

A parable is an extended analogy, a metaphor in motion, a movie.
Here's an analogical motion picture on the 9.11.01 Horror & its aftermath.

TAKE MANY PICTURES, DEVELOP THEM, BUT FIX ONLY A FEW

Earlier today I sent this email to the UCC Confessing Christ meeting in general but in particular to Max Stackhouse (Christian ethicist, Princeton Theological Seminary) in response to a splendid email of his. (I'll not quote his gracious response.)

From: "Willis Elliott" <wandlelliott@mediaone.net>
To: <confessingchrist@yahoogroups.com>
Cc: "Gabe Fackre" <gfackre@mediaone.net>
Sent: Wednesday, September 19, 2001 8:48 AM
Subject: The Horror, Christian responses to Max--

Thanks for pulling a professorial lever & dumping on us a few well-composted & condensed courses. (It takes one to recognize one.) This old biblical theologian thanks God for you especially on two counts: (1) Your persistence in sticking with Scripture all the way (instead of, as Wink, only to the point where one can use Scripture as a springboard into one's particular historical/contemporary sociopolitical thing); (2) Your pointing to the classics of the Faith (eg, the thickness of Baxter vs. the thinness, though truth, of some present-day popular Christian thinkers).

Today my Thinksheets on the Horror will be mailed out, so I'll not say here anything I say there. But here's something from my thinking about a conversation with an old woman (even older than I!) on the Horror. She's depressed from the practicing of the television presence of the Horror, instead of of the presence of God. What gets your attention gets you, & what holds your attention is your god. Here's a personal analogical chronology illustrative of something I learned from Viktor Frankl while studying with him in 1951: we are responsible for the attitude we take toward what is happening to us. Eight days ago the Horror in NYC & WashDC happened to us all. (Thanks, Donald, for getting our meeting going on this vis-a-vis preaching.)

1927--I began taking & developing pictures (on 4x5 glass plates: film hadn't yet taken over).

1939--At the World's Fair (Flushing Meadows, NYC), I saw what looked like the rear end of a camera (where I previewed on a ground-glass 4x5 plate the picture I was about to take). But this contraption was looking at me! I wasn't in control (as I was with 4x5 camera in hand): I was object, not subject. It was objectifying me. I don't like being objectified, never have. I object! I object to what came to be called tele-vision (Greek-Latin, "far-seeing"). I am in charge of it only to turn it on/off: when it's on, it's in charge of me (in the sense that what gets my attention gets me).

1944--As a college photographer (as well as professor of religion & philosophy), I was in charge of telling everybody what to do for the shots. I like telling people what to do, but not as much as telling them what to think. Most, though, I like helping people take charge of what they think, for which they're responsible not to me but to the good Lord, whom (paradoxically) the Horror makes seem even better.

2001--Cancer of the eyeball is a bio-horror, but this Horror is a malignancy of the soul through the eye fascinated, obsessed, & depressed from under-use of the "off" on the remote. The Principalities & Powers have gotten & are cancerously holding the attention of millions--more world-attention than any event in world history with the possible exception of the moon-landing.

Preaching? "Send forth thy light & thy truth, let them lead me. Oh, let them lead me to thy holy hill."

Grace and peace.
Willis

In yesterday's NYTimes, Erica Goode, in warning against the disaster-addiction of watching the Horror on television too much (I'm calling it the Horror, a capitalization parallel to the Holocaust), used the whole photograph process analogically. The TV-disaster junkie's addictive behavior may "fixate" into paranoid depression as the fixative (hypo) bath "fixes" a film or print against further change. Her suggestion got fixed enough in my mind for me to use it in several subsequent conversations, one of them with an MD who wrote a note on it as possibly useful in trying to help depressive patients (reminding him that, these days, they may have ophthalmosclerosis, frozen eyeballs from watching the Horror).

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Thinksheets

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1 The stats-inclined tell us how many thousand visual impressions we experience daily, how many hundred ads, etc. Most of these strike us subliminally, under the "line" of consciousness: (to keep to our photography analogy) we "focus" in & "take" few of these pictures. We focus because, consciously or not, we intend to take, the metaphor of picking up something & carrying it ("taking" it) with you. Why do we focus? Many reasons. Horror (as that 2nd plane hitting the 2nd World Trade Center tower). Beauty (a complex, wondrous experience). Need (food, drink, shelter, love, to be needed). Want (sex, control, safety, freedom, work, leisure). Life-aim: "'Tis the set of the sail and not the gale / That determines the way we go" & what we focus on / take. Time-defiance: "Stop the world, I want to (get off? no) stay here or remember I was here."

Some folks are "focus/take" gifted. We have a *photographic eye* that, at photo-op moments, signals the brain to "Take that!" Next step, the joy of "framing," composing the picture--light, forms, differential depth, motion-suggestion ("phenomenological photography"). Other determinants: plate/film size, emulsion speed, f-stop (aperture). (I still have a contact-print frame for 11x14 glass plates, the standard printing devise of the great American landscape photographer, Ansel Adams, whose usual aperture was f64 [not much greater diameter than a common pin's] for maximum acuity-&-depth.)

2 Chemical photography (emulsions + "soups") may yield to the oncoming digital, which is environmentally friendly. (We get digital pictures via computer from son Bill without use of the scanner.) I know a little about pre-print image-manipulation of digital & scanned pix, but a lot about chemo-&-image-manipulation in the darkroom: "dodging," "pulling," etc. (Besides, the very word "darkroom" gives me a warm feeling. For going-on 57 years I've been living blissfully with my college-darkroom assistant: in that darkroom, more was "developed" than just the negs & prints--an invisible development alongside the visible, as Loree attests.)

As camera, your head takes many pictures; & your mind, by reflective attention to some of them, develops the image (as in the darkroom one can see, & to some extent control, the developing images on glass plates [not plastic film] & on prints). Two more stages remain:

3 If you want to keep (or in computerese, "store") an image, you pass it from the developer tray to the hypo (fixer) tray, where excess silver salts are neutralized. After that, you may without damage to the image examine it in daylight to decide whether you want to wash it in a moving-water bath. (If you skip the wash, after a year or so the viewer will see the sad effects of the pollutants' corrupting the image--or if the wash was insufficiently prolonged.) Well, how do you so "fix" & "wash" something in your soul--say, the Lord's Prayer--that it remains bright, unfaded, uncorrupted? By daily re-exposure (prayer-study-reflection) & practice (self-examination, witness, faithful labor/leisure, *communio sanctorum* [Christian fellowship]).

And be selective! Quality art-museums, in their photo galleries, don't plaster the walls with prints. For proper quiet contemplation, a worthy photograph needs adequate space around it. That's why this Thinksheet's title's last line is "FIX ONLY A FEW." (Being a good reader requires, 1st, the skill of knowing what not to read--as the skill of using television is, 1st, knowing what not to watch--& of music, knowing what not to listen to.) (For inner peace, please listen to "Tranquility" [CD of IMP Inc., ISBN 1-886614-25-3].)

This letter appeared 9.16.01 in the CAPE COD TIMES:

How now shall we live?

A few hours after the twin towers disintegrated, I received a phone call from a church only a few blocks from where they had been. Already, my friend said, the church had become a hospital for "a hundred wounded."

He didn't say "injured." People are injured in accidents: in war, they are wounded.

In our Revolutionary and Civil wars, churches near battlefields became instant hospitals. It's not never again. It's now again.

We now know that this enemy targeted America's symbols of power. Political power, the White House. Military power, the Pentagon. Financial power, Lower Manhattan. Our outer powers have been humiliated, shocking us into paying attention to our inner power face to face with the fragility of human life and the possibility of becoming, "under God," better than we have been. Of this possibility, our churches, synagogues and mosques are symbols.

We have been humiliated, but will we humble ourselves? In "Cymbeline," Shakespeare invites us to do so: "Golden lads and girls all must, / As chimney-sweeps, come to dust...come to dust...come to dust."

How then, how now, shall we live?

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