



October 2005

Dear MARS HILL AUDIO listener,

In his 1957 book, *Prayer in Practice*, Roman Catholic theologian Romano Guardini distinguishes between Christian faith and Christian consciousness. “Consciousness,” Guardini writes, “could be called ‘Christian’ if its particular manner of experiencing—of thinking and judging—caused it to consider true that which is true from the standpoint of divine revelation; to consider possible that which is possible from the standpoint of divine revelation; to consider good, beautiful, noble, satisfying, whatever deserves these attributes as seen from that standpoint. We need only look around us to see that this is so. We do find Christian faith—frequently of a very courageous and pure form—but consciousness seems on the whole completely outside faith.”

I don’t think that Guardini is talking about what we refer to as a “worldview,” which relies on a systematic and analytic method. He is describing a deep reordering of the affections, not just an editing of ideas. If we read Guardini’s observation in light of St. Paul’s injunction to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Romans 12:1, 2), it seems that more than our thinking needs to be Christian: our prejudices and assumptions and instincts need to be realigned as well. The continuing process of Christian conversion has as one of its effects the radical alteration of what Richard Weaver called our “metaphysical dream of the world,” the intuitive sense we have about the nature of things.

The transformation of which St. Paul speaks is intended to deliver us from conformity to the world, that is, from sharing the world’s false and disordered assumptions about God, human well-being, and the nature of Creation. Our growth in godly consciousness is not just the acquisition of a better view of God, but better habits of seeing ourselves and everything around us in light of God.

In the opening paragraphs of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin famously observed that our knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves were inextricably intertwined. I would like to add a third skein to that entwining: our knowledge of Creation—how we know Creation, how we position ourselves with respect to Creation, and what we intuitively assume about Creation’s order and nature.

We were not created to relate to God in a vacuum, but through the web of lived life in the world God has made. Adam and Eve loved God and lived for and with Him as they tended a Garden. Each of us is called to a specific vocation as the site of a living sacrifice, but we are also involved in the general and common reality of living in space and time, in specific places, through specific times, with particular kinds of bodies, within the

pattern of the order of Creation. Creation is the medium through which we know, love, and serve God.

This is really hard for modern people to achieve, because one of the chief characteristics of modern culture is its novel conception of the relationship between man and nature. Modernity denies what classical and Christian culture had previously assumed: that there was an order in Creation that established the pattern for the order that human culture should take.

The Christian account of Creation and redemption teaches that we are particular kinds of creatures, living in a particular kind of world. In *Resurrection and Moral Order*, Oliver O'Donovan observes that "the resurrection of Christ directs our attention back to the creation which it vindicates. But we must understand 'creation' not merely as the raw material out of which the world as we know it was composed, but as the order and coherence in which it is composed."

That order and coherence is one of the great assumptions at work in the poetry found in the Bible's wisdom literature and in Jesus' parables. Take, for example, Psalm 1, which describes the righteous man as being like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and having a leaf that does not wither. There are lessons about righteousness here, but there are also lessons about trees. I believe that when God made trees, and established the way the tree's order of being takes water from root to trunk to branch to twig to leaf, he had this analogy in mind. Creation is such that the affinity between righteousness and trees is built into the order of reality, the trees reminding us of how righteousness works, and the righteous and spiritually sensitive appreciating how trees work.

There are also lessons about living in time in this image. If you have ever planted a tree, especially a fruit tree, you know that this process involves a very different set of expectations from the world of on-line shopping carts linked to a Fed-Ex truck. It takes time for the roots of those trees to become established and to benefit from the proximity of that stream. In this divinely planted analogy, we are reminded that we were created as beings that find their perfection in time. If we were living with the kind of consciousness that was Christian as Romano Guardini described, we would know this every time we saw a tree, and not just when a Psalm was exegeted for us.

"In our desire to impose form on the world and our lives we have lost the capacity to see the form that is there; and in that lies not liberation but alienation, the cutting off from things as they really are." That insight from Colin Gunton's *Enlightenment and Alienation* points to the fact that modern culture not only denies the reality of an ordered Creation. Modern cultural institutions have developed for the purpose of imposing order where there allegedly is none. The scientific worldview that emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries found it more efficient to presuppose a meaningless Nature (rather than a purpose-laden Creation) as the focus of its energies. As a

result, the common understanding of the nature of human dominion over Creation was transformed from a task of stewardship (caring for a mysterious and wonderful gift) to a limitless rule of meaningless and irksome raw material.

If we see ourselves as masters of the world rather than stewards, the real master is marginalized. The God of Deism, a god who is not involved with Creation, becomes much more plausible when we assume certain things about Creation and our place in it. The idea of providence also becomes much less plausible, as does the idea of general revelation, the notion that certain things about God can be known from the things he has made. It is still possible to talk about sin and grace, so Christian proclamation does not disappear. But the Bible's message of salvation becomes hyperspiritualized, detached from the story of Creation in the disenchanting world of modern assumptions, and Christians easily fall prey to dualistic lives in which their faith is practically irrelevant to the way they engage the world. To return to Guardini, they are capable of faith, even deep and intense faith, but not of Christian consciousness.

I guess you could summarize the mission of MARS HILL AUDIO as a campaign for Christian consciousness. For almost thirteen years, we have been talking with writers whose insight into the shape of contemporary culture has the capacity to guide the renewal of our minds. Convinced that the acquisition of a new framework of thinking requires the repudiation of faulty assumptions, I have selected our many interviewees based on their perceptive insights into the patterns of thought (and assumption) encouraged by contemporary cultural institutions and conventions.

Every year we invite our subscribers to help us find new subscribers by giving gift subscriptions. In so doing, we are inviting you to share in that mission. That mission is a full-time task for me and my small but dedicated staff; we're not asking for that much commitment from you. If you think that your own understanding of the challenge of faithful Christian living in these disordered times has been enlarged by the work of MARS HILL AUDIO, please consider how appreciated a gift subscription would be to your friends and family.

Thank you for your time, and may God bless you and your family in the coming year.

Sincerely,



Ken Myers

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