

THE WOODS, THE CATHEDRAL, THE SLUMS

The women were of Roman Catholic background but could have been of any other Christian extraction. One was a saint whom I "heard" on paper today; the parasite I talked with today; the irrationalist I talked with yesterday.

THE SAINT

Receiving Prince Michael of Greece & his wife in Calcutta, Mother Teresa laughingly said (today's PARADE, p.5) "The other day I dreamed that I was at the gates of heaven and St. Peter [refusing me entrance] said 'Go back to earth, there are no slums up here.'" Unlike my other two women, Mother T. never used the too-much-religion-as-a-child excuse for abandoning church, which continues to be the communal-spiritual center of her life as she ministers to the destitute dying in Jesus' name.

Many powerful whom she's displeased have told Mother T. to go to hell, but Peter told her to go to heaven. The slums are her heaven on earth.

Another prince, Vladimir, comes to mind. He'd decided his Russian populace should become Christian, but West or East? He sent a delegation to Rome, & they reported favorably on the mass. But when the other delegation returned from experiencing the liturgy in Constantinople's Sancta Sophia, they said "We could not tell whether we were on earth or in heaven." That's how Russia became Greek Catholic (Orthodox), rather than Roman.

In the incarnation, God walked around on earth in the body of a man: in Mother T., heaven is walking earth in the body of a woman.

It wasn't worship--or at least you didn't worship--if you leave church without having been, at least for one brief moment, in heaven, so heaven can walk out of church with you.

"A banker who wanted to make a big donation to us asked for my business card," Mother T. said to the two Greeks. "Here is a card for you." She gave them one of the cards the banker had printed for her when he discovered she had no business card: "The fruit of silence is prayer. / The fruit of prayer is faith. / The fruit of faith is love. / The fruit of love is service. / The fruit of service is peace.--Mother Teresa."

THE IRRATIONALIST

yesterday refused my invitation to come to ecumenical worship in the Craigville Tabernacle, saying "I had religion up to my ears when I was a child--more than enough to last a lifetime." But I had said "How good it would be to see you, your husband, & your three small children on one bench at worship Sunday morning [& mentioned that the Craigville family they are closest to do exactly that: father, mother, & three little children on one bench]." Her response was narcissistic: no mention of what might be good for her husband & children. Because someone was with me, I did not hit her with "So since you had too much religion as a child, your children should have none?" When I see her alone soon, I'll confront her with her irrationality. (I don't have too many friends, just enough.)

THE PARASITE

at a memorial service had read a poem she'd written about the deceased, a poem I complimented her on. When I asked why I never see her in worship, she said "I gave up church 30 years ago." Said I, "How come?" Said she, "I majored in philosophy in college [a Roman Catholic college] & gave up religion." "What then," said I, "do you do for worship?" "I worship nature; I'm a nature worshiper. To me, the woods is a cathedral." Said I, "The first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence speaks of 'nature and nature's God': why do you stop before 'and'?" She: "Because I see God in nature: 'nature,' for me, includes 'God.'" I: "You've sucked God & the cathedral into nature, but parasitically use the cathedral-metaphor to give magniture & majesty to your nature worship." "I'm offended by being called a parasite." "I would be, too: I can understand your feeling. But the only use you have for the cathedral is metaphorical, a parasitic use, a fading use into amnesia."