



Transcending Contempt
Session Four
January 27th, 2024
The Rev. Christopher H. Martin
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, San Rafael, California

Evil is Privation, Goodness is Creativity

Agenda

- 9:00 Gather in both Duncan Hall and Zoom
- 9:05 Break into groups of three
- 9:20 Gather back into two larger groups, in Duncan Hall and Zoom
- 9:30 Online participants switch to YouTube, Tanner and Christopher report back
- 9:35 Teaching
- 9:55 Q & A

Teaching

- I. Introduction
 - A. Practicing WAG, Nurturing Magnanimity, Stewarding Your Halo, now a fourth practice.
 - B. Words: Very Good, Privation, Repetition, Habits, Preternatural
 - C. The Cosmos is Very Good, Evil is only Privation
- I. Evil is Privation (Three Ways)
 - A. Bad Habits: Identical repetitions that are a vampiric leeching.

B. Lying: Kierkegaard- “lying is to denounce oneself, despise God and fear your neighbor.”

C. Dark thoughts and despair as the dark font of all evil. (Perelandra)

II. Goodness is Creativity (Three Ways)

A. ‘Dance through life’ like Kierkegaard’s women, ‘the natural virtuosos’ with a ‘happy ability to vary the quotidian.’

B. Humility. Casey: ‘a respect for the nature of things.’

C. Preternatural. ‘a scanty and rare survival of that which was connatural to Adam and Eve.’ The anchoring example is the Eucharist- ‘this is my body.’

III. Creatively Inhabiting the Very Good Cosmos

A. A Complement Sandwich

B. Identify Two Good Habits (creativity, non-identical repetition) and One Bad Habit (privation, identical repetition).

C. Practice is to attend to all three and do more of the first two and less of the third.

Question for Groups of Three at the beginning of Sessions Five and Six

• What are your two good habits and how have they given you fullness of life this past week? What is your evil habit and how has it hollowed you out? (Session Five)

• Race. Your Thoughts. Six Words. (Michele Norris’ The Race Card Project. Session Six)

Supplemental Material

1. First Chapter (plus) of C.S. Lewis’ novel, Perelandra.
2. Catherine Pickstock’s summary of Kierkegaard in Repetition and Identity.
3. Michael Casey’s description of Humility in his A Guide to Living in the Truth.
4. Abbot Chapman’s description of the Preternatural in his Spiritual Letters.

The Five Practices

1. _____ ING _____

2. _____ ING _____

3. _____ ING _____

4. _____ ING _____

5. _____ ING _____

I

As I left the railway station at Worcester and set out on the three-mile walk to Ransom's cottage, I reflected that no one on that platform could possibly guess the truth about the man I was going to visit. The flat heath which spread out before me (for the village lies all behind and to the north of the station) looked an ordinary heath. The gloomy five-o'clock sky was such as you might see on any autumn afternoon. The few houses and the clumps of red or yellowish trees were in no way remarkable. Who could imagine that a little farther on in that quiet landscape I should meet and shake by the hand a man who had lived and eaten and drunk in a world forty million miles distant from London, who had seen this Earth from where it looks like a mere point of green fire, and who had spoken face to face with a creature whose life began before our own planet was inhabitable?

For Ransom had met other things in Mars besides the Martians. He had met the creatures called *eldila*, and specially that great *eldil* who is the ruler of Mars or, in their speech, the *Oyarsa* of *Malacandra*. The *eldila* are very different from any planetary creatures. Their physical organism, if organism it can be called, is quite unlike either the human or the Martian. They do not eat, breed, breathe, or suffer natural death, and to that extent resemble thinking minerals more than they resemble anything we should recognise as an animal. Though they appear on planets and may even seem to our senses to be sometimes resident in them, the precise spatial location of an *eldil* at any moment presents great problems. They themselves regard space (or "Deep Heaven") as their true habitat, and the planets are to them not closed worlds but

merely moving points—perhaps even interruptions—in what we know as the Solar System and they as the Field of Arbol.

At present I was going to see Ransom in answer to a wire which had said “Come down Thursday if possible. Business.” I guessed what sort of business he meant, and that was why I kept on telling myself that it would be perfectly delightful to spend a night with Ransom and also kept on feeling that I was not enjoying the prospect as much as I ought to. It was the *eldila* that were my trouble. I could just get used to the fact that Ransom had been to Mars . . . but to have met an *eldil*, to have spoken with something whose life appeared to be practically unending. . . . Even the journey to Mars was bad enough. A man who has been in another world does not come back unchanged. One can’t put the difference into words. When the man is a friend it may become painful: the old footing is not easy to recover. But much worse my growing conviction that, since his return, the *eldila* were not leaving him alone. Little things in his conversation, little mannerisms, accidental allusions which he made and then drew back with an awkward apology, all suggested that he was keeping strange company; that there were—well, Visitors—at that cottage.

As I plodded along the empty, unfenced road which runs across the middle of Worchester Common I tried to dispel my growing sense of *malaise* by analysing it. What, after all, was I afraid of? The moment I had put this question I regretted it. I was shocked to find that I had mentally used the word “afraid.” Up till then I had tried to pretend that I was feeling only distaste, or embarrassment, or even boredom. But the mere word *afraid* had let the cat out of the bag. I realised now that my emotion was neither more, nor less, nor other, than Fear. And I realised that I was afraid of two things—afraid that sooner or later I myself might meet an *eldil*, and afraid that I might get “drawn in.” I suppose every one knows this fear of getting “drawn in”—the moment at which a man realises that what had seemed mere speculations are on the point of landing him in the Communist Party or the Christian Church—the sense that a door has just slammed and left him on the inside. The thing was such sheer bad luck. Ransom himself had been taken to Mars (or Malacandra) against his will and almost by accident, and I had become connected with his affair by another accident. Yet here we were both getting more and more involved in what I could only describe as interplanetary politics. As to my intense wish never to come into contact with the *eldila* myself, I am not sure whether I can make you understand it. It was something more than a prudent desire to avoid creatures alien in kind, very powerful, and very intelligent. The truth was that all I heard about them served to connect two things which one’s mind tends to keep

separate, and that connecting gave one a sort of shock. We tend to think about non-human intelligences in two distinct categories which we label “scientific” and “supernatural” respectively. We think, in one mood, of Mr. Wells’ Martians (very unlike the real Malacandrians, by the bye), or his Selenites. In quite a different mood we let our minds loose on the possibility of angels, ghosts, fairies, and the like. But the very moment we are compelled to recognise a creature in either class as *real* the distinction begins to get blurred: and when it is a creature like an *eldil* the distinction vanishes altogether. These things were not animals—to that extent one had to classify them with the second group; but they had some kind of material vehicle whose presence could (in principle) be scientifically verified. To that extent they belonged to the first group. The distinction between natural and supernatural, in fact, broke down; and when it had done so, one realised how great a comfort it had been—how it had eased the burden of intolerable strangeness which this universe imposes on us by dividing it into two halves and encouraging the mind never to think of both in the same context. What price we may have paid for this comfort in the way of false security and accepted confusion of thought is another matter.

“This is a long, dreary road,” I thought to myself. “Thank goodness I haven’t anything to carry.” And then, with a start of realisation, I remembered that I ought to be carrying a pack, containing my things for the night. I swore to myself. I must have left the thing in the train. Will you believe me when I say that my immediate impulse was to turn back to the station and “do something about it”? Of course there was nothing to be done which could not equally well be done by ringing up from the cottage. That train, with my pack in it, must by this time be miles away.

I realise that now as clearly as you do. But at the moment it seemed perfectly obvious that I must retrace my steps, and I had indeed begun to do so before reason or conscience awoke and set me once more plodding forwards. In doing this I discovered more clearly than before how very little I wanted to do it. It was such hard work that I felt as if I were walking against a headwind; but in fact it was one of those still, dead evenings when no twig stirs, and beginning to be a little foggy.

The farther I went the more impossible I found it to think about anything except these *eldila*. What, after all, did Ransom really know about them? By his own account the sorts which he had met did not usually visit our own planet—or had only begun to do so since his return from Mars. We had *eldila* of our own, he said, Tellurian *eldils*, but they were of a different kind and mostly hostile to man. That, in fact, was why our world was cut off from communication with the

other planets. He described us as being in a state of siege, as being, in fact, an enemy-occupied territory, held down by eldils who were at war both with us and with the eldils of "Deep Heaven," or "space." Like the bacteria on the microscopic level, so these co-inhabiting pests on the macroscopic permeate our whole life invisibly and are the real explanation of that fatal bent which is the main lesson of history. If all this were true, then, of course, we should welcome the fact that eldila of a better kind had at last broken the frontier (it is, they say, at the Moon's orbit) and were beginning to visit us. Always assuming that Ransom's account was the correct one.

A nasty idea occurred to me. Why should not Ransom be a dupe? If something from outer space were trying to invade our planet, what better smoke-screen could it put up than this very story of Ransom's? Was there the slightest evidence, after all, for the existence of the supposed maleficent eldils on this earth? How if my friend were the unwitting bridge, the Trojan Horse, whereby some possible invader were effecting its landing on Tellus? And then once more, just as when I had discovered that I had no pack, the impulse to go no farther returned to me. "Go back, go back," it whispered to me, "send him a wire, tell him you were ill, say you'll come some other time—anything." The strength of the feeling astonished me. I stood still for a few moments telling myself not to be a fool, and when I finally resumed my walk I was wondering whether this might be the beginning of a nervous breakdown. No sooner had this idea occurred to me than it also became a new reason for not visiting Ransom. Obviously, I wasn't fit for any such jumpy "business" as his telegram almost certainly referred to. I wasn't even fit to spend an ordinary week-end away from home. My only sensible course was to turn back at once and get safe home, before I lost my memory or became hysterical, and to put myself in the hands of a doctor. It was sheer madness to go on.

I was now coming to the end of the heath and going down a small hill, with a copse on my left and some apparently deserted industrial buildings on my right. At the bottom the evening mist was partly thick. "They call it a breakdown *at first*," I thought. Wasn't there some mental disease in which quite ordinary objects looked to the patient unbelievably ominous? . . . looked, in fact, just as that abandoned factory looks to me now? Great bulbous shapes of cement, strange brickwork bogeys, glowered at me over dry scrubby grass pock-marked with grey pools and intersected with the remains of a light railway. I was reminded of things which Ransom had seen in that other world: only there, they were people. Long spindle-like giants whom he called Sorns. What made it worse was that he regarded them as good people—very much nicer, in fact,

than our own race. He was in league with them! How did I know he was even a dupe? He might be something worse . . . and again I came to a standstill.

The reader, not knowing Ransom, will not understand how contrary to all reason this idea was. The rational part of my mind, even at that moment, knew perfectly well that even if the whole universe were crazy and hostile, Ransom was sane and wholesome and honest. And this part of my mind in the end sent me forward—but with a reluctance and a difficulty I can hardly put into words. What enabled me to go on was the knowledge (deep down inside me) that I was getting nearer at every stride to the one friend: but I *felt* that I was getting nearer to the one enemy—the traitor, the sorcerer, the man in league with "them" . . . walking into the trap with my eyes open, like a fool. "They call it a breakdown at first," said my mind, "and send you to a nursing home; later on they move you to an asylum."

I was past the dead factory now, down in the fog, where it was very cold. Then came a moment—the first one—of absolute terror and I had to bite my lips to keep myself from screaming. It was only a cat that had run across the road, but I found myself completely unnerved. "Soon you will really be screaming," said my inner tormentor, "running round and round, screaming, and you won't be able to stop it."

There was a little empty house by the side of the road, with most of the windows boarded up and one staring like the eye of a dead fish. Please understand that at ordinary times the idea of a "haunted house" means no more to me than it does to you. No more; but also, no less. At that moment it was nothing so definite as the thought of a ghost that came to me. It was just the *word* "haunted." "Haunted" . . . "haunting" . . . what a quality there is in that first syllable! Would not a child who had never heard the word before and did not know its meaning shudder at the mere sound if, as the day was closing in, it heard one of its elders say to another "This house is haunted"?

At last I came to the cross-roads by the little Wesleyan chapel where I had to turn to the left under the beech trees. I ought to be seeing the lights from Ransom's windows by now—or was it past black-out time? My watch had stopped, and I didn't know. It was dark enough but that might be due to the fog and the trees. It wasn't the dark I was afraid of, you understand. We have all known times when inanimate objects seemed to have almost a facial expression, and it was the expression of this bit of road which I did not like. "It's not true," said my mind, "that people who are really going mad never think they're going mad." Suppose that real insanity had chosen this place in which to begin? In that case, of course, the black enmity of those dripping trees—their horrible

expectancy—would be a hallucination. But that did not make it any better. To think that the spectre you see is an illusion does not rob him of his terrors: it simply adds the further terror of madness itself—and then on top of that the horrible surmise that those whom the rest call mad have, all along, been the only people who see the world as it really is.

This was upon me now. I staggered on into the cold and the darkness, already half convinced that I must be entering what is called Madness. But each moment my opinion about sanity changed. Had it ever been more than a convention—a comfortable set of blinkers, an agreed mode of wishful thinking, which excluded from our view the full strangeness and malevolence of the universe we are compelled to inhabit? The things I had begun to know during the last few months of my acquaintance with Ransom already amounted to more than “sanity” would admit; but I had come much too far to dismiss them as unreal. I doubted his interpretation, or his good faith. I did not doubt the existence of the things he had met in Mars—the Pfiltriggi, the Hrossa, and the Sorns—nor of these interplanetary eldila. I did not even doubt the reality of that mysterious being whom the eldila call Maleldil and to whom they appear to give a total obedience such as no Tellurian dictator can command. I knew what Ransom supposed Maleldil to be.

Surely that was the cottage. It was very well blacked-out. A childish, whining thought arose on my mind: why was he not out at the gate to welcome me? An even more childish thought followed it. Perhaps he *was* in the garden waiting for me, hiding. Perhaps he would jump on me from behind. Perhaps I should see a figure that looked like Ransom standing with its back to me and when I spoke to it, it would turn round and show a face that was not human at all. . . .

I have naturally no wish to enlarge on this phase of my story. The state of mind I was in was one which I look back on with humiliation. I would have passed it over if I did not think that some account of it was necessary for a full understanding of what follows—and, perhaps, of some other things as well. At all events, I *can't* really describe how I reached the front door of the cottage. Somehow or other, despite the loathing and dismay that pulled me back and a sort of invisible wall of resistance that met me in the face, fighting for each step, and almost shrieking as a harmless spray of the hedge touched my face, I managed to get through the gate and up the little path. And there I was, drumming on the door and wringing the handle and shouting to him to let me in as if my life depended on it.

There was no reply—not a sound except the echo of the sounds I had been making myself. There was only something white fluttering on the knocker. I guessed, of course, that it was a note. In striking a match

to read it by, I discovered how very shaky my hands had become; and when the match went out I realised how dark the evening had grown. After several attempts I read the thing. “Sorry. Had to go up to Cambridge. Shan’t be back till the late train. Eatables in larder and bed made up in your usual room. Don’t wait supper for me unless you feel like it—E. R.” And immediately the impulse to retreat, which had already assailed me several times, leaped upon me with a sort of demoniac violence. Here was my retreat left open, positively inviting me. Now was my chance. If anyone expected me to go into that house and sit there alone for several hours, they were mistaken! But then, as the thought of the return journey began to take shape in my mind, I faltered. The idea of setting out to traverse the avenue of beech trees again (it was really dark now) with this house behind me (one had the absurd feeling that it could follow one) was not attractive. And then, I hope, something better came into my mind—some rag of sanity and some reluctance to let Ransom down. At least I could try the door to see if it were really unlocked. I did. And it was. Next moment, I hardly know how, I found myself inside and let it slam behind me.

It was quite dark, and warm. I groped a few paces forward, hit my shin violently against something, and fell. I sat still for a few seconds nursing my leg. I thought I knew the layout of Ransom’s hall-sitting-room pretty well and couldn’t imagine what I had blundered into. Presently I groped in my pocket, got out my matches, and tried to strike a light. The head of the match flew off. I stamped on it and sniffed to make sure it was not smouldering on the carpet. As soon as I sniffed I became aware of a strange smell in the room. I could not for the life of me make out what it was. It had an unlikeness to ordinary domestic smells as great as that of some chemicals, but it was not a chemical kind of smell at all. Then I struck another match. It flickered and went out almost at once—not unnaturally, since I was sitting on the door-mat and there are few front doors even in better built houses than Ransom’s country cottage which do not admit a draught. I had seen nothing by it except the palm of my own hand hollowed in an attempt to guard the flame. Obviously I must get away from the door. I rose gingerly and felt my way forward. I came at once to an obstacle—something smooth and very cold that rose a little higher than my knees. As I touched it I realised that it was the source of the smell. I groped my way along this to the left and finally came to the end of it. It seemed to present several surfaces and I couldn’t picture the shape. It was not a table, for it had no top. One’s hand groped along the rim of a kind of low wall—the thumb on the outside and the fingers down inside the enclosed space. If it had felt like wood I should have supposed it to be a large packing-case. But it

was not wood. I thought for a moment that it was wet, but soon decided that I was mistaking coldness for moisture. When I reached the end of it I struck my third match.

I saw something white and semi-transparent—rather like ice. A great big thing, very long: a kind of box, an open box: and of a disquieting shape which I did not immediately recognise. It was big enough to put a man into. Then I took a step back, lifting the lighted match higher to get a more comprehensive view, and instantly tripped over something behind me. I found myself sprawling in darkness, not on the carpet, but on more of the cold substance with the odd smell. How many of the infernal things were there?

I was just preparing to rise again and hunt systematically round the room for a candle when I heard Ransom's name pronounced; and almost, but not quite, simultaneously I saw the thing I had feared so long to see. I heard Ransom's name pronounced: but I should not like to say I heard a voice pronounce it. The sound was quite astonishingly unlike a voice. It was perfectly articulate: it was even, I suppose, rather beautiful. But it was, if you understand me, inorganic. We feel the difference between animal voices (including those of the human animal) and all other noises pretty clearly, I fancy, though it is hard to define. Blood and lungs and the warm, moist cavity of the mouth are somehow indicated in every Voice. Here they were not. The two syllables sounded more as if they were played on an instrument than as if they were spoken: and yet they did not sound mechanical either. A machine is something we make out of natural materials; this was more as if rock or crystal or light had spoken of itself. And it went through me from chest to groin like the thrill that goes through you when you think you have lost your hold while climbing a cliff.

That was what I heard. What I saw was simply a very faint rod or pillar of light. I don't think it made a circle of light either on the floor or the ceiling, but I am not sure of this. It certainly had very little power of illuminating its surroundings. So far, all is plain sailing. But it had two other characteristics which are less easy to grasp. One was its colour. Since I saw the thing I must obviously have seen it either white or coloured; but no efforts of my memory can conjure up the faintest image of what that colour was. I try blue, and gold, and violet, and red, but none of them will fit. How it is possible to have a visual experience which immediately and ever after becomes impossible to remember, I do not attempt to explain. The other was its angle. It was not at right angles to the floor. But as soon as I have said this, I hasten to add that this way of putting it is a later reconstruction. What one actually felt at the moment was that the column of light was vertical but the floor was not

horizontal—the whole room seemed to have heeled over as if it were on board ship. The impression, however produced, was that this creature had reference to some horizontal, to some whole system of directions, based outside the Earth, and that its mere presence imposed that alien system on me and abolished the terrestrial horizontal.

I had no doubt at all that I was seeing an *eldil*, and little doubt that I was seeing the archon of Mars, the Oyarsa of Malacandra. And now that the thing had happened I was no longer in a condition of abject panic. My sensations were, it is true, in some ways very unpleasant. The fact that it was quite obviously not organic—the knowledge that intelligence was somehow located in this homogeneous cylinder of light but not related to it as our consciousness is related to our brains and nerves—was profoundly disturbing.¹ It would not fit into our categories. The response which we ordinarily make to a living creature and that which we make to an inanimate object were here both equally inappropriate. On the other hand, all those doubts which I had felt before I entered the cottage as to whether these creatures were friend or foe, and whether Ransom were a pioneer or a dupe, had for the moment vanished. My fear was now of another kind. I felt sure that the creature was what we call “good,” but I wasn't sure whether I liked “goodness” so much as I had supposed. This is a very terrible experience. As long as what you are afraid of is something evil, you may still hope that the good may come to your rescue. But suppose you struggle through to the good and find that it also is dreadful? How if food itself turns out to be the very thing you can't eat, and home the very place you can't live, and your very comforter the person who makes you uncomfortable? Then, indeed, there is no rescue possible: the last card has been played. For a

1. In the text I naturally keep to what I thought and felt at the time, since this alone is first-hand evidence: but there is obviously room for much further speculation about the form in which *eldila* appear to our senses. The only serious considerations of the problem so far are to be sought in the early seventeenth century. As a starting point for future investigation I recommend the following from Natvilcius (*De Aethereo at aeri Corpore*, Basel, 1627, II. xii.); *liquet simplicem flammam sensibus nostris subjectam non esse corpus proprie dictum angeli vel daemonis, sed potius aut illius corporis sensorium aut superficiem corporis in coelesti dispositione locorum supra cogitationes humanas existentis*. (“It appears that the homogeneous flame perceived by our senses is not the body, properly so called, of an angel or daemon, but rather either the sensorium of that body or the surface of a body which exists after a manner beyond our conception in the celestial frame of special references.”) By the “celestial frame of references” I take him to mean what we should now call “multi-dimensional space.” Not, of course, that Natvilcius knew anything about multi-dimensional geometry, but that he had reached empirically what mathematics has since reached on theoretical grounds.

second or two I was nearly in that condition. Here at last was a bit of that world from beyond the world, which I had always supposed that I loved and desired, breaking through and appearing to my senses: and I didn't like it, I wanted it to go away. I wanted every possible distance, gulf, curtain, blanket, and barrier to be placed between it and me. But I did not fall quite into the gulf. Oddly enough my very sense of helplessness saved me and steadied me. For now I was quite obviously "drawn in." The struggle was over. The next decision did not lie with me.

Then, like a noise from a different world, came the opening of the door and the sound of boots on the door-mat, and I saw, silhouetted against the greyness of the night in the open doorway, a figure which I recognised as Ransom. The speaking which was not a voice came again out of the rod of light, and Ransom, instead of moving, stood still and answered it. Both speeches were in a strange polysyllabic language which I had not heard before. I make no attempt to excuse the feelings which awoke in me when I heard the unhuman sound addressing my friend and my friend answering it in the unhuman language. They are, in fact, inexcusable; but if you think they are improbable at such a juncture, I must tell you plainly that you have read neither history nor your own heart to much effect. They were feelings of resentment, horror, and jealousy. It was in my mind to shout out, "Leave your familiar alone, you damned magician, and attend to Me."

What I actually said was, "Oh, Ransom. Thank God you've come."

The door was slammed (for the second time that night) and after a moment's groping Ransom had found and lit a candle. I glanced quickly round and could see no one but ourselves. The most noticeable thing in the room was the big white object. I recognised the shape well enough this time. It was a large coffin-shaped casket, open. On the floor beside it lay its lid, and it was doubtless this that I had tripped over. Both were made of the same white material, like ice, but more cloudy and less shining.

"By Jove, I'm glad to see you," said Ransom, advancing and shaking hands with me. "I'd hoped to be able to meet you at the station, but everything has had to be arranged in such a hurry and I found at the last moment that I'd got to go up to Cambridge. I never intended to leave you to make *that* journey alone." Then, seeing, I suppose, that I was still staring at him rather stupidly, he added, "I say—you're *all right*, aren't you? You got through the barrage without any damage?"

"The barrage?—I don't understand."

"I was thinking you would have met some difficulties in getting here."

"Oh, *that!*" said I. "You mean it wasn't just my nerves? There really was something in the way?"

"Yes. They didn't want you to get here. I was afraid something of the sort might happen but there was no time to do anything about it. I was pretty sure you'd get through somehow."

"By *they* you mean the others—our own *eldila*?"

"Of course. They've got wind of what's on hand. . . ."

I interrupted him. "To tell you the truth, Ransom," I said, "I'm getting more worried every day about the whole business. It came into my head as I was on my way here—"

"Oh, they'll put all sorts of things into your head if you let them," said Ransom lightly. "The best plan is to take no notice and keep straight on. Don't try to answer them. They like drawing you into an interminable argument."

"But, look here," said I. "This isn't child's play. Are you quite certain that this Dark Lord, this depraved Oyarsa of Tellus, really exists? Do you know for certain either that there are two sides, or which side is ours?"

He fixed me suddenly with one of his mild, but strangely formidable, glances.

"You are in *real* doubt about either, are you?" he asked.

"No," said I, after a pause, and felt rather ashamed.

"That's all right, then," said Ransom cheerfully. "Now let's get some supper and I'll explain as we go along."

"What's that coffin affair?" I asked as we moved into the kitchen.

"That is what I'm to travel in."

"Ransom!" I exclaimed. "He—it—the eldil—is not going to take you back to Malacandra?"

"Don't!" said he. "Oh, Lewis, you don't understand. Take me back to Malacandra? If only he would! I'd give anything I possess . . . just to look down one of those gorges again and see the blue, blue water winding in and out among the woods. Or to be up on top—to see a Sorn go gliding along the slopes. Or to be back there of an evening when Jupiter was rising, too bright to look at, and all the asteroids like a Milky Way, with each star in it as bright as Venus looks from Earth! And the smells! It is hardly ever out of my mind. You'd expect it to be worse at night when Malacandra is up and I can actually see it. But it isn't then that I get the real twinge. It's on hot summer days—looking up at the deep blue and that thinking that *in there*, millions of miles deep where I can never, never get back to it, there's a place I know, and flowers at that very moment growing over Meldilorn, and friends of mine, going about their business, who would welcome me back. No. No such luck. It's not Malacandra I'm being sent to. It's Perelandra."

"That's what we call Venus, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And you say you're being sent."

"Yes. If you remember, before I left Malacandra the Oyarsa hinted to me that my going there at all might be the beginning of a whole new phase in the life of the Solar System—the Field of Arbol. It might mean,

he said, that the isolation of our world, the siege, was beginning to draw to an end."

"Yes. I remember."

"Well, it really does look as if something of the sort were afoot. For one thing, the two sides, as you call them, have begun to appear much more clearly, much less mixed, here on Earth, in our own human affairs—to show in something a little more like their true colours."

"I see that all right."

"The other thing is this. The black archon—our own bent Oyarsa—is meditating some sort of attack on Perelandra."

"But is he at large like that in the Solar System? Can he get there?"

"That's just the point. He can't get there in his own person, in his own photosome or whatever we should call it. As you know, he was driven back within these bounds centuries before any human life existed on our planet. If he ventured to show himself outside the Moon's orbit he'd be driven back again—by main force. That would be a different kind of war. You or I could contribute no more to it than a flea could contribute to the defence of Moscow. No. He must be attempting Perelandra in some different way."

"And where do you come in?"

"Well—simply I've been ordered there."

"By the—by Oyarsa, you mean?"

"No. The order comes from much higher up. They all do, you know, in the long run."

"And what have you got to do when you get there?"

"I haven't been told."

"You are just part of the Oyarsa's *entourage*?"

"Oh, no. He isn't going to be there. He is to transport me to Venus—to deliver me there. After that, as far as I know, I shall be alone."

"But, look here, Ransom—I mean . . ." my voice trailed away.

"I know!" said he with one of his singularly disarming smiles. "You are feeling the absurdity of it. Dr. Elwin Ransom setting out single-handed to combat powers and principalities. You may even be wondering if I've got megalomania."

"I didn't mean that quite," said I.

"Oh, but I think you did. At any rate that is what I have been feeling myself ever since that thing was sprung on me. But when you come to think of it, is it odder than what all of us have to do every day? When the Bible used that very expression about fighting with principalities and powers and depraved hypersomatic beings at great heights (our translation is very misleading at that point, by the way) it meant that quite ordinary people were to do the fighting."

Kierkegaardian idiom of 'dance' (since it includes also the spatial axis),⁴¹ which achieve *durée* through an harmonious passage between the measured moments of clock-time. Indeed, to hear the chiming of the cabinet clock 'in such a way that it does not shorten but lengthens his eternity', is Kierkegaard's favoured picture of the archetypally ethical life of marriage.⁴² This attains 'the sublime in the pedestrian' by seamlessly bringing together balletic leaps of trusting faith with a continued mundane promenade.⁴³

But we would be mistaken to imagine that Kierkegaard opposes the flimsiness of the aesthetic with a Kantian moral rigour. Rather, he takes it to be the case that what is moral differs somewhat (not absolutely) from person to person, since to be ethical is to find a way of living out consistently one's particular and unique 'aesthetic' nature, but to do so in harmony with others, by matching one's capacities to a social role. In this respect, Kierkegaard is a kind of 'open-ended' virtue theorist, sustaining the *sittlich* or customary approach to the ethics of both Friedrich Schleiermacher and G. W. F. Hegel, and supporting the Aristotelian derivation of justice from friendship, rather than Kantian 'abstract-categorical' duty, even though he wishes to surpass a pagan identification of the social with the State and a corresponding over-prescription of social role.⁴⁴ Accordingly, '[the ethical person] repeats himself back into himself, back into the family, back in to the race, until he founds himself in God'.⁴⁵ This link of repetition with *Sittlichkeit* is explicitly contrasted to Kantian uniformity and inflexibility in *The Concept of Anxiety*: 'If repetition is not posited, ethics becomes a binding power.'⁴⁶

For this reason, despite his famous tripartition of the existential between the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious, Kierkegaard, through the *persona* of 'Judge William' in *Either/Or*, presents 'an aesthetic defence of marriage', according to which the ethical is the highest development of art; he later declares that 'it is the total aesthetic self that is chosen ethically'.⁴⁷ Here he takes the *topos* already referred to which derives from G. E. Lessing, Johann Gottfried Herder, and F. W. J. Schelling (and continues to Celan in the twentieth century) of contrasting the static aesthetic detail available to 'painting' with the less detailed but temporally open perspective of mimetic and allegorical continuity gained by poetry: 'art is in the category of space, poetry in the category of time [...] art depicts repose, poetry

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motion'.⁴⁸ In line with his German predecessors, Kierkegaard suggests that art in general is gradually evolving in the direction of a greater representation of time; it is turning increasingly towards poetry, theatre, and opera. But Kierkegaard thinks (in a proto-avant-garde fashion) that this tendency is consummated when life itself coincides with art, or, one might say, repetition with (self) representation.⁴⁹ E/O II p. 274-76

He understands this, through the voice of Judge William, as a male deferral to an already existing female tendency to 'dance through life', as if 'separate' art were a kind of hobby which men might tend to resort to.⁵⁰ Therefore, woman, the 'natural virtuoso', 'explains in the most interesting and beautiful manner the question that has cost many a philosopher his reason: time'.⁵¹ In explaining time, she also explains the finite and is 'nature's mistress'.⁵² It is for this reason that Kierkegaard, with an implied allusion to biblical traditions of nuptial mysticism and of the Church as 'the bride of Christ', proposes that 'woman should always represent the [ecclesial] congregation', and that, 'if one would look at it this way', 'many prospects for beautifying the church service would open up'.⁵³ He suggests a female connection between his two paradigms for non-identical repetition: married life and liturgical life.⁵⁴

The 'ethical', then, as most realized by women, consists in the happy ability to vary the quotidian, to take delight in the subtle variations and continuity of day after day shared with friends, or with a marriage partner. Moreover, this bringing together of art and life is, for Kierkegaard, the combination of the fictional and the historical; this is the 'happily ever after' to which all fiction, in its aspiration to be hopeful, points. Kierkegaard knows that 'happily ever after' seldom occurs, but his suggestion is that it is still more seldom told or related, because from the outside it would be too tedious. The 'plots' which constitute all stories are plots involving 'plots': tales of conflict, intrigue, adventure, and capture; they end just at the moment that 'ethical' life begins.⁵⁵

However, Kierkegaard observes that this is another respect in which real history exists as fictional. For recorded history is also the story of conflict, adventure, and capture. But this suggests that neither fiction nor history consider 'most of life', because most of life consists in the intimately ethical, and however many minor storms

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tical reality. My desired goal is to bring into the light “moral goodness and basic monasticity” (RB 73.1). In other words, the interpretation I am offering is primarily monastic as distinct from scholarly.⁹ After some hesitation I have decided to leave Saint Benedict’s words in the context of a conventional monastery of monks. At the same time, I would hope that these reflections will make sense to a much wider readership. I encourage layfolk, women, and those who belong to a non-Western culture to attempt to enter into the original context of the Rule with me, and I hope that they will find there something worthwhile to carry back to their own situation.

Because of my practical goal this is a very concrete book. Many of the examples I use come from my experience. I have changed the details and usually indulged in some exaggeration to make the point clearer. Bernard of Clairvaux defended his use of unflattering examples in his work on *The Steps of Humility and Pride* by saying that he was personally more acquainted with the way down than with the way up.¹⁰ Like Bernard, I hope that the occasional caricatures that I draw will cause a smile of recognition rather than a surge of resentment. The fact is that we often learn about an unknown good by looking at a known evil.

TWO

Humility As Truth

Bernard of Clairvaux clearly affirms that humility is grounded on truth: within oneself, in one’s relations with others, and with regard to God.¹ This is, perhaps, a more positive way of approaching humility, and one which enables us to appreciate its importance. In such a perspective, “humility” connotes a fundamental concordance with the reality of one’s nature. Pride is more than *hauteur*; it is radical falsehood. In saying this we have to remember that in ancient terms “truth” was viewed as more than correct information. It was seen as a quality of being, taken as a whole, and not merely a state of intellect. It signified the conformity of the created reality with the intention of its Maker. In this context, truth touched not only the mind but also the heart and the emotions. To be alienated from the truth was to be cut adrift from all that makes us human. Separation from truth was seen as the source of all human suffering, the result of the will failing to find its proper object in reality. On a practical level, the ancients understood that a defective grasp of truth inevitably led to positive falsehood. If we are not concerned to pursue and embrace the truth then surely we will be ensnared by its opposite. As Bernard wrote, “The pursuit of empty things amounts to a contempt for the truth, and it is this contempt for the truth that causes our blindness.”² We will go astray.

Truth-filled living is the soul of humility. It is characterized by an attitude of realism. Humility is, above all, a respect for the nature of things, a reluctance to force reality to conform to subjective factors in ourselves. Applied to human reality, truth's various zones of application can be summarized under the following four headings. These can also be regarded as the foundation of an attitude to life that is characterized by humility.

WE ARE NOT DIVINE

In the Garden of Eden the first temptation succeeded because it promised that we should become gods. This desire is the essence of pride. We want to deny our earthly origins with their consequences of vulnerability, weakness, labor, social constraint, and limitation. We refuse to be satisfied with a medium level of gratification. We demand a high level of pleasure, total freedom, power, a good reputation, and a complete absence of irritants. And we want them now. Whatever gnaws away at our capacity to be happy in the restricted possibilities normal human life offers may be labeled as the opposite of humility, that is "pride." We demand from others what they cannot possibly give us. We are resentful that they do not give us all that we want. Humility, on the other hand, leads us to find contentment in the ordinary, obscure, and laborious occupations that constitute our daily existence.

In forgetting that we are not gods, pride also makes us expect too much from ourselves. Many people cannot forgive themselves for being human: for their slowness of mind and ineffectiveness of will. Their chagrin with their own contingent goodness and their zeal for self-improvement do not constitute humility. They stem from wounded pride. The truth is that we are not divine and so we cannot be expected to perform as gods. The first thrust of humility is to incul-

I failed here at Covenant. I tried to force reality.

- Not Divine
- Creations
- Sinners
- Stalled

That's me!

cate in us an acceptance that we are of the earth; we are *humus*. To judge ourselves or others from any other perspective is false, and will eventually become destructive.

WE ARE CREATURES

The recognition of our earthly nature leads us to affirm that our fundamental relationship with God is one of dependence. We are not the source of our own being: our race exists only because we receive life from another. However great the divine condescension, we are never on a par with God. Truth in prayer, worship, and service of God is characterized by the realization that all that we have comes from God; we have nothing to contribute to the relationship except our needs. Our deepest spiritual experience is to feel utterly dependent on God and to want to submit ourselves to the divine will. The mystics talk about a point at which the soul becomes absorbed in God and seems no longer to have an autonomous existence. God creates. God sustains us in being. Like children who buy Christmas gifts for their parents with money received from them, we can give nothing to God that has not first been God's gift. Far from expecting God to congratulate us for our attempts to lead a good life, we need to recognize the truth of Jesus' saying: "When you have done all that you were ordered, say 'We are unprofitable servants: we have done only what we ought to have done'" (Lk 17:10).

The truth is that our being is incomplete without God. To seek God is, therefore, a fundamental tendency of our nature. "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." We cannot attain human fulfillment except in relationship with God. There is a space in us that can be filled by only God. There is a certain spiritual potentiality that never comes alive if we are locked in a world of self-sufficiency. "Look to God that you may become radiant" (Ps 34:5).

worthless slaves

found in heretics and unbelievers and reprobates. It is a delicate art to clutch the inapprehensible. Like the farmer's daughter,

"When you try to approach her, away she skips
Over tables and chairs with apparent ease."

And many clutch nothing at all. They are sure they have had an experience. They cannot say even to themselves what it was.

And I believe that still more numerous are those who, because the experience is untranslatable, are unaware that they have had an experience at all. They do not feel there was an illusion, an illusion is more homely, nearer to flesh and blood. There was only an uncomfortable and disturbing stupidity, accompanied by involuntary distraction. The power of 'translation', the only bridge from the 'angelic' to the 'human' consciousness of the same intellect is atrophied and will not work, so that the left lobe of the intellect does not know what the right lobe is doing. It only notices that it cannot itself act freely, that there is a 'ligature'.

THE PRETERNATURAL. Now the only new point I wish to urge in this paper is this: that granting the classical thesis that 'Mysticism' is perception by pure species after an angelic manner, it follows that this lofty manner of cognition is not 'supernatural' in fallen nature, but merely 'preternatural', since it is a scanty and rare survival of that which was connatural to Adam:—

with God. Therefore it is quite unnecessary to decide their nature in each case: the confessor is to say, 'pay no attention to them'. The patient will thus get no harm if they are diabolical, distorted, misleading, or purely natural; while if divine, they will produce the effect God wishes, without our worrying about them. This is certainly the most authorised advice to give to good nuns and others who experience these things.

a survival of powers of perception and translation disused and atrophied by neglect; obscured and rendered invisible by our concentration on our natural powers; but yet emerging half consciously in a few and overpoweringly in a very few; but traceable in a good many.

Thus neither the faculty of perceiving pure species nor the act of perceiving them is in itself 'supernatural'; obviously not, in its essence; but not even in the sense of 'miraculous'; nor again, in the sense of a 'gift (special or ordinary) of the Holy Ghost', conferred in Baptism or Confirmation. But it is beyond the ordinary powers which we expect in a human being; it is not needed for daily human life. It comes as a surprise and it even gets in the way.¹

NATURAL, PRETERNATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL. We have to remember that actual graces are always *supernaturales quoad modum*, that is to say, they are arranged by God to help our salvation. But they may be external, and merely natural *quoad essentiam*,—such as the good examples we see or read of, or the good advice we are given, or the sudden death of some one, and so forth,—but they act upon our souls by the aid of internal grace. As souls grow in piety, a far larger number of things becomes useful to their souls.²

¹ It resembles, though on a higher plane, the rare faculty of telepathy, by which a few individuals can feel and even visualise friends or others who are in great troubles or at the point of death, at whatever distance. The facts seem to be proved. But the power is preternatural (some extreme delicacy of perception?) not miraculous.

² Gradually they realise that *diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum*, so that all things and circumstances and events are seen to be intended as steps to heaven and can be used as such, and all that happens to us is God's supernatural Providence, His touch on our souls, and we can thus live in continual contact with Him. From this point of view there is no event, no feeling, no suffering, no temptation, nothing created, in fact, which is not potentially a grace.