

FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING

It was the first time he didn't know me. So many times I'd seen so many things forgotten. Small things. From just minutes ago. Somehow never registered in his mind. So we could laugh when he put on his baseball cap with the letters stitched boldly, C.R.S. And he'd delight to tell that it stood for Can't Remember Shit! After which he'd proceed to ask once again a question that he had perhaps asked just a few minutes before, and probably an hour before that. And I could see that this was their routine, my Mom and Dad's, day by day, moment by moment. His frustration real, but soothed so deeply by her patience. The forgetting painful to see, but the loving a joy to witness. C.R.S., though, had never before meant Can't Remember Son.

There we were the night after Thanksgiving, sitting in our home filled with so many memories of so much life. But sometimes memory fades in the evening of a day, or of a life. And on this evening, it faded fast. This face, etched so deeply in my memory and foreshadowing so inevitably my own forty years hence, turned leftwards to me and asked, "Now, who are you?"

Denial can be instantaneous, so I presume he's wondering which of his three sons. "I'm Jim."

"Do you have come connection here?" Instantaneous denial can be pierced rather instantaneously.

"Dad, I'm you son."

"No, you're not my son." Head shaking slowly side to side, as if to say "I'd at least remember my own son." Denial can be mutual.

Two sets of eyes look at Mom, as both of us call her these days. Her loving, gently smiling nod tells him, 'He is, indeed, your son,' tells me, 'He does, indeed, get like this sometimes,' and most importantly tells us both, 'It'll be okay.' She gives both sets of eyes permission to turn to each other. In tears, but in love.

"I can't believe I don't remember my own son."

"It's okay, Dad, I can remember well enough for both of us." Really believing what her nod had said. It is okay. I knew that, holding him now. And hoped he knew it, too. Like I used to know it, shaking from a childhood nightmare, when he'd tell me, "It's okay." Like me then, he now could sleep. Waking, he knew me. And, ah!, great gift of forgetting, didn't remember that he had forgotten.

Waiting for that moment of waking, I knew something of our Advent waiting for a final and Absolute Remembering. Now, not knowing many things. But able to love even in the not knowing. Then, we shall know and love. Now, we love and wait. And it is okay.

Vermillion
December 3, 1995.

HATRED IS INSANE

Bill is a long-term volunteer at Casa San Martin in Gallup NM, the soup kitchen and shelter operated there by the Missionaries of Charity. During our time at the Casa over Spring Break this past year, he was a constant companion. We cooked and laughed with him. He took us on his grocery store runs, trying each morning to beat the pig farmers to get the food that was being thrown away. We hiked canyons together, listened to his stories, and of course we prayed, because he did that most of the time. Our most treasured memory, though, is of a moment that we didn't really share with Bill. He awakened us each morning at 5:30 to help with breakfast. Except one morning when he didn't come.

We discovered that Bill had been assaulted by a man who had stayed in the shelter that night. He'd been dropped to the floor, and when he tried to dial 9-1-1, the phone got ripped off the wall and thrown at him. As Bill fled, his assailant grabbed a crucifix off the wall and snapped it in half. Bill stopped in his tracks. Outraged. And ready to give the fight the man had sought.

As he turned to fight, though, he later told us, he couldn't take his eyes off the broken cross and the broken body of Jesus. "I realized," he said, "that the cross is all about forgiveness - and that's what I had to do." He got decked again; then another volunteer stepped in to restrain his assailant. Telling us the story, a bemused disbelief in his eyes, Bill just muttered, "Hatred is insane."

Later, as we gathered in the kitchen to fix lunch, Bill was there - the broken body of Jesus in his hands, the broken cross on the table, right next to the glue with which he was about to set to work. And we realized that this is what he is trying to do with his life: to heal the broken body of Jesus, which he met daily in the poorest of the poor, whom he served. And whom he had met that morning in the most "distressing disguise," as Mother Teresa would have put it, of a violent man who needed to be loved.

We met Jesus, too, a wounded healer whose other name is Bill. And we pray that we will never forget to try to see what he saw, to know what he knew, and to do what he did.

Vermillion
Spring, 1997

gives stark reminder of an absent warmth
 whose return seems so distant
as daily the pilgrimage of fire
 continues across the skies
 with its promise of tropic heat
 while I am chilled to the marrow of my bones.
and the whitened horizon
which extends in seemingly endless expanse
 leaving me at the center - isolated
 and alone -
 gives me pause to question:
 what deeper chill
 what greater distance
 what wider expanse
 and what more terrifying aloneness
 afflict my soul?
the passionate embrace of life
with its flames of committed love
 and wondrous delight
 in the simple existence
 of everything
 and everyone
 eludes my feebly grasping efforts.
but must it elude me forever?
 i wait.
 how long?
and the halting steps of growing friendship
 which seek the unity of spirit
yield painfully the human truth
 of eternal distance
 and the radical aloneness of my deepest self.
but must the distance be eternal.
 and the frustration of unity be forever?
 i wait.
 how long?
i so desperately need the coming of Someone
 Who would fulfill the passionate yearning
 and the frustrated searching of my life.
i need. i wait. how long?
come, Lord Jesus!

Pierre, December 1979

ASH WEDNESDAY
(for Kim)

giggling girl
approaches solemn priest
with innocent flesh to be ashed.
he giggles, too,
while speaking of dust,
though never dreaming
he meant it.
but to dust she has gone
leaving a lonely priest
to ponder
just
one
question:
which is stronger,
the ashes
or
the giggle?

St. Paul, September 1984

THE THIRTEENTH STATION: THE BODY OF JESUS IS PLACED IN THE ARMS OF HIS MOTHER

The central event of my Dad's life occurred when he was three years old. His mother died. This loss left an ache in his heart that was seldom spoken, though constantly present. I heard him speak of it

only once, late in life. He shared that at the heart of his prayer was a hope that God would one day take him to heaven because, he said, "I want my mama to hold me." That prayer seared his soul for eighty years. It was answered on this side of death in the love of two women.

His wife, friend and lover of fifty-eight years had another role as well; he called her "Mom." How true the biblical words: "Isaac took Rebekah into his tent; he married her, and thus she became his wife. In his love for her Isaac found solace after the death of his mother" (Genesis 24.67). In the passion of their love, my dad and mom's, six of us were brought to life. But there was a seventh birth which preceded ours, a rebirth. Dad had found new life in the passion of love.

An oftentimes unobservant kid, it was a passion so suffusing my life that I seldom noticed. In later years, though, I was transfixed whenever I saw it. The tenderness of their aging touch revealed their knowledge of every inch of each other's bodies, hearts and souls. The caress of a cheek, the massage of a tired back, the pinch of a toe to loosen a sock at a nap's beginning, a pimple expertly popped – these were the hands of hearts whose union in the passion of love had brought profound healing, joy and life.

But in the final years of their shared life, passion had entered upon its ineluctable second meaning: a passion of forgetfulness and confusion, of pain and powerlessness. Dad's signature grin would still flash, but it could be followed so soon by a cloud of unknowing, a grimace of fear. Through it all, there was one ever-present desire: to be with her. "I want my mama to hold me." And she did. And he knew. Even when he knew absolutely nothing else. He knew that. And it was all he needed to know.

Through all those years, another woman lived in the center of Dad's heart and soul: the Mother of God. His devotion to her was intense, witnessed in the tangled and oft-broken rosaries he fingered prayerfully. He saw in her a mother so tenderly holding a child, and he was in her arms. With Jesus. There's room for all in this embrace. And he prayed – how many tens of thousands of times – "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death." He saw in this prayer another embrace. The same woman. The same child, now a man, his body lifeless and bloodied, but still held in love. Dad prayed to be held in that hour, too.

And he was. As I kept vigil with him through the nights of his last week of life, I had only one thought, one mission: he needed Mom to be with him "at the hour of death." I was to wait, and watch. To be sure that she would be there. And she was.

In their final embrace this side of death, I saw, in that fleeting yet eternal moment, the mystery of God revealed. We are embraced in birth and death, in the passion of love and the passion of pain – embraced by the Passionate God from Whom life comes and to Whom we journey through death. Jesus' cry, "My God, why have you abandoned me?", was answered in the loving embrace of his mama: "I haven't."

So, too, does God embrace us, in both the passions of our lives. So, too, are we to embrace each other, to be the arms of God embracing each other at the foot of the cross. Dad's mama holds him now, and Mary, too. We're left to hold each other, now and at the hour of our death. And to desire with passion that day when we shall all be embraced by God and by all who are held by God.

Vermillion, Lent 1997

The words of Deuteronomy hold a haunting beauty for me this Lenten season. "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants shall live." In the days of preparing for Lent, I have held almost constantly in my heart, and occasionally but painfully in my arms, an anguished friend who is finding that choice almost impossible to make.

The depth of her darkness is unfathomable to my mind: her numbness I can't begin truly to feel, or perhaps un-feel would be more apt. I can only pray in an utter helplessness that serves to remind me poignantly Who is God, and who is not. Pray and love.

The starkness of the choice with which she struggles, literally whether to live or to die, seems a black hole of incomprehensibility. Yet there are flashes of insight. Frighteningly, I see that the choice is not all that much a stranger. It's really the choice of every day, and each moment of every day. Hers is stark and anguished; mine, often not even noticed. Life-giving or death-dealing words: which shall I speak? Open hands or clenched fist: which shall I extend? One choice, and we all live a little more. The other, and something in all of us dies.

Vermillion, Lent 1996

Where else would I begin, but on the softball field?

In the early years, Newman women's softball was a sight to behold. Hollywood couldn't have improved on the cast for a movie about the misadventures of a hapless group of players, most of whom had never before played. Coaching was an endless adventure. I often recalled Tom Hanks's famous line from *A League of Their Own*, revised to fit the game: "There's no crying in softball!" Except I was the one doing the crying!

I never have liked to lose, but like a lot of things in life, you get used to it. In fact, though, the black background of chronic losing may have been what allowed so many moments of pure exhilaration to explode in more brilliant color than a Chagall window. Like Clo's first game in left field.

She was the first, and only, Canadian-Goan I've ever met. And I suspect they don't play a lot of ball – hard or soft -- in Goa or in her neck of the Canadian woods. At least she hadn't. Our version of spring training began with lessons on fitting fingers into glove. And learning rules, lots of rules. One never realizes how closely the complexity of the game's rulebook rivals that of the Church's Code of Canon Law, until you start trying to explain from scratch. And like a good canon lawyer, a coach in such a situation -- at least this coach -- eventually succumbs to responding to the incessant litany of 'Why?'s' by chanting in progressively shriller intonation, "Because that's the rule!"

There comes a moment, though, whether your fingers fit into the glove or the rules fit in your brain, it's time to play ball. Through the first several innings, it had been just another game filled with misadventures. Casey Stengel's Mets would have been awestruck at the manifold diversity of ways we discovered to bungle the game. But we'd played just well enough that night to get past the fifteen-run-after-three-innings rule, and we often didn't get that far. A small victory in itself. And then, for the fifth inning stretch, a rousing chorus of *Amazing Grace*.

We were in the field, and their first two batters had reached. First and second, nobody out. Their third batter hit a scorching drive down the left field line. The runners took off, not wanting to be passed by the hitter who no doubt was thinking inside-the-park-home-run. Clo broke spontaneously to her right, getting a jump on the ball that proved conclusively, once and for all, that there is a Jungian archetype of The Outfielder, lurking somewhere down deep in the subconscious mind, just awaiting The Call. As the ball screamed down the line, hooking ever further from her reach, she just kept running, like the gazelle in *The Song of Songs*, knowing precisely where to run, even if not really knowing how or why.

And then, The Transfiguration. A last, lunging, cross-body, backhand reach. And the ball disappears from mortal view. The Outfielder has made The Catch. The batter is out, and the runners are hung out to dry. In the coach's mind a vision unfolds of the most unimaginable event, the easy flip to second and the equally easy relay to first, and forget St. Paddy's shamrock, the Three-in-One Godhead is revealed in the Mystery of the Triple Play.

But the vision recedes, the coach falls from heaven to earth, and mid-fall sees on the lush, green earth of Left Field, an ecstatic mystic joyously jumping up and down, up and down, up and down, ball clutched tightly to her bountiful bosom, screaming, "I caught it! I caught it! I caught it!"

He screams, too: "Throw the damn ball! . . . damn ball! . . . damn ball!" Each pointless echo losing conviction. He's always been a sucker for mystics. And her joy is more catching even than her glove. It radiates through the others on the field, who, in that moment, I think, more than any other, became Teammates.

Vermillion, Summer 1997

Triumph of the Cross

now accustomed greenery soaring skyward
begins its glorious explosion of golden color
in desperate burst of radiant splendour
in defiance of impending death:
fall, ye windblown creatures of wood,
the entombing world awaits your descent
upon drought-parched earth, now hardened,
as evening's chill
envelopes apollo's rays.

'tis your descent which signals birthing
of the season of death
when barren branches of reaching wood
stretch forth hauntingly
to memorialize the brevity of your radiance:
unfrocked sticks,
whose gnarled and twisted emptiness
recalls to us your passing
as beneath their abandoned heights
you lie on well trod paths
to be crushed underfoot
and commingled with earth
as fodder for a distant spring.
so cold, the towering wood!
so mangled, its golden passion!
but, ah, so tender, the paschal hope of eternal spring!

Pierre, October 1980

IN MEMORIAM

"A great man of peace," Bishop Hoch has called him, and we might hasten to add that he was such a man in difficult times. As peacemaker in a tumultuous age, Paul VI has left us a host of challenging memories: the spirit of openness to the modern world with which he guided the Second Vatican Council; the eloquent appeal for a dis-armed world which he made as the first pope to stand on

American soil; the warm embraces with which he greeted the leaders of other world religions; the firmness with which he upheld the traditional values of Christian marriage and priestly celibacy; the tolerance with which he treated those who dissented from his teaching; the insightfulness of his plea for evangelization in our day; and the boldness of his efforts on behalf of persons in the developing countries. These, and countless other memories, stand as his testament to faith and as his challenge to us. We are grateful for his life of service and pray that we, and the new leadership of the church, might be up to the challenge.

Pierre, August 1978

SAINT THERESE PRAYER FOR EVANGELIZATION

Therese, our sister,
we come to you in prayer.
Your vocation to love,
given by God,
inspired simplicity in your life.
For to love is to live simply,
like the flower that unfolds
when warmed by the sun.
Faith was your sun, unfolding your love

for the child Jesus
and those whom he loved.

Pray for us, Little Flower,
pray for us before God.
Let us too be blossoms
unfolding in faith
to bring beauty and life
to our hungering world.

Ask our God whom you love
to grace us with his life:
So that we might bring hope
to those without faith.
So that we might bring faith
to those without love.
So that we might bring love
to any we find alone.

Pray God to bless our labors,
and to accept our prayers.
May all one day share
in the gift we share with you:
the treasure of faith,
the pearl of hope,
the mystery of love.

Pray for us,
Little Flower of Jesus,
to God who blesses us with life,
today and everyday,
forever and ever. Amen!

Sioux Falls, September 1982

BEAUTIFUL DOING, BEAUTIFUL BEING

Mother Teresa loved to talk about trying to spend her days doing something beautiful for God. And surely she did so, day in and day out. And in the midst of that beautiful doing, she became a beautiful being; through a life of doing that was holy, she became a holy being. Which is what we call a 'saint.' The French dramatist Paul Claudel once wrote, "There is only one tragedy in life, not to become

a saint.” No tragedy here. Mother Teresa’s life story could perhaps best be called a romance; she was in love with God, and saw everyone and everything in the light of that love. And a lifetime of loving action brought into being this loving woman.

We’re given an insight here into the Catholic understanding of salvation. From the outside, people sometimes think that our emphasis on action/doing/works is a matter of storing up credits in a heavenly registrar’s office so that we finally can qualify to graduate? But what we mean by ‘saintliness’ doesn’t refer to the external; it has to do, rather, with who we are be-coming. We become who we are by the choices and decisions we make in life, especially insofar as we truly act on those choices and decisions. And that’s the crux of the matter. Who am I? And who am I becoming?

The early Christian writers (commonly referred to as the Fathers of the church) often commented on the statement in Genesis that we are created “in the image and likeness of God.” Many of them stated that we are the “image” of God from the beginning, but must continually be re-created as God’s “likeness.” And we do so through a life lived faithfully.

In Teresa of Calcutta, we quite clearly see a likeness to God. She is a ‘saint,’ not because of all the wonderful things she did, but because of who she became through that doing. And that doing was not hers alone. It was a life lived through the power of God’s grace. By cooperating with that grace, by a life of intense prayer, Jesus lived in the center of her heart and transformed her heart daily through her loving and faithful life of service into one of the most beautiful icons of God that we are ever likely to see. That’s the same transformation that God desires to work in all of us. But we must cooperate with that divine desire.

Vermillion, September 1997

Damien

Damien Kraus, O.S.B., was a monk of Blue Cloud Abbey, Marvin SD. Scripture scholar, novice master, ecumenist, spiritual director, teacher, friend. He died suddenly at the age of 45, on December 28, 1981, the Feast of the Holy Innocents, as he would have insisted that I mention! Just a couple weeks later, the younger priests of the Diocese of Sioux Falls gathered at Blue Cloud for our annual continuing education workshop, which Damien and I organized and planned. Our first Mass, together with the monks of the Abbey, was celebrated in Damien’s memory. The abbot asked me to preach.

The last time I stood in this church was to bury Damien. On that day, as I stood before his then breathless, though once so vital, body, he was once again my teacher as he had previously been so many times. For as I looked upon his flesh I was struck by a brute fact, and by a question which stubbornly provoked an insight.

Factually, I was struck by the potent truth of our liturgical formula: ‘from dust you come only to return to dust.’ And yet there was also the question: Is there not a difference between this second state of dust and the first?

The obvious answer is that the difference is what each of us IS right now. Our breathing, looking, inquiring, thinking, hoping, desiring, fearing, sorrowing, laughing, and loving is a journey from dust to dust: it is a journey that makes all the difference.

For the journey is measured by a progress in meaning. The chaos of life becomes ordered – to a degree. By our growth in understanding, we create a ‘world’ – life becomes meaning-full.

And meaning becomes ours in many forms. Before language, there is love. And accordingly, at my mother’s breast my world was forming. I was given there not simply milk, but meaning. For there I learned, before I could even question, that the universe is a place of nourishment and of warmth. A meaning never to be lost – despite the hungers and coldness of subsequent days.

Meaning also is carried by important symbols in our lives. As a child kneeling in cassock and surplice, incensing the golden monstrance which contained God – I learned that this universe is a place of incredible mystery.

And as I finally learned language, I not only could create my own world, but I was graced by contact with the worlds of others – especially with the world of the dead, with the worlds left by others in the books which delighted my childhood and which continue to bring delight, and meaning.

But finally, meaning is carried for us by the incarnate drama of a concrete human life. The decisions, the smiles, the tears, the anger, and the hope of another person who touches us gives order to our own struggle with chaos – gives direction to our own journey from dust to dust.

Damien’s drama was filled with meaning – and not only for himself.

It would be sheer folly to pretend that I could grasp what his life means in any absolute sense, as he stands before God. And it would be presumptuous to think that I could begin to understand what he means for you, his Benedictine brothers. And really, since life always exceeds the power of words to convey, I cannot hope to express or even grasp myself what he means for me.

But I can hint at that meaning. And I share with you three places in which I have progressed from that first state of dust because of my encounter with this extraordinary monk.

For Damien, the world was a place of action. When confronted with situations of need, he acted. Whether it be on behalf of married love, ecumenical understanding, priestly maturity, or monastic holiness, he labored for a better life for others. He seemed never to simply throw up his hands in helpless disgust. And his action has given meaning to the lives of many. From that action, I have learned that we do not live in a universe of futility; I do make a difference. I am not helpless in the face of the forces of disorder. Damien lived in a world of creative freedom; he opened that world to me.

Secondly, he lived a life of ‘worshipful irreverence.’ For Damien, the Holy Mystery God was to be worshipped, and Him alone. The traditions of men received no reverence from his mind or mouth. Because he knew that the son of man is lord of the Sabbath, and lord of ecclesiastical law, and, yes, even lord of the rule of Benedict. And so his irreverence toward the traditions of seminary and diocese, toward the policies of movements in which he was involved, and toward the accustomed practices of

monastic living was an attitude of worship. From him I learned that human law and tradition may well be useful but it is never worth taking seriously for it is literally nothing in the face of God.

And finally, I recall thinking immediately of Damien when I first read, some years back, of Andrew Greeley's description of what is needed in religious leadership in our day: 'a holy, hopeful man who smiles.' That incredible grin, and that boisterous laugh. The sometimes impractical 'practical jokes.' These were the laughter of a holy man – of a man who knew that however tragic things may at times seem, they are never truly and ultimately tragic. Without shrinking from life's pain, Damien knew that life would ultimately be comic, and that its end would be a sumptuous banquet of gourmet food and choicest wine. He lived in anticipation of that banquet; his laugh was an act of faith. My memory of that smiling face continues to give me hope – and meaning.

And that's what it is for us to be in communion – as we gather around a table to become one body, one spirit in faith. Damien touched us all. As one day my breathless flesh will lie in the earth – my second state of dust will be different, will be more, than the first. And Damien will be a real part of that difference. He has been part of my journey – he will be part of my destiny.

We are invited to be that for each other. To touch each other's lives in such a way as to share meaning. To give order to chaos, to give direction to our wandering. That is the communion of saints. That is eucharist.

Our communion with him was expressed beautifully in the recollection of Damien's funeral written by one of his students, Teresa Chief Eagle: "it was letting go of a man that we shall never forget and never stop loving."

And so to You, the Mystery from Whom we spring and into Whom we live, praise and thanks for this monk – our teacher, our brother, and our friend – whom we remember, and whom we love.

Blue Cloud Abbey
January 19, 1982

DIFFERENT VOICES: MAN – NOT GOD – MAY KEEP WOMEN FROM THE PRIESTHOOD

Bishop Paul Dudley's recent article on the role of women in the Catholic Church concluded with an ominous theological maxim: "If the ordination of women is not the will of God, any efforts intended toward that end will ultimately prove fruitless; if however, the ordination of women is the will of God, no effort will prevent it." This piece of wisdom is the recurring slogan of every quietist ideology to have emerged in the first two Christian millennia.

The ominous danger of this principle is that it pays insufficient attention to the professed reality of sin. It is my understanding of common Christian orthodoxy that human freedom can stifle the operation of God's Spirit and thus frustrate the fulfillment of God's will. Is not the economic exploitation of impoverished peoples a profound example of human freedom effectively opposing the

divine will for justice? Does not the carnage of child abuse and feticide portray graphically the fact that God allows human freedom to effectively opposing the divine will for justice? Does not the carnage of child abuse and feticide portray graphically the fact that God allows human freedom to effectively operate in opposition to Her/His will? Human effort can prevent things which God wills. And things which God wills become realities in the human world – more often than not – only through the cooperation of human effort with the initiating movement of divine grace.

The terrifying thing is that this initiating grace can be refused, and it can be refused by priest, bishop and pope as well as by anyone else; that refusal is what we term sin.

It is eminently possible for things that are not God's will to continue in human history. Beyond human history, the triumph of grace will be total. But in this world and in this church, sin can frustrate grace. And to say that we must accept what is as being clearly the will of God is a quietist invitation to passive resignation in the face of a very ambiguous reality.

Accordingly, it could be very possible for God to will the participation of women in ordained Catholic ministry, and for that will to be resisted by those who have the frustrating power to do so. It is because of that possibility that searching questions must be addressed to the word that God has definitively spoken in history and to the contemporary human world in which traces of the Spirit's operation may be discerned.

My reading of biblical texts is rather different from Bishop Dudley's. It seems not at all clear to me that Jesus appointed the apostles to positions in which they were responsible for the administration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments. This may well be the language of a 20th century Chancery Office, but it is hardly the language of the Gospels! That the 12 played a unique role in the life of Jesus is unquestionable. But precisely what their role was to be in the post-resurrection and ascension community is not at all clear.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no clear indication of an apostle presiding at the celebration of Eucharist. Indeed, the emerging consensus of historical and biblical scholarship seems to be that the Eucharist was celebrated in households and that those who presided in the households presided at Eucharist. It is more probable than not that these presiders included women. Indeed, in Romans 16.7, Paul even refers to his co-worker Iouinia (Junia) as a apostle; this name is quite manifestly feminine as recognized by St. Jerome, who rendered it Julia in his Latin translation of the Bible. The apostles were a much larger and more varied group than the 12, to whom Bishop Dudley restricts his attention.

The fact is that the whole shape of ministry in the first Christian generations was in considerable state of flux. There was simply no absolute clarity as to what the Lord intended. That the ministry of Jesus had to be continued was clear. In exactly what fashion this was to be done became clarified only through time and through many efforts to see what fit the situation.

Undoubtedly, the church reflected constantly on their memory of Jesus in guiding these attempts. We must do the same today. And this leads me to place one fundamental objection to Bishop Dudley's reading of the Gospels. He holds it to be evident that "Christ clearly intended that different types of people have different types of ministries." My reading of the Gospel convinces me

that Jesus thought precious little in terms of 'types' of people. That he expected different things of different persons is sure; but he expected that of them as persons, not as instances of a certain type. Jesus related to men, women, and children on the basis of who they were as persons – not on the basis of the categories to which they belonged.

This is precisely why Saint Paul could sing that “in Christ Jesus, there is no Gentile or Jew, slave or free, male or female.” The world’s types are to mean nothing in the body of Jesus. That is a song that many of us are trying to learn once again how to sing.

Sioux Falls Argus Leader
September 1986

THE PARADOX OF CHRISTMAS LIVING

Throughout his many essays and stories, G.K. Chesterton took delight in developing a notion of the paradoxical nature of Christianity – how it combines the strange and the secure, life and death, nature and grace, finitude and the infinite. He described the feast of Christmas as paradoxical in this sense: “... that the hands that had made the sun and stars were too small to reach the huge heads of the cattle.” Bethlehem, we might say, is emphatically a place where extremes meet.

And it is this that is professed and affirmed when Christians gather to tell and hear stories, to sing carols and to look upon figures, exquisite or crude, of persons from another time and place: THE WORD HAS BECOME FLESH. Extremes have met and contraries have been united in the mystery of Incarnation.

The poverty of the most intimate of human moments being shared with asses and sheep, the weakness of a helpless infant's shriek at the pain of birth, the dependence upon the warmth and nourishment of the mother's breasts – all combine to form an image of the human creature: weak, finite, dependent. Yet, there is more. Glorious choruses of heavenly singing, elegant visitors from a mysterious land, and wondrous announcements, only vaguely understood, which tell of a future glory barely anticipated – all point toward another dimension, another world, present in the midst of what had appeared ordinary.

Christmas is every-day; Bethlehem is every-where. In the midst of our frailty, dependence, guilt and betrayal, in the midst of the hurt and resentment which we feel and the violence which we experience, we glimpse occasionally that there is something MORE to life. There are, in the midst of our everyday lives, hints of a Love which is overpowering, an Acceptance which is forgiving, a power which is gracious. Christmas is the revelation that human life, my life, is more than it seems; that there is a promise of glory in all flesh; that the worldly and the otherworldly paradoxically are one and the same.

All of which is a call to WONDER, an attitude of reverence toward all that is. It is a call to take on the attitude of Mother, Shepherd, Angel, and King toward all creation, toward all human life.

Pierre [SD] *Times*
December 23, 1978