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★ SMILES ACROSS AMERICA
IMPROVING THE ORAL HEALTH OF AMERICA'S
CHILDREN THROUGH HEALTH PROMOTION, DISEASE
PREVENTION, CLINICAL SERVICES AND COMMUNITY
OUTREACH.

DATE: <u>February 12, 2004</u>	NUMBER OF PAGES (including cover sheet): <u>2</u>
TO: <u>Peter Lennon</u>	FAX NUMBER: <u>570-408-7829</u>
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FROM: <u>Robert J. Kline</u>	PHONE: 312-836-9900
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CONFIDENTIAL FAX TRANSMITTAL
MESSAGE:

ORAL HEALTH AMERICA • 410 N. MICHIGAN AVENUE, SUITE 362 • CHICAGO, IL 60611

www.oralhealthamerica.org • www.nstep.org

To: Mike Lennon

From: Robert J. Klaus

Fax: 570-408-7829

E-mail: lennon@wilkes1.wilkes.edu

Re: Mailer's Cosmology

Mike,

1. Much of M's ethics sound like material criticized in Rieff's Triumph of the Therapeutic, i.e., if it feels good, do it. How can NM square his stand with the 10 Commandments with his ethics?
2. The contrapuntal forces of godliness and diabolism are elemental and irrational, and can only deliver an ethics that is likewise irrational; which is not necessarily bad, but it needs further work. Now I recognize that this could be a contradiction in terms, but I don't know how you oppose the rational and come up with a System of ethics.
3. Perhaps NM should revisit Augustine's brutal campaign against Pelagius. It really does reveal the continuing influence that Manicheism had on Augustine and is close to some of NM's observations about good and bad in individuals.
4. "Have the honor to live by/with confusion." This statement of M's could be the foundation of his ethics. Life is confusion writ over and under ambiguity and in the interstices of Machiavelli's fortuna. This is also the corollary of M's observation that the greatest virtue is courage.
5. The bottom paragraph of page 22 is just awful. "Ethos of the moment"? Who will take this seriously?
6. Page 24 observations on the deity. See Confessions Book I. Opening 4-5 pages for a far better description of his ins/outs; no's/yeses/ apparent contradictions on the deity.
7. Finally, have you or NM read or do you know about the book, The Selfish Gene? According to the book, we are hard wired to do what we do. 'Ethics, thy name is Darwin.'
8. P. S. Have NM look at Alasdair McIntyre's After Virtue, especially the first 6 chapters, with special attention to "Emotivism."



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February 17, 2004

Mr. Norman Mailer
627 Commercial Street
Provincetown, Ma. 02657

Dear Mr. Mailer:

Mike Lannon told me that you and others were celebrating Jim Farrell's centennial on February 25th. Studs Lonigan (Cunningham) was my uncle. My mother is Loretta (Fritzie) and my dad, the Jewish Bookie, Phil Rolphe (Lou Lederer).

Although I met with Jim Farrell about a half-dozen times, I considered him my friend. He revealed much about my family, their friends and the "old neighborhood" to me.

Back in the early 70's I asked Jim who, among the living, were his favorite living authors. You were the first name mentioned.

Jim told me that when you and he were living at the Chelsea you'd run up and down the corridors to keep in shape. Did Jim tell you that he was St. Cyril High School's first letterman in 4 sports? Although some guys in the old neighborhood threatened to kill Jim if he returned, that didn't stop him. Once I drove him around his old haunts at which time he re-lived his works.

I'm enclosing a review of Bob Landers' biography on Farrell. Bob interviewed my mother in the early 90's. She started off the interview by saying she didn't know Jim very well, but by its end was referring to him as Jimmie. (Jim dated my mother a few times).

In preparation for upcoming talks I re-read Studs Lonigan. What still amazes me about that book is its range. It's Chicago's Ulysses.

Sincerely,

William L. Lederer
1504 Palmgren Drive
Glenview, IL 60025
PH: Home: 847-724-5705
Work: 312-726-9670
FAX: 312-726-9695
Email: biederer@american-hearing.org

Mike,
Lederer is quite
the character. There's
a story - there
always is
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fax @ 570 408-7829

Francine du Plessix Gray

copied again until late in the evening. They saw very few people beyond those who came to inquire about Simone. They were exclusively dedicated to the goal of preserving her work.¹⁷

Thus did Simone's parents continue to serve as an umbilical cord to reality, to a world this mystic did not seem able to survive without her mother and father at her side.

Mika.
As promised R

12. Our Father Who Art in Secret

SIMONE WEIL'S PHILOSOPHY crystallized into its final form during the last two years of her life. Here is a summation of some basic concepts that inform her work, and a sampling of the reactions they have elicited.

Creation and Decreation

God's act of creating the universe is one of renunciation and sacrifice. He must relinquish his status as sole power and reality in order to make space for other realities, must pull himself back, as it were, to give them room. "God could create only by hiding himself," so goes a jolting in *Gravity and Grace*, "otherwise there would be nothing but himself."¹ Since he is all goodness, God also has to renounce his power because power is opposite to goodness, and because he wishes us to obey him solely out of our own free will. This is a radically transcendent God who has tied his hands in the presence of evil, a suffering God who is torn asunder, separated from himself by human autonomy. It is only in the person of Christ, through Christ's crucifixion, that God can begin to be reunited with himself.

Weil's apposite concept of "decreation" has often been misread as evidence of her denigration of the physical

world. In fact, it is something quite other, as her love of nature and of art, her intense involvement in social reform, and the following statement make clear: "For living man here below . . . sensible matter . . . is like a filter or sieve; it is the universal test of what is real in thought." So her "decreation" must be viewed, rather, in psychological terms, as a process of mimesis and return. Just as God, when he created the world, relinquished his power over us and the rest of nature, so we must relinquish the independence he offered us, and cease to live apart from him. In Weil's lexicon, there is a world of difference between "decreation," which she defines as "making something created pass into the uncreated," and "destruction," which entails "making something created pass into nothingness."

The language of paradox and contradiction familiar to all mystics abounds in Weil, and is made even more cryptic by her very terse aphoristic style. "God has created our independence to offer us the possibility of renouncing it out of love. . . . God in His love withdraws from us so that we can love Him. . . . He who has not God in himself can not feel His absence."² (At times, Weil's peekaboo deity resembles one of those nightmarishly perverse, sadistic lovers in French cinema who pepper their endearments with such conundrums as, "I must leave you in order to be with you.")

In her last years, influenced by the Upanishads and other Eastern systems of belief she was studying, Weil linked her concept of decreation to the notion that the self is an illusion that must be purged in order to find true contact with the *Déty*. Like many an earlier mystic, Weil often uses the concept of a screen—we must give up our own feelings totally enough to allow free passage, as through a transpar-

ent window, of God's love which sin and error cast. The sin in me says I."³

But Weil's theology is anorexia as well as by. She low herself any of the brought by some intimate most mystics. "There ar salutary which brings G everything which keeps comes as significant to us tell ourselves that he does hell to an imaginary para

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Necessity and the Creat

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SIMONE WEIL

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But Weil's theology might be dictated by her spiritual anorexia as well as by Eastern influences. She does not allow herself any of the nourishing consolations—usually brought by some intimate contact with God—traditional to most mystics. "There are people for whom everything is salutary which brings God nearer to them. For me it is everything which keeps Him at a distance."⁴ "If God becomes as significant to us as treasure is to a miser, we must tell ourselves that he does not exist. . . . We must prefer real hell to an imaginary paradise."⁵

Seldom does she phrase her impulse to self-annihilation more brutally than in the following sentence, written to the Dominican priest Father Couturier: "When I think of the Crucifixion, I commit the sin of envy."⁶

Necessity and the Created World

The world of space and time is the terrain in which God's most precious gift to man, free will, is acted out. It is dominated, alas, by Necessity, those inflexible laws of nature and history whose often brutal expression—wars, pestilence, the suffering of innocents—we have always struggled to reconcile with God's goodness. Our only path to spiritual illumination (here Weil is at variance with Manichaeism) is through a serene acceptance of the mechanism of Necessity. We must accept it as just and beautiful, we must even admire it, we must practice what the Stoics called *Amor fati*, a calm acquiescence to nature's most brutal laws, and of our utter

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Francine du Plessix Gray

insignificance in relation to the cosmos. However pitiless and implacable these laws, "as blind and exact as the laws of gravitation," we must love them because they are expressions of God's will.

By meditating on Necessity's indifference to us (one of the last phrases of Camus's *The Stranger*, "*la tendre indifférence du monde*," might well have been influenced by a reading of his beloved Simone Weil) we can cultivate a true detachment from material creation. Only this experience of detachment, of acute voidness—the *via negativa* of medieval mysticism—might create interstices through which God can enter and touch us. "Grace fills empty spaces . . . it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void."⁷ "Only when man accepts the void can grace rush in." Yet another cryptic Weil-ian aphorism: "The world is a closed door. It is a barrier. And at the same time it is the way through."⁸

The bitter experience of our insignificance and of God's ~~infinite distance from us~~—echoes of Pascal's vision of God as the *Truly Other*—are of central importance to Weil. It is only through painfully feeling his absence that we begin to experience his presence. "God and the supernatural are hidden and formless in the universe. It is well that they should be hidden and nameless in the soul."⁹ "We must experience the fact that we love him, even if he does not exist."¹⁰ "A method of purification: to pray to God . . . with the thought that God does not exist."¹¹ (One possible interpretation: Since God does not exist in the same way as the created things we apprehend with our natural faculties, supernatural reality might first be experienced as nothingness.)

In a passage eerily precursive of the "Death of God" the-

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SIMONE WEIL

ology that would arise in the postwar years, Weil also compares the emotions we feel toward God to our emotions toward the dead: "The presence of the dead person is imaginary, but his absence is very real; henceforth it is his way of appearing." She illustrates this point—this is one of her favorite rhetorical devices—with an example from classical Greek drama. Just as Electra "preferred the absence of Orestes to the presence of anyone else," so we must love God, who is absent from material creation, more than any object in it.¹²

But what kind of a love of God are we pitiful creatures capable of? This is what Weil examines in her pivotal essay, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God."

The Implicit Love of God

There are three potential objects of human love in which God is secretly present, and through which we can therefore love him in an indirect or implicit manner: love for our neighbor, for religious rituals, and for the order and beauty of the created world. These implicit or "veiled" loves constitute a stage through which we must absolutely pass in order to reach the explicit contact with God that only the most privileged mystics attain: "The soul is not ready to receive the personal visit of its Master, unless it has in it all three indirect loves to a high degree. . . . The veiled form of love necessarily comes first and often reigns alone in the soul for a very long time. . . . Veiled love can reach a very high degree of purity and power."¹³

The love of our neighbor has to do with our absolute compassion for every human being, and, above all, with jus-

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tice, that most sacred of principles, which is exclusively based on mutual consent. Justice—another mimetic principle that emulates the workings of divine compassion—is always a pivotal point of Weil's ethics: "He who treats as equals those who are far below him in strength really makes them a gift of the quality of human beings. . . . As far as it is possible for a creature, he reproduces the original generosity of the Creator.¹⁴ . . . The supernatural virtue of justice consists of behaving exactly as though there were equality when one is the stronger in an unequal relationship."¹⁵

Another form of "veiled" or "implicit" love of God that draws us nearer to him is our love for religious practices. Like Pascal, Weil holds prayer in the greatest importance, and believes that the practice of rituals can help us to deepen our faith. "The recitation of the name of the Lord," she writes, "truly has the power of transforming the soul." But in terms of Roman Catholic doctrine, Weil verges far more closely on heresy than Pascal ever did. If practiced with a pure heart, rituals of all the major faiths, she insists, have the same sacred power, and can bring redemption to whomever performs them "with desire." (One can imagine how such a universalist view was received by the stern Dominican monks of Provence with whom she held her last theological discussions in France.) It is also in this passage that Weil lashes out ferociously against Roman Catholics' zeal for converting those born into other faiths. She is severely opposed to conversion, for the religion of one's birth, she esteems, serves as "a ladder" from which one can best grasp the beauty of other faiths. "We must have given all our attention, all our faith, all our love to a particular religion in order to think of any other religion with the high degree of attention, faith and love that is proper to it."¹⁶

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The third "implicit" form of loving God designated by Weil—our obligation to love "the beauty of the world"—is such an essential facet of her thought that it is considered separately below.

Beauty

The beauty of the world displays "the cooperation of divine wisdom in creation." It is a sacramental quality which "like a mirror . . . sends us back to our desire for goodness." Whereas the achievements most of us mistake for ends—money, power—are merely means, beauty alone is a good in itself, and can never be a means to anything else. As Kant perceived, it is "a finality which involves no objective."¹⁷

It is also through the world's beauty that brute necessity most readily becomes an object of love. Here again, Weil is antiascetic. With the exception of Saint Francis, whose life she looks on as "perfect poetry in action," she repeatedly castigates Christianity's lack of emphasis on nature's physical splendor. Our very longing for the beauty of the world, in her view, is God-inspired. It is part of our yearning for the Incarnation. It is eternity here below. It also has a deep ethical dimension, a view elaborated in Weil's play *Venice Is Saved*, in which the hero commits treason against his own state—the Spanish Empire—to save the city, which has captivated him through its beauty and valor.

Beauty, of course, is the bridge to art, which is "an attempt to transport into a limited quantity of matter, molded by man, an image of the infinite beauty of the entire universe." Predictably, Weil's views of art are utopian, rigorously traditional, and somewhat piggish, and she would probably have been appalled by most contemporary aes-

Francine du Plessix Gray

thetic artifacts, based as they are on shock and information value rather than on traditional notions of "Beauty" with a capital B. She believes that works of art that are not "true reflections of the beauty of the world" have little validity, and that every true artist has a real, direct, and immediate contact with the world's beauty, "a contact that is of the nature of a sacrament."¹⁸

Affliction

At the time of her first religious experiences Weil began to differentiate between *la douleur*, physical suffering, and *le malheur*, a more psychological term that is best translated as "affliction." Unless it is chronic and severe—such as the pain caused by Simone's headaches, which might indeed turn it into affliction—physical suffering is a transient state that we usually learn to bear until it disappears, and that does not leave any permanent marks. (Weil points out that even severe emotional pain, such as sorrow over the loss of a loved one, can be healed or at least diminished over time.)

Affliction, on the other hand, is a profound distress of both body and spirit that leaves permanent marks on our bodies and our souls. It involves humiliation and social degradation of the kind that she saw being branded, during her months on the production line, on factory workers. In such excessive instances as slavery, "an extreme form of affliction," victims are even deprived of their personalities and reduced to objects.

Job, of course, is a perfect example of affliction. One of Weil's most subtle points is that the kind of affliction suffered by Job stamps our souls with "the sorrow, the disgust, and even the guilt and defilement that crime logically

should produce but actually does not... everything happens as if the state of soul is criminal."¹⁹ It is these feelings of guilt, of abasement, and even, in particularly acute moments, of criminality that seem to have been innate to Simone Weil since her youth, and may have enabled her to identify so deeply with the wretched of the earth.

However, affliction, this "marvel of divine technique," plays an important role in our eventual illumination. It is also through suffering that the world's beauty can reach us, since "suffering alone gives us contact with that necessity which constitutes the order of the world."²⁰ (Throughout her writings on affliction, one is struck by Weil's kinship to Kafka, who wrote that "[c]ontradiction is our wretchedness, and the feeling of our wretchedness is the feeling of our reality... that's why we must love it." To both writers, the transforming power of suffering is indispensable to understanding that the entire universe is "the vibration of the word of God.")

Attention and Waiting

Weil's thoughts on attaining a state of grace are best expressed in her own words, with little commentary.

We must not want to find: as in the case of an excessive devotion, we become dependent on the object of our efforts. . . . It is only effort without desire (not attached to an object) which infallibly contains a reward. . . . By pulling at the bunch, we make all grapes fall to the ground. . . .²¹

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the

object. . . . Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it. . . . We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them. . . . This way of looking is, in the first place, attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive the human being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only one who is capable of attention can do this. . . .

The wrong way of seeking; the attention fixed on a problem. Another phenomenon due to horror of the void. . . .

The attitude that brings about salvation is not like any form of activity. The Greek word which expresses it is *υπομενη*, and *patientia* is rather an inadequate translation of it. It is the waiting or attentive and faithful immobility that lasts indefinitely and can not be shaken. The best image for it is that of the slave who waits near the door so as to open as soon as the master knocks. He must be ready to die of hunger and exhaustion rather than change his posture. . . . Even if he is told that the master is dead, and even if he believes it, he will not move.²²

In our acts of obedience to God we are passive; whatever difficulties we have to surmount . . . there is nothing analogous to muscular effort; there is only waiting, attention, silence, immobility, constant through suffering and joy. The crucifixion of Christ is the model of all acts of obedience.

This kind of passive activity, the highest of all, is perfectly described in the Bhagavad-Gita and in Lao-Tse. . . .

As Aeschylus says: "There is no effort in what is divine." There is an easiness in salvation which is more difficult to us than all our efforts.²³

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SIMONE WEIL

So there is little we can do to attain faith, or redemption, or most good things Weil wants for us. The greatest quarrel she has to pick with Pascal, in fact, concerns his notion that we should actively pray for grace. On this issue Samuel Beckett might have understood her meaning better than anyone else: We can do little else than wait, little else than maintain a degree of acutely loving attentiveness to the living world. Or as we used to say in the antiwar movement (which, as Staughton Lynd notes, much appreciated Simone Weil) when advocating civil disobedience: "Don't just *do* something, *stand* there."

Food, Sacred and Profane

Metaphors of food and hunger recur throughout Weil's writings to an obsessional degree, and are often imbued with a very negative view of the act of eating.

My meat is to do the will of Him who sent me. . . .

Friendship is a miracle by which a person consents to view from a certain distance, and without coming any nearer, the very being who is as necessary to him as food. . . .

The beautiful is a carnal attraction which keeps us at a distance and implies a renunciation. . . . We want to eat all the other objects of desire. The beautiful is that which we desire without wishing to eat it. We desire that it should be.²⁴ [Does she view eating as a form of original sin?]

Weil was so fond of this paradigm of looking/eating that she repeated it in her journals and her letters, and the metaphor

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eventually made its way into different books: "The great trouble in human life is that looking and eating are two different operations. . . . It may be that vice, depravity and crime are nearly always, or even perhaps always, in their essence, attempts to eat beauty, to eat what we should only look at. Eve began it."²⁵ (Might this mean that paradise, for Weil, would be a condition in which she would be forever allowed to sate her appetite?)

"The beauty of the world is the mouth of a labyrinth. The unwary individual who on entering takes a few steps is soon unable to find the opening . . . if he goes on walking, it is absolutely certain that he will finally arrive at the center of the labyrinth. And there God is waiting to eat him."²⁶

From a letter to Father Perrin: "My situation with regard to you is like that of a beggar, reduced by extreme poverty to a state of constant hunger, who for the space of a year had been going at intervals to a prosperous house where he was given bread."²⁷

One should keep in mind that the female mystic's rendering of supernatural experience is traditionally imbued with eroticized images of food and lactation. To Julian of Norwich, "our precious Mother, Jesus . . . can feed us with a substance far more precious than mother's milk, Himself." Clare of Assisi, an anorexic who from her early youth slept on wooden boards and secreted her food away to the poor, had dreams that she suckled at the breast of her hero, Saint Francis of Assisi. To another anorexic saint, Teresa of Avila, the Lord's kiss was also "sweeter than wine."

"A child does not stop crying if we tell him that there is no bread . . . it goes on crying all the same. The danger, for the soul, is not to doubt whether there is any bread, but to persuade itself, through lying, that it is not hungry."²⁸

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copied again until late in the evening. They saw very few people beyond those who came to inquire about Simone. They were exclusively dedicated to the goal of preserving her work."¹⁷

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world. In fact, it is something quite other, as her love of nature and of art, her intense involvement in social reform, and the following statement make clear: "For living man here below . . . sensible matter . . . is like a filter or sieve; it is the universal test of what is real in thought." So her "decreation" must be viewed, rather, in psychological terms, as a process of mimesis and return. Just as God, when he created the world, relinquished his power over us and the rest of nature, so we must relinquish the independence he offered us, and cease to live apart from him. In Weil's lexicon, there is a world of difference between "decreation," which she defines as "making something created pass into the uncreated," and "destruction," which entails "making something created pass into nothingness."

The language of paradox and contradiction familiar to all mystics abounds in Weil, and is made even more cryptic by her very terse aphoristic style. "God has created our independence to offer us the possibility of renouncing it out of love. . . . God in His love withdraws from us so that we can love Him. . . . He who has not God in himself can not feel His absence."² (At times, Weil's peekaboo deity resembles one of those nightmarishly perverse, sadistic lovers in French cinema who pepper their endearments with such confusions as, "I must leave you in order to be with you.")

In her last years, influenced by the Upanishads and other Eastern systems of belief she was studying, Weil linked her concept of decreation to the notion that the self is an illusion that must be purged in order to find true contact with the Deity. Like many an earlier mystic, Weil often uses the concept of a screen—we must give up our own feelings totally enough to allow free passage, as through a transpar-

ent window, of God's love which sin and error cast. The sin in me says I."³

But Weil's theology is anorexia as well as by *Être* low herself any of the brought by some intimate most mystics. "There are salutary which brings G everything which keeps comes as significant to us tell ourselves that he does hell to an imaginary para-

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Necessity and the Great

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ent window, of God's love: "The self is only the shadow which sin and error cast by stopping the light of God. . . . The sin in me says I."³

But Weil's theology might be dictated by her spiritual anorexia as well as by Eastern influences. She does not allow herself any of the nourishing consolations—usually brought by some intimate contact with God—traditional to most mystics. "There are people for whom everything is salutary which brings God nearer to them. For me it is everything which keeps Him at a distance."⁴ "If God becomes as significant to us as treasure is to a miser, we must tell ourselves that he does not exist. . . . We must prefer real hell to an imaginary paradise."⁵

Seldom does she phrase her impulse to self-annihilation more brutally than in the following sentence, written to the Dominican priest Father Couturier: "When I think of the Crucifixion, I commit the sin of envy."⁶

Necessity and the Created World

The world of space and time is the terrain in which God's most precious gift to man, free will, is acted out. It is dominated, alas, by Necessity, those inflexible laws of nature and history whose often brutal expression—wars, pestilence, the suffering of innocents—we have always struggled to reconcile with God's goodness. Our only path to spiritual illumination (here Weil is at variance with Manichaeism) is through a serene acceptance of the mechanism of Necessity. We must accept it as just and beautiful, we must even admire it, we must practice what the Stoics called *Amor fati*, a calm acquiescence to nature's most brutal laws, and of our utter

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insignificance in relation to the cosmos. However pitiless and implacable these laws, "as blind and exact as the laws of gravitation," we must love them because they are expressions of God's will.

By meditating on Necessity's indifference to us (one of the last phrases of Camus's *The Stranger*, "*la tendre indifférence du monde*," might well have been influenced by a reading of his beloved Simone Weil) we can cultivate a true detachment from material creation. Only this experience of detachment, of acute voidness—the *via negativa* of medieval mysticism—might create interstices through which God can enter and touch us. "Grace fills empty spaces . . . it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void."⁷ "Only when man accepts the void can grace rush in." Yet another cryptic Weil-ian aphorism: "The world is a closed door. It is a barrier. And at the same time it is the way through."⁸

The bitter experience of our insignificance and of God's infinite distance from us—echoes of Pascal's vision of God as the Totally Other—are of central importance to Weil. It is only through painfully feeling his absence that we begin to experience his presence. "God and the supernatural are hidden and formless in the universe. It is well that they should be hidden and nameless in the soul."⁹ "We must experience the fact that we love him, even if he does not exist."¹⁰ "A method of purification: to pray to God . . . with the thought that God does not exist."¹¹ (One possible interpretation: Since God does not exist in the same way as the created things we apprehend with our natural faculties, supernatural reality might first be experienced as nothingness.)

In a passage surely precursive of the "Death of God" the-

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ology that would arise in the postwar years, Weil also compares the emotions we feel toward God to our emotions toward the dead: "The presence of the dead person is imaginary, but his absence is very real; henceforth it is his way of appearing." She illustrates this point—this is one of her favorite rhetorical devices—with an example from classical Greek drama. Just as Electra "preferred the absence of Orestes to the presence of anyone else," so we must love God, who is absent from material creation, more than any object in it.¹²

But what kind of a love of God are we pitiful creatures capable of? This is what Weil examines in her pivotal essay, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God."

The Implicit Love of God

There are three potential objects of human love in which God is secretly present, and through which we can therefore love him in an indirect or implicit manner: love for our neighbor, for religious rituals, and for the order and beauty of the created world. These implicit or "veiled" loves constitute a stage through which we must absolutely pass in order to reach the explicit contact with God that only the most privileged mystics attain: "The soul is not ready to receive the personal visit of its Master, unless it has in it all three indirect loves to a high degree. . . . The veiled form of love necessarily comes first and often reigns alone in the soul for a very long time. . . . Veiled love can reach a very high degree of purity and power."¹³

The love of our neighbor has to do with our absolute compassion for every human being, and, above all, with jus-

tice, that most sacred of principles, which is exclusively based on mutual consent. Justice—another mimetic principle that emulates the workings of divine compassion—is always a pivotal point of Weil's ethics: "He who treats as equals those who are far below him in strength really makes them a gift of the quality of human beings. . . . As far as it is possible for a creature, he reproduces the original generosity of the Creator."¹⁴ . . . The supernatural virtue of justice consists of behaving exactly as though there were equality when one is the stronger in an unequal relationship."¹⁵

Another form of "veiled" or "implicit" love of God that draws us nearer to him is our love for religious practices. Like Pascal, Weil holds prayer in the greatest importance, and believes that the practice of rituals can help us to deepen our faith. "The recitation of the name of the Lord," she writes, "truly has the power of transforming the soul." But in terms of Roman Catholic doctrine, Weil verges far more closely on heresy than Pascal ever did. If practiced with a pure heart, rituals of all the major faiths, she insists, have the same sacred power, and can bring redemption to whomever performs them "with desire." (One can imagine how such a universalist view was received by the stern Dominican monks of Provence with whom she held her last theological discussions in France.) It is also in this passage that Weil lashes out ferociously against Roman Catholics' zeal for converting those born into other faiths. She is severely opposed to conversion, for the religion of one's birth, she esteems, serves as "a ladder" from which one can best grasp the beauty of other faiths. "We must have given all our attention, all our faith, all our love to a particular religion in order to think of any other religion with the high degree of attention, faith and love that is proper to it."¹⁶

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The third "implicit" form of loving God designated by Weil—our obligation to love "the beauty of the world"—is such an essential facet of her thought that it is considered separately below.

Beauty

The beauty of the world displays "the cooperation of divine wisdom in creation." It is a sacramental quality which "like a mirror . . . sends us back to our desire for goodness." Whereas the achievements most of us mistake for ends—money, power—are merely means, beauty alone is a good in itself, and can never be a means to anything else. As Kant perceived, it is "a finality which involves no objective."¹⁷

It is also through the world's beauty that brute necessity most readily becomes an object of love. Here again, Weil is antiascetic. With the exception of Saint Francis, whose life she looks on as "perfect poetry in action," she repeatedly castigates Christianity's lack of emphasis on nature's physical splendor. Our very longing for the beauty of the world, in her view, is God inspired. It is part of our yearning for the Incarnation. It is eternity here below. It also has a deep ethical dimension, a view elaborated in Weil's play *Venice Is Saved*, in which the hero commits treason against his own state—the Spanish Empire—to save the city, which has captivated him through its beauty and valor.

Beauty, of course, is the bridge to art, which is "an attempt to transport into a limited quantity of matter, molded by man, an image of the infinite beauty of the entire universe." Predictably, Weil's views of art are utopian, rigorously traditional, and somewhat priggish, and she would probably have been appalled by most contemporary aes-

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thetic artifacts, based as they are on shock and information value rather than on traditional notions of "Beauty" with a capital B. She believes that works of art that are not "true reflections of the beauty of the world" have little validity, and that every true artist has a real, direct, and immediate contact with the world's beauty, "a contact that is of the nature of a sacrament."¹⁶

Affliction

At the time of her first religious experiences Weil began to differentiate between *la douleur*, physical suffering, and *le malheur*, a more psychological term that is best translated as "affliction." Unless it is chronic and severe—such as the pain caused by Simone's headaches, which might indeed turn it into affliction—physical suffering is a transient state that we usually learn to bear until it disappears, and that does not leave any permanent marks. (Weil points out that even severe emotional pain, such as sorrow over the loss of a loved one, can be healed or at least diminished over time.)

Affliction, on the other hand, is a profound distress of both body and spirit that leaves permanent marks on our bodies and our souls. It involves humiliation and social degradation of the kind that she saw being branded, during her months on the production line, on factory workers. In such excessive instances as slavery, "an extreme form of affliction," victims are even deprived of their personalities and reduced to objects.

Job, of course, is a perfect example of affliction. One of Weil's most subtle points is that the kind of affliction suffered by Job stamps our souls with "the sorrow, the disgust, and even the guilt and defilement that crime logically

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should produce but actually does not . . . everything happens as if the state of soul is criminal."¹⁹ It is these feelings of guilt, of abasement, and even, in particularly acute moments, of criminality that seem to have been innate to Simone Weil since her youth, and may have enabled her to identify so deeply with the wretched of the earth.

However, affliction, this "marvel of divine technique," plays an important role in our eventual illumination. It is also through suffering that the world's beauty can reach us, since "suffering alone gives us contact with that necessity which constitutes the order of the world."²⁰ (Throughout her writings on affliction, one is struck by Weil's kinship to Kafka, who wrote that "[c]ontradiction is our wretchedness, and the feeling of our wretchedness is the feeling of our reality . . . that's why we must love it." To both writers, the transforming power of suffering is indispensable to understanding that the entire universe is "the vibration of the word of God.")

Attention and Waiting

Weil's thoughts on attaining a state of grace are best expressed in her own words, with little commentary.

We must not want to find: as in the case of an excessive devotion, we become dependent on the object of our efforts. . . . It is only effort without desire (not attached to an object) which infallibly contains a reward. . . . By pulling at the bunch, we make all grapes fall to the ground. . . .²¹

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the

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object. . . . Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it. . . . We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them. . . . This way of looking is, in the first place, attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive the human being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only one who is capable of attention can do this. . . .

The wrong way of seeking; the attention fixed on a problem. Another phenomenon due to horror of the void. . . .

The attitude that brings about salvation is not like any form of activity. The Greek word which expresses it is *προσηνεια*, and *patientia* is rather an inadequate translation of it. It is the waiting or attentive and faithful immobility that lasts indefinitely and can not be shaken. The best image for it is that of the slave who waits near the door so as to open as soon as the master knocks. He must be ready to die of hunger and exhaustion rather than change his posture. . . . Even if he is told that the master is dead, and even if he believes it, he will not move.²²

In our acts of obedience to God we are passive; whatever difficulties we have to surmount . . . there is nothing analogous to muscular effort; there is only waiting, attention, silence, immobility, constant through suffering and joy. The crucifixion of Christ is the model of all acts of obedience.

This kind of passive activity, the highest of all, is perfectly described in the Bhagavad-Gita and in Lao-Tse. . . .

As Aeschylus says: "There is no effort in what is divine." There is an easiness in salvation which is more difficult to us than all our efforts.²³

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So there is little we can do to attain faith, or redemption, or most good things Weil wants for us. The greatest quarrel she has to pick with Pascal, in fact, concerns his notion that we should actively pray for grace. On this issue Samuel Beckett might have understood her meaning better than anyone else: We can do little else than wait, little else than maintain a degree of acutely loving attentiveness to the living world. Or as we used to say in the antiwar movement (which, as Staughton Lynd notes, much appreciated Simone Weil) when advocating civil disobedience: "Don't just *do* something, *stand* there."

Food, Sacred and Profane

Metaphors of food and hunger recur throughout Weil's writings to an obsessional degree, and are often imbued with a very negative view of the act of eating.

My meat is to do the will of Him who sent me. . . .

Friendship is a miracle by which a person consents to view from a certain distance, and without coming any nearer, the very being who is as necessary to him as food. . . .

The beautiful is a carnal attraction which keeps us at a distance and implies a renunciation. . . . We want to eat all the other objects of desire. The beautiful is that which we desire without wishing to eat it. We desire that it should be.²⁴ [Does she view eating as a form of original sin?]

Weil was so fond of this paradigm of looking/eating that she repeated it in her journals and her letters, and the metaphor

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eventually made its way into different books: "The great trouble in human life is that looking and eating are two different operations. . . . It may be that vice, depravity and crime are nearly always, or even perhaps always, in their essence, attempts to eat beauty, to eat what we should only look at. Eve began it."²⁵ (Might this mean that paradise, for Weil, would be a condition in which she would be forever allowed to sate her appetite?)

"The beauty of the world is the mouth of a labyrinth. The unwary individual who on entering takes a few steps is soon unable to find the opening . . . if he goes on walking, it is absolutely certain that he will finally arrive at the center of the labyrinth. And there God is waiting to eat him."²⁶

From a letter to Father Perrin: "My situation with regard to you is like that of a beggar, reduced by extreme poverty to a state of constant hunger, who for the space of a year had been going at intervals to a prosperous house where he was given bread."²⁷

One should keep in mind that the female mystic's rendering of supernatural experience is traditionally imbued with eroticized images of food and lactation. To Julian of Norwich, "our precious Mother, Jesus . . . can feed us with a substance far more precious than mother's milk, Himself." Clare of Assisi, an anorexic who from her early youth slept on wooden boards and secreted her food away to the poor, had dreams that she suckled at the breast of her hero, Saint Francis of Assisi. To another anorexic saint, Teresa of Avila, the Lord's kiss was also "sweeter than wine."

"A child does not stop crying if we tell him that there is no bread . . . it goes on crying all the same. The danger, for the soul, is not to doubt whether there is any bread, but to persuade itself, through lying, that it is not hungry."²⁸

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A Conversation with Norman Mailer and Dr. Christopher M. Leighton

Norman Mailer is certainly not the first novelist to leap over almost two thousand years of history and attempt to land inside the story of Jesus. Nor is he the first Jew to do so. Mailer's latest novel, "The Gospel According to the Son," beckons readers into territory strangely familiar. There are recognizable landmarks from start to finish, but I found the well-known signs pointed in strange directions, making it easy to become disoriented. Puzzled and intrigued by this novel, I finally yielded to the impulse to interview Mr. Mailer.

CL: I am enormously interested in your new novel, The Gospel According to the Son, precisely because it lies on the boundaries - the boundaries of theology and literature, the boundaries of the sacred and profane. It is also situated at that intersection where the Jewish and Christian traditions converge. There is so much going on here that deserves careful reflection and scrutiny.

First, I'm intrigued with the very title of the work, The Gospel According to the Son. I associate a gospel with a specific genre of literature that is driven by a theological agenda. While there is a fair amount of debate about what exactly constitutes a gospel, it entails a sacred story that tries to shape a community and to instill a shared theological vision. And, I usually don't think of most contemporary writers attempting to work through such a genre. Is there a theological passion underlying your novel?

NM: Well, yes I think there is. But by your explanation, I would say that Tolstoy to a great degree was a gospel writer. And in that sense, all proportions capped at a more modest level, I think I've been trying to do that all my writing life. Now the gospel in my case keeps shifting, and it's not a word I would have used for many, many years. Yes, I do think there is a religious agenda in the book. You know I've had this notion for decades that the only way that I can feel comfortably religious, and I do believe in God, is to conceive of God as not all powerful. And I'd say if there is a gospel in this book, it's that.

CL: Aren't there numerous other characters in the Bible besides Jesus that you might have chosen to make this same point?

NM: Well, in fact, it's not even a comfortable form for those ideas of course. After all, you know the book ends up irritating a great many people because it stays too close to

the gospels, and it irritates a great many others because it departs from them at the end. I've been thinking a long time about why I structured the book this way. What impelled me to do it? What were my motives? One usually doesn't know one's motives when one writes a book. Well, you don't want to, in a way, because it gets in the way. The moment you decide you're writing a book for a purpose then the purpose takes over and paralyzes often some more interesting possibilities. So I generally prefer to write a book in a motivational fog. It's enough that I'm writing the book. I don't question why I'm writing it. Then afterward I begin to ponder the question. I've thought more about this book than any other book I've written because it was so fickle, so out of character for me.

In anticipation of our talk, I started thinking, "Well why don't you try just once to define a little better what you were up to." As I've been thinking about it, it's occurred to me that actually what is interesting to me about the book is that I have very, very little knowledge - for a reasonably sophisticated, civilized, cultivated author, like five hundred of us in America - I really had relatively little knowledge of Christian theology. I had a much more developed sense of Jewish theology, though I'm not at all a devout orthodox Jew. I don't think I've been - this is not to brag or apologize - I don't think I've been in a synagogue in twenty years. On the other hand, I always think of myself as being absolutely attached to Jewish questions. Over the years I've spent a lot of time in various Jewish studies on my own. I studied Hebrew at one point unsuccessfully. I studied Jewish Yiddish at one point unsuccessfully. I've read an awful lot of Judaica compared with how much I've read of Christian theology. Years ago I read Graetz' History of the Jews in five volumes, which is the great nineteenth century history that was done. I really think his is the best because it's so private and particular. He's so passionate, and he's unwittingly very humorous. Great popes come through who were cruel to the Jews, and he dismisses them with the stroke of a pen. Some evil bastards come along, and he adores them because they were so nice to the Jews. It's a wonderful sort of.... It gives you a notion of what history is all about.

What occurred to me when I read the gospels a couple of years ago is, "here I am, I'm a typical Jew, which is that I know a lot about my tradition and feel a lot about being Jewish." And I know so little about these gospels that I'm really reading them in a virtual state of innocence. I've been familiar with the lines. I've been familiar with the theory. I've heard many conversations about Christianity, but finally I had no basic experience in the reading of the gospels. And I was struck with several interesting paradoxes. On the one hand, here is a wonderful story. On the other hand, this has gotten me in a lot of trouble, but I repeat it, the gospels vary between the most beautiful, illuminated and exalted writing and some terribly pedestrian writing. It just stands out that the evangelists kept the good lines from earlier people or from Jesus himself. So I had very little interest in the historical Jesus, or in the reality or even the unreality of the gospels. What I was fascinated with as a Jew is the fact that Jesus is Jewish. This struck me as incredibly important. Indeed, if you're going to make a pantheon of the ten greatest Jews, the only argument would be, "Is he the first, or is he not?"



The Jews for the most part have never gone near the gospels, because that is the place where all the trouble started for them. And so I thought I really ought to tell this story. Now, looking back on it, I think it wouldn't be at all bad for a great many of my fellow Jews to have the same experience I had, which is how interesting and moving and profound a story this is. And how full it is of novelistic ambiguities and depths that we can't plumb and so forth. And, on the other hand, I thought there are so many Christians out there who are probably analogous to the kind of Jew I am -- which is they had a considerable amount of church when they were young, they've left the church, they're not interested but they too might enjoy going through the story again. There's a no man's land surrounding the gospels that I can fill, precisely because I don't know a great deal about Christian theology. This was probably my motive for writing this novel.

CL: I encounter some Jewish readers, and I'm sure I'll encounter many more, who wonder what one of the preeminent writers - who clearly identifies himself as a Jew - is doing making Jesus so believable. They are scandalized that, in a sense, you opened the door to making an assimilationist move; that in a sense is what you are doing by reclaiming the Jewishness of Jesus in the way that you do.

NM: Well, I'm not interested in having Jews concur. That's not my aim. But what I do feel is that it's immensely important for western civilization to fulfill the promise of the hyphen in Judeo-Christian. Unless our concept of spirituality deepens immensely in the next century, I'm not at all certain that we're going to make it. The destructive tendencies in human nature are not necessarily any less than they ever were, and in fact, with the greater power we have technologically, we could ruin the whole thing in so many different ways. It's terrifying. And, global capitalism doesn't exactly relax me. You know there's an old dictum of Marx's that money leaches out everything else in sight. Of course, that's very close to what Jesus was teaching. Global capitalism to me represents precisely that principle: that money prevails. So, given all that, there has to be a rapprochement between Jews and Christians. But it won't work on the old terms. It won't work on the premise that we Jews are simply victims. "Oh, we've been unfairly accused of killing Christ" and so forth and so on. The fact of the matter is, if Christ existed - and I suspect he did - it's very hard to believe that all this was made up and believed in without any objective reality there. If the real story, the historic story, is anything at all like the story that has come down to us through the gospels, then almost certainly Christ was killed by a collaboration between the Roman establishment and the Jewish establishment. I don't know if that's something that the Jews have to still feel guilty or uneasy about. Establishments are always killing their own.

CL: Well, again, this raises the questions about the peculiar nature of the gospels. A polemic is built into the gospels, and one of the ways in which the theological agenda of the church is established is through an effort to discredit her evangelical competitors. This verbal attack redounds on the Jewish tradition. In other words, to make sure there is space cleared for the emergence of this alternative way of being in relationship to God, a sharp assault is directed against Jesus' compatriots. The Pharisees in particular get a bad rap. Now I understand that your literary task is not to recontextualize in historical terms exactly what went on, but I am unsettled that you recapitulate the familiar anti-Jewish polemics that have plagued western culture for so

many centuries. This is most conspicuous in your characterization of the Pharisees as legalistic, spiritually vacuous and, in the last analysis even murderous.



NM: Well, no. I don't think I picture them as murderers. I picture them as no more murderous than any government that ever executes some of its own people. In other words, they are exercising one of the functions of government at that point. No, I don't see them as individually murderous, but....

CL: The grandeur of the very tradition out of which Jesus emerged is nonetheless obscured. I'm convinced that had there not been a Pharisaic movement, Jesus himself would have been unimaginable. He stands precisely on traditions enshrined by the Pharisees. The aptitude for innovation and self-criticism and the democratizing of the religious experience—these creative dynamics comprise what Ellis Rivkin calls "the hidden revolution." The creativity of the Pharisees makes them of huge importance, not only for the development of the church but for the emergence of rabbinic Judaism. It seems to me that one of the real challenges for Christians and Jews is to reconceptualize their origins. I think that this recovery of our beginnings is necessary if Christians and Jews are going to forge a new relationship. There is no escaping the imperative to reappraise the enduring perceptions among Christians of the Jewish tradition that crystallize in the New Testament.

NM: Well, I'll confess that I knew very little about the Pharisees when I started writing the book, and I don't know a great deal more now. But, taking it on the terms of the gospels themselves, and I assure you that the sense of distortion was not absent from me. Luke, for example, is a very good example of someone who is so filled with hatred for the Jews that I found much of Luke very hard to accept head on. I didn't trust his motives. But I think the cutting edge is here: how does one bring Christians to recognize that there is more to the Jewish half of the argument that they've accepted. I think that using your approach, which is to make people recognize that there was much more to the Pharisees than they've ever understood, is going to be very difficult. Your method consists of approaching people about faith and telling them that they have to adapt their faith to fit a historical likelihood. And that's almost impossible for most people. My feeling was that the best approach - I could be wrong about this - was to emphasize a very Jewish Jesus. This would move and affect them much more than any attempt to argue about the historical reality. This was my premise. Like all premises, one could be wrong on that.

It started with an interesting episode way back in Arkansas, about twelve years ago. I was there with my wife, who comes from a Baptist family, and her father invited me to come to church. I said, "Well sure, yes, I think I'd like to go." So I went, and the people and, they were very excited that someone was Jewish in their adult Sunday school, their Bible class on Sunday. They assumed that I would have an insight that they wouldn't have - particularly since we were reading the Old Testament that day - because I was of the root. I thought about that a lot afterward. I thought, let them encounter the profound Jewishness of Jesus. That might even accomplish more than any other approach to it.

Now as I said, it's only a premise, and I could be dead wrong on it. A profound change in attitude won't necessarily occur by restoring the dignity of the Pharisees and insisting that they were not really deserving of blame. If indeed the events are historically true, and Jesus was crucified, then I think there's no doubt of collaboration between the high priests and Pilate.

CL: Well, the rehabilitation of the historical image of Second Temple Judaism may not capture the imagination of most readers or change many hearts. The contours of the original story may prove unalterable. Yet, I wonder how you, as a writer of a gospel, sort out the conflicting responsibilities of your profession. Do the aesthetic demands of composing a gripping story take precedence over the responsibility to present a historically reliable portrait, especially in light of the devastation already worked in the name of the "new and improved" covenant? You take imaginative liberties in describing Jesus as bedeviled with doubt and suffering from a lack in knowledge and power. You also take some innovative turns in projecting an image of God as profoundly limited. So why not go the distance? Doesn't the story benefit from a more historically nuanced and therefore more ambiguous description of Jesus' opponents?

Furthermore, aren't we left with a problem? By profiling the Jewishness of Jesus, do you end up advocating that Christians recognize and reconstitute their own tradition as a form of Judaism?

NM: No, no.

CL: How then does Jesus depart from what it means to be Jewish? What are the critical junctures that signal a break? Where does he veer away or separate himself from the tradition?

NM: Well, after all for the Jews, God was nothing if not absolutely awesome. So, I think the most profound break is actually an existential one, which is Jesus saying, "I'm intimate. I may be awesome to some of you, but you can approach me with great intimacy. You will receive my love. You will receive my compassion. You will experience a tenderness you've never known before. That is what I offer. What I offer is the best side of ourselves as human beings. Now that's not particularly present in the Jewish religion. It wasn't then, and it still isn't to this day. I mean the Jews believe in compassion. They believe in all the Christian virtues, but they believe in them in a different way. If they believe in anything, they believe in the Shekhinah, which is the divine female principle. But generally speaking, what they believe is that God is essentially remote, immensely powerful, and awesome. God has laid down rules that one can follow and if one follows those rules, one can have a reasonable and a decent life. And living decently has an importance beyond description. Don't try to explain it further. Don't try to analyze it in terms of a heaven, a hell, a this or a that. Lead your life this way. This is the way it was given. I mean they're more fundamental, really, than the fundamentalists. And I think that Christianity is altogether different.

CL: But the Jesus that you portray is not somebody who self-consciously departs from this tradition.

NM: Well I just felt that he was living existentially. I treated him finally as a decent young man and a fine carpenter whom at the age of thirty that he is the son of God. He realizes that he has much to do about it. And then he goes out, and he learns as he goes. My idea was that he became larger as he proceeded. The question of how much he was Jewish just really didn't enter his mind. He was Jewish. His horror was that most Jews were not following him. Nonetheless, all his initial followers were Jewish. So it wasn't a matter of his departing from Judaism. I think he saw his work as an illumination of Judaism, as an intensification of it. Because he was not a theologian, he didn't see himself departing from what he had been given so much as that he had had revelations. After all, saints and visionaries are rarely theologians at the same time.

CL: I think that one of the more compelling tensions in the novel revolves around the fact that the Jesus that you describe is racked with doubt. He struggles without resolution to differentiate when the devil is speaking and when God is speaking. There's a certain distrust he has of himself. And that distrust and doubt humanizes him.

NM: Well, I remember one review that I liked very much because I thought the positive and negative sides of the review were both very accurate. And the negative side was that I had very little sense of the divinity of Jesus. But, I did have a good sense of him as a man. And it was what I wanted. You know, I felt that to try to imagine what his religious transports were like would be presumptuous, much more presumptuous than writing in the first person.

CL: When you imaginatively relocate yourself into the world of the book, is Jesus the kind of character that you would have followed had he called you?

NM: You know, I don't know. I'm terribly set in my ways. I've never followed anyone. But of course this is another century, in another period, in another need. I've followed authors in my life, authors who have changed my life. I think if someone came along who was extraordinary and said things that I've begun to think about but had never quite been able to articulate for myself, and said them in a noble voice and was wonderful, yes I could see following someone like that, yes. Obviously there was something extraordinary about him, and that's the price that you pay for the writing in the first person. You can't go around saying, "Well, I knew I was wonderful."

CL: No, thankfully you avoid that. Well, I have no idea how this book will play out when I gather Christians and Jews together to read and study. I don't know what kinds of buttons your novel will push because it seems to me to blur some well-guarded boundaries. It may provide an opening for rethinking the relationship between Christians and Jews. I will keep you posted.

NM: I would appreciate that.

The puzzles that vexed me before the interview lingered long after I hung up the phone. Mailer wants to reintroduce Jesus to modern readers who are disaffected with institutionalized religion. He hopes to rattle the complacent--the secularists as well as the religionists--out of their dogmatic slumbers. A noble purpose that even the most

pious, talented, and daring among us rarely achieve. No, it is not his intention nor his failure to realize the dream that leaves me troubled.

Perhaps what worries me is the notion of gospel that animates the novel. In Mailer I could hear the echo of Wallace Steven's claim: "The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing other." Freed from the constraints of historical research and liberated from the canons of traditional interpretation, the reader can follow the lead of the writer, and both can yield to whatever creative impulses and literary urges seize the imagination. One can boldly go where no one has gone before.

Ironically, Mailer's dream of engaging the religiously disaffected will most likely come to naught, precisely because these readers will find in Mailer's Jesus the iconoclastic individualist they came looking for: a homeless, spiritual pilgrim like them whom they can afford to ignore without the fear or hope of any serious consequences. It is the devoted and inquiring Christian who may realize the elusive aspirations of the novelist. Those who balance the Bible in one hand and Mailer's fiction in the other encounter conflicting images of Jesus, and these images compete for our attention and ultimately our loyalty. This is the problem and the opportunity that Mailer's novel presents to readers who care deeply about their tradition. Is there enough weight and substance within Mailer's image of Jesus to sustain the living memory of a Christian community? Where does this image direct our moral and theological vision? Mailer's book invites readers to identify what is essential to the Christian story. What of the Christian gospel does he capture? What does he miss?

Mailer, of course, has little interest in the theological tasks of the Christian community, in this case the imperative to assess any literature that presents itself as a gospel. Yet, if Christians and Jews are willing to subject the book to an inquiry that engages the authoritative tradition in which they are grounded, Mailer may prompt both communities to explore their underlying religious assumptions. What, after all, happens to Christians and Jews who immerse themselves in a story of Jesus that is uprooted from its traditional theological and historical moorings? Is the Christian imagination liberated from dogmatic strictures that stunt new forms of engagement with their sacred story? Or, does this literary reconstruction of Jesus flatten the ambiguities of the Gospel and domesticate the theological mysteries that lie at the heart of this sacred story? Does Mailer's account recover neglected dimensions of Jesus' humanity, or does he trivialize Jesus, thereby creating an entirely forgettable character? The answers to these questions do not rest on Mailer, but on the community that risks the challenge of rereading its sacred stories.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.): "Man is by nature a political animal."

Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626): "Knowledge is power."

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832): "The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation."

Confucius (551–479 B.C.): "Hold faithfulness and sincerity as first principles."

René Descartes (1596–1650): "Cogito, ergo sum" (Latin for "I think, therefore I am").

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82): "Nature is a mutual cloud, which is always and never the same."

Friedrich Engels (1820–95): "The state is not 'abolished,' it withers away."

Georg Hegel (1770–1831): "What experience and history teach us is this—that people and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it."

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): "The life of man [in a state of nature is], solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804): "Happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination."

John Locke (1632–1704): "No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience."

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527): "God is not willing to do everything, and thus take away our free will and that share of glory which belongs to us."

Karl Marx (1818–83): "The proletarians have nothing to lose [in this revolution] but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of the world, unite!"

"Religion is the opium of the people."

"The class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat."

John Stuart Mill (1806–73): "Liberty consists in doing what one desires."

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): "I teach you the Superman. Man is something to be surpassed."

Thomas Paine (1737–1809): "Suspicion is the companion of mean souls, and the bane of all good society."

Plato (428–348 B.C.): "The life which is unexamined is not worth living."

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78): "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains."

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970): "It is undesirable to believe a proposition when there is no ground whatever for supposing it true."

Seneca (c. 4 B.C.–A.D. 65): "Even while they teach, men learn."

Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.): "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance."

Voltaire (1694–1778): "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him."

Thales of Miletus (c. 636–546 B.C.). Regarded as the first Western philosopher, this pre-Socratic monist thinker is said to have believed that the fundamental principle of all things, or universal substance, is water. All of his writings are lost.

Unamuno, Miguel de (1864–1936). The major Spanish philosophical thinker of his time. Unamuno criticized philosophical abstractions such as "man" for ignoring concrete men. He held that reason by itself is virtually useless and cannot reveal the basic fact of human immortality. He wrote *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*.

Voltaire (François Marie Arouet) (1694–1778). French philosopher, essayist, and historian; one of the major thinkers of the Enlightenment. A Deist who was anti-Christian, Voltaire widely advocated tolerance of liberal ideas and called for positive social action. His novel *Candide* is a parody of the optimism of Leibniz.

Whitehead, Alfred North (1861–1947). British philosopher and mathematician who worked with Bertrand Russell. Whitehead tried to integrate twentieth-century physics into a metaphysics of nature.

PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

While theology may take God's existence as absolutely necessary on the basis of authority, faith, or revelation, many philosophers—and some theologians—have thought it possible to demonstrate by reason that there must be a God.

St. Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, formulated the famous "five ways" by which God's existence can be demonstrated philosophically:

1. *The "unmoved mover" argument.* We know that there is motion in the world; whatever is in motion is moved by another thing; this other thing also must be moved by something; to avoid an infinite regression, we must posit a "first mover," which is God.
2. *The "nothing is caused by itself" argument.* For example, a table is brought into being by a carpenter, who is caused by his parents. Again, we cannot go on to infinity, so there must be a first cause, which is God.
3. *The cosmological argument.* All physical things, even mountains, boulders, and rivers, come into being and go out of existence, no matter how long they last. Therefore, since time is infinite, there must be some time at which none of these things existed. But if there were nothing at that point in time, how could there be anything at all now, since nothing cannot cause anything? Thus, there must always have been at least one necessary thing that is eternal, which is God.
4. *Objects in the world have differing degrees of qualities such as goodness.* But speaking of more or less goodness makes sense only by comparison with what is the maximum goodness, which is God.
5. *The teleological argument (argument from design).* Things in the world move toward goals, just as the arrow does not move toward its goal except by the archer's directing it. Thus, there must be an intelligent designer who directs all things to their goals, and this is God.

Two other historically important "proofs" are the ontological argument and the moral argument. The former, made famous by St. Anselm in the eleventh century and defended in another form by Descartes, holds that it would be logically contradictory to deny God's existence. St. Anselm began by defining God as "that [being] than which nothing greater can be conceived." If God existed only in the mind, He then would not be the greatest conceivable being, for we could imagine another being that is greater because it would exist both in the mind and in reality, and that being would then be God. Therefore, to imagine God as existing only in the mind but not in reality leads to a logical contradiction; this proves the existence of God both in the mind and in reality.

Immanuel Kant rejected not only the ontological argument but the teleological and cosmological arguments as well, based on his theory that reason is too limited to know anything beyond human experience. However, he did argue that religion could be established as presupposed by the workings of morality in the human mind ("practical reason"). God's existence is a necessary presupposition of there being any moral judgments that are objective, that go beyond mere relativistic moral preferences; such judgments require standards external to any human mind—that is, they presume God's mind.