prophets of doom, we still have our Jeremiahs and Cassandras among us." What two worse examples to prove his case could he have chosen? And in an impassioned plea for flexibility—I hand this out gratis to the English staff, they may use it—"The person who refuses to budge from a fixed position because of principle is surely in a frightful mess. One should be prepared to change course in midstream. Positions that may have had value twenty years ago can hang,

like an albatross, over our heads today." And, to quote Elaine May, "And that man is a doctor!" More, he's a clergyman. And oddly enough, he's a clergyman who back in the days when it was rather fashionable to be evangelical, wrote me praising *Least of All Saints* and rejoiced that the church was back to evangelical emphases after the old fashioned sterile liberalism of the twenties. Truly, the Vicar of Bray is not an outmoded concept.

Or consider another clergyman who has vaulted into fame by his concept of a church without God, and who postulates that Jesus may have been an atheist, was certainly an agnostic, talks very little about God, may have got drunk or had experience with women—I shudder as I quote this but it was there—certainly died and disintegrated, and, as there is no after-life, is completely gone, but with whom, nathless, one may have an experience!

Perhaps we should relax from our defeatist tension and try the therapeutic value of a hearty laugh. After all, we have divine precedent in the second psalm. Perhaps we should stop being impressed by publicity and numbers, and acquire some perspective from history and from scripture—the hymn says, "He told me no less," "What more can He say than to you He hath said?"—and that we make with regard to these much-advertised, knowledgeable buffoons the telling comment which Mark Twain in one of his most subtle characterizations has Eve say about Adam: "He is very clever and knows a great many things, only they are not so." (You wives can have that one!)

That—and it has taken me a long time to get to it—is my thesis. That whether in the new theology, the new morality, the new realism—these things are not so. Not only in the sense of eternal reality of lasting validity, but in the practical everyday sense of representing the total situation on earth here and now. As with the publicity given to the sensational and untrue in religious trends, the most dangerous and damnable thing about so-called realism in writing and cinematic production is the impression created that it is universal, that any other actions or standards are unheard of, or inhuman, or obsolete. The evangelical world had its ivory towers; this is the Dark Tower of the enemy.

And if you doubt it, read the reviews or the books by Norman Mailer and half a dozen others. What we can do when we see or hear or are asked to believe that everybody talks or acts or thinks like the characters in such books, that all teenagers have minds like Holden Caulfield's, is simply to shrug and say, without caring whether we're thought to protest too much—I've long since stopped; I know what Freud would make of me, but then I'd like to make a bit of Freud, too—"Sorry, that's just not what I

am like or what the most vital and interesting people I know are like. And the whole thing seems unutterably dreary and messy compared with life as I experience it."

Actually, I think the pitiful immaturity of those who praise such stuff might awaken our sympathy if it wasn't matched by their arrogance. Margaret Avison, our Canadian poetess, has found recently, because of her comparatively recent conversion, what some of us have long known—the bitter intolerance of the professedly liberal, the ignorant or deliberate dishonesty of those with whom honesty (in the sense of shameless exposure) is a fetish, the dogmatism of the foes of dogma. With no grasp of history, with the constant, conscious determination to divorce themselves from heritage and tradition, they actually delude themselves into believing that they have achieved a breakthrough in thinking and action. Aristophanes could teach them obscenity; Rabelais, wit; Swift, searing and ironic misanthropy. But apart from the occasional gesture of admiration toward some Restoration comedy or a masterpiece like *Fanny Hill*—as to a phenomenon—they prefer to think of themselves as the first citizens of a brave new world of which, paradoxically, they take a depressingly dim view. It is this element of naiveté that sits so awkwardly on their would-be sophistication and makes their position so vulnerable to attack. But if we have our answer ready, if we have our information straight, sooner or later the chance to use it will come. Our trouble—my trouble—is that I want to convince everybody and set everybody straight. Well, the servant is not above his lord; the parable of the sower should remind us of the proportion of return we can expect if we sow faithfully.

The comment was recently made in the review of a continental movie that English audiences were more mature than American (and presumably Canadian). In concession to which fact, a sheet was provided in the version released here, as partial covering for a couple seen there, naked in bed. Mature, my foot! If a Peeping Tom is mature, yes; (don't let them get away with that mature stuff). It's a matter of good taste. There are certain actions which no-one except a Peeping Tom wishes to see another person perform, and the degree to which adults so derive vicarious pleasure is the degree of their juvenility. To plead that art demands such realism is so specious that it's funny. *Ars*, says Quintus Haritius Flaccus, *celare artem*. Translation? Art is the art of concealing art. I have yet to hear it suggested in the interests of realism—and mind you I say "yet" because anything may happen in this age of unreason, though I suspect there may be difficulty in getting people to act the part—that a stage murder must be literally enacted in the theatre, or that the great jewel or train-robbery is inartistically produced unless the victim be actually deprived of the amount stolen. Yet this plea or defence is made

for the embarrassing number of scenes in which the sex act has been approximated, and actually performed several times in a movie recently released for audiences over fifteen (and I can imagine the under-fifteen saying "Why such unfair restrictions? Have the young no rights?")—in, guess where, that's right! Sweden.

Now, I say without fear of contradiction to any lover and student of the theatre that the audiences who enjoy this spectacle do so in inverse ratio to their genuine dramatic interest and pleasure. They are, in fact, moving steadily in the direction of the decadent Roman audiences to whose palate Greek and Roman tragedy were too refined, and even the broader comedies tasteless, in comparison with the bloodshed of the arena and amphitheatre. For there is, by very nature of the human body, a reaction to such actuality which blunts and vitiates the property of drama, that magical property by which the realization that it is mere representation intensifies one's identification with the characters, and if it is a great and sincere play, effects a purgation of the whole being, either by large and compassionate laughter or by pity and fear. But this! this grossness of one situation lived through, and of necessity lived through on one plane only, while the others are merely represented—this is a despoiling of art. It's rather like taking pains to prepare a balanced meal, with careful attention to the correct proportion of delicate herbs and aromatic flavouring, and then rendering all taste indistinguishable by saturating everything with onions!

And candidly I am saturated with all this inartistic forcing down the throat of trivial, disproportionately emphasized detail and incident under the guise of strong, realistic writing. Granted that the books of an earlier day made no mention of man's elemental and alimentary habits, must we, to atone, be surfeited by medical charts of every act of defecation? Granted that hyper-delicacy suggested a blessed event only by a husband's discovery of his wife's shy concealment of little, knitted garments, or that the event itself was blown across our consciousness by such an extension of the pathetic fallacy as "The summer months glided rapidly by, leaving in the home a priceless treasure"—and there was the baby. Or in a novel, daringly frank, which I read in my youth about a pair shipwrecked on a desert island, where the man finding an enormous turtle shell, supposed that natives used these as cradles to rock their babies in, and questioning the girl about her tears at this casual remark, was apprised of the situation by her revealing statement, "Oh, John, my own dear husband." Not slow on the uptake, John took the news manfully, quote, "and as he gathered her close in an embrace of wonderful tenderness, she knew that he understood." So did we! We didn't have to have it spelled out for us, as it now is, long before the first morning sickness. Nor was this delicacy an entirely untrue picture. And I'm not convinced, in

spite of preferring an honest and decent medium, that human relationships and human happiness have been greatly improved or intensified by the grossness of conversation on such topics today. "I'm so fed up," said a woman publisher to me a few weeks ago, a woman who has to read many manuscripts, "with 'loins' and 'flanks' and 'rumps'. The modern novel sounds like a butchershop."

Personally, I resigned myself sometime ago to the fact that my works fall short of present-day literary requirements because I do not avail myself of the respectability-approaching status symbol—of the act of urination. I am in fact so old-hat that only realization that I must be "with it" compels me, against what I've always considered good taste, to mention it in a mixed gathering like this. Frankly, I can't get myself to take an interest in my characters' performance in this regard. If for any reason they failed to perform, it might be worthy of serious, and in fact concerned, mention. But my ennui grows at the dog-like curiosity with which some of these strong writers—and I could mention their names—follow their heroes about, adverbially noting their prowess in this respect. One hero, as I remember (of a great Canadian novel, incidentally), did it "dreamily," "angrily," "broodingly," "absentmindedly" (alarming thought, that!); another performed the amusing feat of tracing his initials on a convenient snow-bank. Shades of crude little boys and their obsessions! Is this man come of age? The truth is, it's become a gimmick, like the stage business of selecting and lighting a cigarette, to conceal inadequacy of action, or like the use of the auxiliary "do" or "did" in poetry to eke out a stubborn metre. But that such trivia should be emphasized, while man's spiritual requirements and experiences are dismissed as unreal, is symptomatic of the myopia of the times. Now, if I do not lard my books with such passages, it is quite obviously because that is not realism to me. That is, it does not indicate the proportion which such matters bear to the whole intricate and stormy and splendid and painful business of life. I'm no stranger to the grimmer realities of everyday existence, although by the mercy of God I have hitherto been spared the excesses of agony through which thousands and millions have passed. However on the level of twentieth century living, I have seen the starker sights and I have smelled the cruder smells. But—and if this be abnormalcy, preserve me from the norm!—these do not linger long with me nor obsess my thinking. I do not wallow in them, even in the moment of contact or performance, and if they be thrust into my un- or sub-conscious, that's fine; that's a good place for them. I'll be glad to leave them there.

Now, if I dare to give a down-to-earth example: an island where I have lived almost every summer since my teens, although, alas, now ringed with mainland cottages, all of them operating gas-belching boats, is still of deliberation, primitive. Until recently

we had oil lamps, we cook and heat on a wood stove, and the conveniences are inconveniently independent of civilized amenities—if that isn't euphemistic for a "privy" I don't know the meaning of the word! Now, for many years, even on an island with few inches of earth, this presented no difficulties. Sturdy sons of the soil were easy to hire for the necessary operations. But with the increase of tourist trade and installation of plumbing on the mainland, the hardier breed is dying out. So several times, this past summer among them, acting on the principle that anything Hercules could do I could do better, I with my own bare hands and a stout spade, but without the aid of a convenient river, cleansed our Augean stables.

It did me good. There is a character building, fear-liberating catharsis, in our soft society, particularly to a woman whose work is largely mental, in performing the lowliest and most revolting of physical work. It carries with it a sense of achievement of vindication, of paying some minute fraction of one's debt to people whose constant performance of such tasks have made our refinement possible. I should greatly prefer never to do it again.

But for me to write a graphic play-by-play—make that shovel-by-shovel—description of the sights and smells and dangers of that mercifully brief period would give it a prominence out of all proportion to its duration: to my feelings at the time, to the thoughts and activities and delights of two months' living on the island. And for what good? If my writing was accurate and literally evocative—unless you belonged to the *avante garde*, whose interest in reading must be, I often think, masochistic, or how can they plough through such lengthy dreariness?—you would be both bored and nauseated; whereas, if I turned the event into humour (the only aspect of it with any appeal to me), that would be a triumph of mind over matter, of spirit over flesh. And that is the very triumph which is anathema to the materialist.

But to my point: The undue emphasis on the one minimal act or experience blows it up to disproportionate size, and diminishes the effect of what is equally real and important, because individual. I doubt if I'm more likely to retain such passages in my mind than most, but the soul growth of a country adolescent described in a recent Canadian novel comes back to me only in a series of questions, spyings, invitations, experiments in sex. And almost every man who writes or has his writing published regarding his teenage period seems to have had little else on his mind, or met girls with nothing else on theirs. Now that is emphatically not true of various young people whom I knew well, or of myself or my sister or of my brothers. These feelings existed, these questions occurred, these suggestions were made or overheard, but there were other things to think about and to

crowd them out. The birds didn't have to make their nests in our hair.

So to the positive side of my topic: What is Christian reality? It's my life and experience, and yours, and yours and yours. It's the life and experience of everyone who has come into living contact with Jesus Christ as Lord in every century and in every country and in every milieu—lives and experiences rich and varied, or curtailed and restricted by human standards. It is the thought and emotion and actions and striving and anguish and joy, the serenity and desperation, (but not despair) the slow slogging on, the "periods of dryness" as C. S. Lewis puts them, the black night of the soul, the lifting renewal of strength and courage, the awe and wonder and inextinguishable laughter, of children and young people, of middle-aged and elderly and old; it is the time when everything goes wrong, and one's nerves are on edge; it is the mystic harmony, linking sense with sound and sight"; it is someone we love dying of cancer—in spite of prayer; it is someone living for years to make the lives of others a hell—in spite of prayer. And it is so abundant a richness of thought and poignant sensation that the mind goes faint with longing for the power to express and grasp what is beyond expression. It is everything but with a difference. Our colours are what J. M. Barrie called "fairy colours," (in the days when that term had only respectable connotations) "like ours with a light behind them," the colours of *Perelandra*. It includes back-sliding, and doubt and pain and disappointment and frustrations; it includes being caught up into the third heaven and hearing things not lawful—and not possible if it were lawful—to utter. But it's more, for it compasses the world made through its Lord and redeemed by him, it coexists with tidal waves and earthquakes and volcanic eruptions and disasters on land and sea and air; it faces ugliness and bestiality and cruelty and abuse of every good gift; it faces the wordless suffering of animals, the darkened life of numberless human beings, the grim threat of unbridled power, and the diabolical use of human knowledge. And it sees all this more clearly, because it does not wear the distorting glasses of self- and man-worship which permit the mirages of a man-planned utopia to brighten the dreariness of the immediate scene.

It sees more clearly, too, because nothing can take it by surprise. Every possible devastation of human sin has been revealed and described in Scripture in language that rivals the frankest modern terminology, with this difference: it was written to warn and to prepare and to comfort, and not for shock or sales or self-satisfaction or self-aggrandizement. And it feels far more intensely because we aren't calloused, and because (faintly, weakly, coldly, but growingly) we are learning to love, because this is a personal concern to us, because these are souls for

whom Christ died and because we realize in the spoiling of God's designed beauty something of the burden borne by Him. But we "wear our rue with a difference." For—impossible though it is to explain, hard as it is to believe—yet we know by faith, and we have our knowledge constantly reinforced with little individual unprovable but unshakeably proven experiences, that our Lord is in control: that the apparently meaningless is meaningful, that disaster has a sequel, that there will be a consummation, and that consummation will be brought about by a God of justice, who is himself love and who will be no man's debtor.

And remember, this is no easier and no harder to believe now than when fathers and brothers and husbands and wives and daughters and friends were being brought before councils and tribunals, flogged, thrown to wild beasts, sold as slaves, sent to galleys, burned, imprisoned, tortured by the Inquisition. The difference isn't in what we see or know; it is in the manner of seeing, the addendum of knowledge, the being—not because we are worthy and not smugly, but gloriously—in the know, in possession of a secret which, though we don't understand now, will make marvellous sense of our present puzzle. The difference is not in absence of pain, but in over-ruling peace; not in immunity from sorrow, but in fulness of joy; and better still, in the mute, unremarkable until recognized as miraculously-granted, power to wait through the horror of great darkness until the morning. And best of all it is the fact that we are never alone.

Now I am aware of the fact that, as soon as the Christian talks of joy and gratitude, someone promptly snarls about living conditions somewhere, about there being no God since Auschwitz, about the selfish evangelicals concerned with their own souls (usually concluding with a reference to John Newton's slave-trading activity!). And God forbid that I should pass light criticism on anybody who gives himself, with a devotion that shames many of us, to a cause that seems righteous to him. But it is the wilful or ignorant suggestion that Christians have made no contribution to social betterment, which causes me to doubt either the intelligence or the sincerity of such critics.

I may be forgiven for questioning the genuine philanthropy of those whose espousal of one pet cause, if successful—whether bomb-banning or better housing or legal abortion—would still leave the beneficiaries in a state which is incomparably more general today than when Emerson described most men as "leading lives of quiet desperation." Because the non-Christians who support these movements most vocally, far from being pleased from any comfort that others can derive from a faith that they cannot share, angrily and jealously try to snatch away what they have. I cite the example of a leading news editor jeering on television at the faith of the woman he was interviewing, the brave quiet woman, who

returned from the Congo with her sons after the murder of her missionary-husband. I cite the newspaper heading in the case of a recent casualty connected with a faith-healing group: "Girl of 18 would be alive today if she had believed that God was dead." No-one countered, when a judge deplored 81 cases of suicides under 19 years of age, "These youngsters would be alive today if they had believed in the living God."

But "Surely," somebody would like to say, "we Christians should write about the starker realities, if only to show that we do know about them, that we're with it." That is your prerogative; it may be your gift. If you can bring to bear the basic background of Christian belief to relieve a foreground peopled with hippies, junkies, perverts, prostitutes—only don't give the impression either that their situation is hopeless or that it doesn't need changing, by all means go ahead. Only, as they say in *The Music Man*, "You've got to know the territory." Personally, I don't, not well enough to write about, and I have two other reasons for keeping to other fields. First, such books (like the obscene in language) tend to multiply the very situations they describe. Secondly, there is enough stark reality in the lives of people with whom I am acquainted to keep me busy in the territory that I do know.

That, after all, is the basic difference in approach. In spite of such ridiculous and insincere statements as that "we love people just as they are without trying to change them"—which must mean to smile whimsically at the child-beater, to give an approving nod to the dog tormentor, to pat the degenerating alcoholic, to purr at the extortionist or the sweatshop employer—the Christian, conscious of his own need for changing and working out that change with fear and trembling, must passionately (what else does "love" mean?) desire the change which Christ can bring about in sordid and darkened and beauty-spoiling lives. More—and it's no pipe-dream and no wishful thinking—the Christian knows that such change has occurred, dramatically, incredibly in situations as seemingly fantastic and desperate. And his Christ is the same today as he was in all those yesterdays.

History today is becoming uniquely the possession of the Christian; modern man is deliberately isolating himself and repudiating, by his own statement, his connection with his historical heritage. But even as the shape of things to come has been foreshadowed to us, so that when the terrifying, the final, the cataclysmic, occurs, we won't be caught unawares. So history has reinforced the promise of scripture and is a constant reminder that with our God nothing shall be impossible.

Obscenity and lewdness is fashionable? But so it was in the 18th century when swearing betrayed noble birth, and it gave way to such punctiliousness as endured well into my youth when "gee"

and "darn" were frowned on as blasphemy and cursing, without the courage of their convictions. Unbelief in the church? Remember Luther's impression of the cynicism and vice rampant in Rome? Look at the weary sophisticated aftermath of religious struggle in restoration England. Violence, depravity, bloodthirstiness among rich and poor alike? Into what age did you think the Christian church was born? Adolescent iniquity? gangs? dissolute habits? assured and indifferent atheism? The roster of the church is liberally sprinkled with brands plucked from the burning and transformed into gentle or militant saints.

Also, in a particularly new way, the Christian possesses mankind. A prolific writer speaking to an audience of several authors several years ago, amazed me by speaking of the difficulty of imagining himself back in the 18th or 19th centuries, because beyond that, he said, men appeared like creatures of a different species. My first reaction was incredulity, for our experience is surely the oneness, the unchanged nature of man, wherever and whenever we meet him in history. Then, realizing that he was speaking in all seriousness, I sought (and I think found) the reason. For in shutting himself off from the source of human motivation, so-called modern man is shutting himself off from understanding of that motivation, that is, from humanity.

Christian reality is no closing of the eyes and mind and heart to suffering and ugliness and vice. It is refusal to close them to the sure revelation within and without of God who has chosen and called us, who became and suffered the ugliness so that his beauty might be seen and revealed to and in us. I could tell—no, I can't tell because it defies description—but I could tell some of these theoretical moaners, and so could some of you, what the dark night of the soul is, what the man or woman of God can suffer in the lonely depths of being. But I cannot but speak the things that I have seen or heard. I have to tell more, for there will always be more. For there is Christ, and "He is bringing many sons unto glory."

Grace Irwin

... we are all agreed on one thing: that the times through which we are now living mark the end of a period which, for convenience, we can say began with the Renaissance... The statement, "Man is a fallen creature, with a natural bias to do evil," and the statement, "Men are good by nature and made bad by society," are both presuppositions... If, as I do, you assent to the first, your art and politics will be very different from what they will be if you assent, like Rousseau or Whitman, to the second.

W. H. Auden, in *"The Intent Of The Critic."* (1941).

THE EFFICACY OF 'DISCUSSION'?

It appears to be in the nature of things that all moral and intellectual activity runs the risk of confusion between the 'means' and the 'ends'. While this difficulty is accorded general recognition, it is less frequently diagnosed, understood and remedied in specific situations. The means still tends to become the end, in which case a ritualistic adherence to the means is considered adequate attainment of the end. The reverse of this; i.e., that the end justifies the means, is also a prevalent claim. The difficulty does not lie in raising both issues, means and ends, but in commitment to one at the expense of the other. In the ethical realm this dilemma is illustrated by the tension between law and liberty; in science, between methodology and informative content; in communication, between the medium and the message.

The issue of communication occupies many minds today. It is not merely a problem of passing on some information, but of having the recipient of that information accept it and act upon it. Only then is the process of communication complete. The politician endeavors to communicate in order to implement his political program; the businessman, to sell his products, the Christian, to spread the Gospel. In each case the 'process' of communicating is not identical with the 'product' to be communicated. If the product is tangible, the distinction between process and product is easily maintained. This is not the case when the product is intangible; i.e., a relationship or disposition. The goal of proclaiming the Gospel is a relationship. I suggest that the method of discussion is easily and frequently confused with the 'end'; i.e., a relationship. In the following paragraphs we want to explicate the contributions of 'discussion' as a method, and its inadequacies as an 'end'.

The Apostle Paul's experience at Athens, as recorded in Acts 17:16-31, appears rather contemporary with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of 'discussion'. The typical dynamics of a discussion usually involve at least three factors: involvement, inquiry and interpersonal relations.

1. Involvement

When the Athenian philosophers sensed that Paul had something 'new' to say, they got busy to have him discuss it with them. There is a confrontation of ideas; a response of one to the other. This direct involvement with the subject matter leads to greater interest. Involvement with ideas requires greater

effort than mere exposure to ideas. As a result, 'involvement' has a greater impact on the participant than does mere exposure. It is in this area that the method of discussion has made a valuable contribution. If an idea is presented and no response is elicited on the part of the recipient, the results, if any, are meagre. Discussion is a means of evoking responses.

2. Inquiry

Discussion often is an occasion for the cross-fertilization of ideas which more than likely will lead to fruitful inquiry into unsolved problems. As long as my thoughts are well integrated and kept in logic-tight compartments there is little need for further investigation. Interpretations and explanations remain the same; they become rigid, stale, irrelevant, and void of meaning. A new idea which challenges existing opinions and viewpoints evokes reexamination and this often leads to a new and meaningful experiences with truth; i.e., it revitalizes the genuine search for truth.

3. Interpersonal Relations

Man is not a purely intellectual being. He also has emotions and they may significantly affect his intellectual activities. A careful examination of man's reasoning processes reveals that logic and psychology are closely (but not entirely) related. A man who has been embittered toward the church finds it difficult, no matter how brilliant he is, to see any value in it, even when the available information contradicts his stance. Man's intellectual activities need emotional props. A discussion group is in the fortunate position of being able to provide the interpersonal relations that shape and channel the individual's intellectual and volitional energy.

A discussion group, because it is the setting of interpersonal relations, can actually become an 'end'. And perhaps rightly so. Satisfactory interpersonal relations are of vital importance to man's emotional, intellectual and spiritual well-being. I have found that participation in a discussion group can yield that much-needed satisfaction of being accepted, even when the intellectual substance of the discussion is virtually nil.

The ascendancy of the method of discussion over that of lecturing or 'preaching' has been phenomenal. It is due largely to one or more of the factors mentioned above. The tendency for any movement which involves human beings is to overextend itself. If a new method has brought about some improvement, then, the reasoning goes, more of this method will lead to greater improvement. Its natural limitations are easily overlooked

because past success 'proves' its effectiveness. The method of discussion is a case in point. Discussion of a problem is not equivalent to the solution of that problem; discussion of a need is not equivalent to the satisfaction of that need. In what areas is the method of discussion inadequate?

1. Comprehension

Knowledge is not purely intellectual in character. The philosophers confronting Paul illustrated this assertion perfectly. They were involved in the pursuit of truth but worshipped an 'unknown god'. No amount of discussion could lead to a personal knowledge of God.

Comprehension includes intellectual knowledge but it has an additional dimension, namely that of experience. To know God is to experience Him; to comprehend suffering is to experience it; to understand a problem fully is to encounter it in a real situation. We can discuss an atheist's reasons for not believing in God and still be taken entirely by surprise when we encounter one. Discussion is not an adequate substitute for comprehension.

2. Concern

Evidence from psychology indicates that concern for a cause may be dissipated by talking about that cause. Concern is a motivating force, the expression of which normally appears in action. Tension is the result of unexpressed concern. This tension can be reduced by verbal expression thereof. Discussion becomes a substitute for personal involvement and engenders a sense of satisfaction that at least something has been accomplished; i.e., we have discussed it, while the conditions that aroused the original concern remain unaltered. In this case, discussion is a 'means' toward the reduction of tension, but it does not bring us any nearer to achieving the 'end'. One example will suffice. 'Concern for others' is a frequent topic of discussion in groups. An ironic feature about this concern is that frequently only those who can intelligently 'discuss' that topic are fully accepted by the group. Discussion of a problem does not guarantee a genuine concern for it. Discussion may evoke concern, but it may also dissipate it.

3. Commitment

Commitment is an act of the will. Discussion can furnish alternatives to which a commitment is possible, but the commitment per se is not a part of the discussion. Paul challenged the philosophers of Athens to 'make' a commitment after they had discussed the possibility thereof. Perhaps some did, but

most of them did not (Acts 17:32). We have said before that discussion facilitates cross-fertilization of ideas. This usually raises questions and problems. It is a favorite ploy to focus on these questions and problems and utilize them as the reason for staving off a commitment.

Such are the strengths and weaknesses of discussion.

H. Regehr

WE BELIEVE

Though silence cold breaks homes apart
and anger flings its poisoned dart
from race to race, and creed to creed, —
though lust for money regulates,
and cruel ambition dominates,
the feverish dynamo of greed, —
Still we believe that love is strong,
that love can surely conquer wrong,
can melt man's fortresses of ice
and set him free.

Though man destroy his inner life
through jealousy and selfish strife
and isolate himself through pride, —
though languishing in haughtiness
and withering in loneliness
he let no person come inside, —
Still we believe God's love can win
The man deluded by his sin,
can draw him from his castle strong,
and set him free.

John Regehr.