



Summer 2021

Dear listener,

As someone interested in the arts since my teen years, I early became familiar with indifference within Christian circles toward cultural matters. “Faithfulness” pertained first to our “spiritual lives,” then to matters of morality. “Culture” — whether understood narrowly as referring to the arts and literary life, or more broadly in terms of social structures — was a realm ordered by practical necessity or personal preference, but not by theological reflection.

As I found myself struggling to explain the importance of attending thoughtfully and critically to aesthetic matters, I soon realized that Christian nonchalance about cultural life was often an expression of a deeper and more widespread dualism which had troubling affinities with ancient Gnosticism. In a kind of zero-sum logic, meditation on the Christian account of redemption was somehow understood to cancel reflection about the meaning and significance of Creation. Human nature itself was assumed to be exhaustively described in terms of the Fall, as if the account of Creation in the book of Genesis begins in chapter 3.

In “The Body and the Earth,” an essay written in the mid-1970s, Wendell Berry perceptively describes a “rift in the mentality of religion [which] continues to characterize the modern mind, no matter how secular or worldly it becomes.”

For many of the churchly, the life of the spirit is reduced to a dull preoccupation with getting to Heaven. At best, the world is no more than an embarrassment and a trial to the spirit, which is otherwise radically separated from it. The true lover of God must not be burdened with any care for or respect for His works.

Fortunately, poet-farmers such as Berry are not the only ones to appreciate how destructive this dualism can be, both to theology and to life. In *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, theologian David Burrell, observes that “Redemption . . . has so overshadowed creation in the Christian sensibility that Christians generally have little difficulty adopting a naturalistic attitude toward the universe.” Burrell argues that Christians should recognize Creation as a gift, not simply as a given, a meaningless fact.

In his 1960 *Freedom, Grace, and Destiny*, Romano Guardini offered a sobering warning to Christians who believed they should best preserve the purity of their faith by disregarding concern for earthly matters:

I am concerned with the fact that the conscious unity of existence has been to a large extent lost even by believing Christians. The believer no longer stands with his faith amid the concrete, actual world, and he no longer rediscovers that world in his faith. He has made a grim necessity of this dismemberment by constructing, if we may employ the term, a chemically pure faith in which he insists upon seeing the true form of orthodoxy. This orthodoxy has a somewhat austere and very courageous quality, but we must not forget that it is an emergency position. To save redemption by the Son it has been forced to abandon creation by the Father. Yet the sentence ‘He who sees Me, sees the Father’ (John xiv. 9) has logically as its reverse the further sentence, ‘Who will not see the Father, does not see Me any more.’

It should not be surprising that a study of eucharistic theology would be the occasion for a rebuke of dualistic faith. After all, we recognize in this physical foretaste of our eschatological banquet the *meeting* of heavenly and earthly realities. In *The Eucharist*, his last major work before his death in 1983, Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann lamented the “utterly individualized and essentially minimalistic” shape of contemporary piety, “which easily, in the name of ‘spiritual comfort,’ hands the world over to the devil.” Schmemmann contrasted true faith with conventional pursuit of “religious feeling,” characteristic in the lives of many church-goers:

True faith aspires to the integral illumination of the entire human composite by subordinating to itself the reason, the will, the whole of life. Religious feeling, on the contrary, easily accepts a rupture between religion and life and gets along happily with ideas, convictions, sometimes entire worldviews that are not only alien to Christianity but frequently openly contradictory to it.

Understanding the logic of that “rupture between religion and life” is crucial in understanding the story of modern culture. And a pivotal chapter in that story is the late medieval tendency to describe the “natural” and the “supernatural” as *two separate “orders,”* the second understood as an *extrinsic addition to the first* (and hence *optional*). This segregation enabled Western minds to imagine a wall of separation between “sacred” and “secular,” and in time all of earthly life, *including human nature*, was assumed to be intelligible without reference to anything beyond itself. There may well be a God, but that is an unneeded hypothesis for happily making our way in the world. As this two-tiered conception of life has become more entrenched — thanks as much to faulty theology as to the forces of irreligion — the Gift promised in the Gospel has gradually come to be seen not as a gift at all, but as (in the words of Henri de Lubac) “an arbitrary imposition. . . . Indeed, shouldn’t the intrusion of a foreign ‘supernatural’ be rebuffed as a kind of violation?” No wonder the Gospel is foolishness to our contemporaries.

We should not be surprised at statistics describing an increasingly faith-less world. After all, much of modern Christianity — aided by a dualistic theology which radically promoted a separation of the natural from the supernatural — involved the practice of a *world-less faith*.

The various audio materials distributed by **MARS HILL AUDIO** and the content we provide on our website are all aimed to encourage a deeper understanding of the sources of the tragic dismemberments of modern culture. In contrast to what Wendell Berry has labelled our various “piecemealings,” the Christian tradition offers rich resources for recovering a sense of “the conscious unity of existence,” for informing “the integral illumination of the entire human composite.” I have had the pleasure for almost three decades of serving as a sort of intellectual scout, reconnoitering books and articles (new and old) and their wise authors to discover and report on promising pathways through the confusing thickets of modern cultural experience.

This work has always depended on the practical and generous support of hundreds of listeners — “anti-dualists” who share the belief that Christian faithfulness entails much more than what Fr. Schmemmann dismissed as “religious feeling.” Our subjective reception of the gift of salvation is much deeper than that, and hence more consequential. I hope that what you and thousands of others have heard and learned in the work of **MARS HILL AUDIO** continues to encourage your perception of those consequences. My tiny staff and I continue to be grateful for your help.

In hope,



Ken Myers
Host and Producer