

MANIFEST (CARGO LIST) OF THE ANNUAL BATES COLLEGE RELIGION LECTURE for 1972
 THE UNCONFINABLE AS THREAT AND PROMISE.....Willis F. Elliott

As the one hour given and taken for the lecture included less than half the lecture (attached), and as the style of the lecture itself is impressionistic, this manifest is a rational, lineal display of the argument.

1. In certain life-experiences, human beings have BVRs (basic visceral responses) they generally, in all cultures, interpret as confrontations with boundaries that confine them but not forces on the other side of those boundaries. In these experiences, Something/Someone gets through to us from "the Beyond," Something/Someone "More" than we are and "Other" than we are--traditionally called the supernatural, the divine/demonic, gods, God. Whether, in a particular instance, I feel this invasion as threat or promise, the emotion it produces is awe,

2. Which is one of a number of indicators of the presence/power of "the Holy"--the others being order, love, oddness, rage, pain, and joy.

3. In church this morning (16bJan 72) a highschooler said to me "I've never had an experience of God, and am therefore an atheist." The statement--in all its honesty, ignorance, and urgency--needs gentle and firm responding and guidance, including (a) TRUE, you have not "experienced" "God," and (b) NO, you have had, and are having, many unconscious and therefore unfully realized experiences of God. The lecture has to do with (b) as propaedeutic to (a) and is therefore evangelistic. Let those beware who wish to continue to resist the biblical God!

4. To advance from REFLECTION to ACTION, refer to the following revised chart (the letters not corresponding exactly to those on the manuscript chart):

What are we to DO? Face reality, and in community-meditation-prayer test reality, vis-a-vis the threat

and promise of what we experience as unconfinable by us--and not (pathologically) fight against the obtrusive-intrusive reality of "God" (hyper-, as hubris; hypo-, as apathy). ... "B" takes care of itself, but "A" takes virtues (discipline, patience, etc.) and skills....If I go the way of hypertrony ("overdoing it"), I specialize in one of the indicators (#2, above); e.g. love (which is the idol of the mystical-communal lifestyle in the counterculture) or rage (the idol of the militants). What, here, is "health" and "sanity" and "the will of God"?....By what criteria (values) do we determine all the questions arising from our chart--such as what to confine my/my neighbor's energies to, and how to confine man's use of exhaustible earth-resources and man's polluting of the earth by human-and-"good"'s production, and how achieve optimal interior disciplines in homeostatsis with external controls (about which I was talking today to a member of Nixon's Pay Board--who had a column in Thursday's NYT OpEd page)?

			want to	don't w.to
can't confine/limit...			A	B
can	do	shouldn't	C	D
		should	E	F
	don't	shouldn't	G	H
		should	I	J

5. Self-examination toward attitudinal and behavioral change should proceed on "C," "D," "I," and "J," toward the biblical goal of the praise of God in the joy of the whole creation.

THE UNCON-
FINABLE
AS
PROMISE
AND
THREAT

This lecture attempts something small and enormous. Its substance is huge and therefore in danger of remaining vague, but its space (its ideational extent and territory) is tiny and consequently in danger of technical invisibility. But if you hang in tight with me, there's a good chance, well worth taking, that we'll avoid these twin perils.

Now, the substance of my remarks is the whole range of our human experience of what we can't confine yet want to. So that each of us can right now experience the mind's power to abstract this factor from the chaos of human experiencing, take a moment to list what comes to your mind within this category whose limits are what I (1) can't limit/contain and yet (2) want to....To sharpen the assignment, note the exclusions:

- (a) What I can't limit and don't want to.
- (b) What I can limit and don't want to, and don't limit.
- (c) What I can limit and want to, and do limit.
- (d) What I can limit and want to, and don't limit.
- (e) What I can limit and don't want to, but do limit.

To get clarity, let's use this analytic grid:

Now take a few minutes to write down the first thing that comes to mind in each of these subcategories, as applies to you.

[This lecture is about GOD, but I wouldn't know how to give a lecture about God that was not also a lecture about you, since for me God is personal and person-making, source of all's that's personal and of all persons, power of all struggle for personhood.]....

	CONFINE?	
	want to	don't want to
can't	the lecture subject	(a)
do	(c)	(e)
can't	(d)	(b)

Because I didn't want to begin the lecture safely (for me and you) with a brain game, I've left definition to this point: note that the lust to "define" (to set limits away from all else, and thus make discrete, separate) is close to the desire to "confine" (to set limits around and thus to enclose in order to control--finis as "end[s]" paralleling telos as "end[s]" in the sense of "purposes").

Now, in the light of this sharpening definition and of what you wrote in (a)-(e), take another look at your list of things you can't limit/contain yet want to ["the lecture subject" box on our grid]....Do you want to change anything? add? subtract?....You see, what we are doing, severally and together, is refining "the lecture subject," much as in the traditional "scientific method" one eliminates, isolates, identifies constants and variables. The more powerful your fieldglass, the harder to focus (because of shallow focaldepth) and orient (because of small field): if you are unwilling to do the work I've been trying to help you to, you'll not see the bird, the shy spirit-bird I'm asking you to discipline your attention to.

Why am I so asking? I want my purpose out in the open: I'm trying to direct your attention to what I want you to "get," and even more important, what I want to "get"you--for what gets your attention gets you, and what most gets your attention is your god. Willis Elliott in one of his roles, viz. theologian, wants to get your attention for God and on God, that God--in this case, the biblical God, my God--may get you for his "ends," his purposes, that he may confine you within his liberating will, he whom you cannot confine and who signals his presence in all you can't but want to confine.

Now, some of you may have wrestled with that religious classic in this general area, Rudolf Otto's DAS HEILIGE (sadly translated THE IDEA OF THE HOLY), and know that the process of refinement I've asked you to engage in--though I was not conscious of the parallel--is very similar to the process by which, vis-a-vis early-20th-c. European idealism and scientism, Otto refined "the Holy" out from all other dimensions of human experiencing. Says he in substance: the

heart of religion, and therefore the reality of "God," is experienced as a terrifying yet fascinating mystery (*mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*). Well, take this lecture as one of a score of refinements on that refinement: I'm asking you to ratiocinate small, fine, about the emotionally huge experiences, and range of experiences, in which we face unpenetrated mysteries that frighten and intrigue us precisely because we know that they lie beyond our present control--and, the end of the refinement process, these mysteries we sense as unpenetrable by us [at least in our present natural state, predeath] and as forever beyond our control. Shout out, now, what's on that list of yours:....

Now, so that I'm not asking you to play games I don't play, I'll share with you what I quickly put down [first thoughts] on our grid, and make of it a minibio. First, the upper-left box: What I can't confine but would want to is aging and death in my beloved wife Loree and in myself (she 46, I 53); and, the threat of inadequate income to sustain our surviving and thriving. She and I have a great and growing lust for life-life-life; and while we accept fading, we wish we wish we wish it were not so not so not so; and, in the confidence of God's love, we take comfort in the biblical words, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." But I remind you, these are only the first thoughts I had as I was writing this manuscript: now that I've written them, my consciousness is flooded with other notions, which I shall resist afflicting you with. The chief point is, I daily experience myself as up against limits, and understand myself personistically to be thus up against the God of limits, the God who sets limits and knows in general [in his whole creation] and in particular [in my case] what he is doing in setting limits--including setting limits on himself!

As for (a) [the upper-right box on our grid], I savor moments I can't and don't want to limit--sexual orgasm [which severely limits itself, no matter how healthy one keeps one's body], tripping on an idea or [less frequently with me] an image [fantasy], the spontaneous action and gesture [within the limits of my virginal monogamy]. As a Dionysiac I'm of cosmopolitan tastes and don't constrict myself with specialisms, though my chief temptation is long headtrips. If I were to Willis-date (a), I guess it'd be age 12, when I reached sexual maturity and the Great Depression hit and I got a free Kodak [along with all other American 12-year-olds] because it was the centenary of George Eastman's birthday. Somehow, a visual fact and a physical fact and a social fact triangulated me into a hot focus of individuation/decision. I felt increasingly alien to the silver-spoon suburbanism I'd grown up (to age 12!) in, and began to read the Gospels every night in long sessions: who was this strange, alien, mysterious, terrifying, fascinating Jesus? Every since, this has been the primary historical and intrapsychic identity question for me, and my life-stages are series of attempts at reinventing answers. No matter how much attention I give to Lord Buddha or Lord Anybody Else, it's mainly Lord Jesus whose disciple I am, under whose liberating discipline I strive to live and witness and serve God's creation, humanity and the rest of nature, toward what the biblical lifestyle calls "the praise of God in the joy of the whole creation."

As for (b), the first thing I thought of that I could change but don't want to is my occupation as clergyman. There've been a lot of subroles within that role: teaching religion and philosophy in two colleges, teaching the biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek) in three seminaries, then pastoring one church for a little more than a decade, then serving on a national church staff for a little less than a decade, now these three years associated as a dean and teacher with New York Theological Seminary in the center of Manhattan. I don't often even fantasize anything else, and the few times I do it's lawyer: my father was a judge for 40 years; maybe it ought to be politician, but I'm even more of an introvert than the second Senator McCarthy (and somewhat paranoid like the first Senator McCarthy, except that it's Washington and not Moscow that I fear).

How about (c)? What I can and want to and do confine is--the first thing that comes to mind, mind you!--daydreaming. It's so easy to fantasize victory over my enemies, on whom [by the way] I've got a pretty firm fix, as firm as any of the Psalmists. But all of a sudden I come rational about such WalterMittyism, laugh at myself, and get off it. "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord...." Then I look around for something more creative for my hostility to do. [I'm an agonistic type, most alive when in a fight.]

most alive when in a fight.]

What about (d)? Well, there are certain bad habits I like just too well. I hate to clean up either my study at home or my office at the seminary, and in consequence both usually--normally?--look like Saustallen [pignens]. Then there's that old demon, procrastination, especially when it comes to meeting writing deadlines....But my orderliness sustains this debilitating chaos....

As for (e), it's clearly eating and drinking: anything gustable I gust on, taking comfort from my teacher Fritz Perls' saying that the lover of food and drink is also a lover of the world. While I daily yoga and tai chi (as well as reading my Bible in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin), the basic exercise indicated for this condition is push-aways, i.e. pushing away from the table and/or bar early enough to avoid visceral distention. In the eyes of the world I'm hardly an ascetic, confining what I can and don't want to, but in my own eyes I'm daily deprived of the intake I'd take in if I became mindless and immoral about it. My other and parallel appetite is lust for learning: if I didn't watch myself I'd be all day every day with print in my face, except for the times I'd be seeking out and dialoging with those I thought could teach me what I want to learn--a natural craving given in hypernormal supply and hypertrophically developed (as we humans tend to overdevelop our individual strengths). For me, Apollo wins hands down over Dionysos--or better, Apollo, in my passion for learning, metamorphoses himself into a heady Dionysos.

Well, enough, if not too much, of autobiography. Let's spend the rest of this lecture, before plenum discussion, on commentative listing of experiences of unconfined threat and of unconfined promise as experiences of what I call "God," that fearful-benevolent character whose action is the unity of the Bible and, for us biblical types, of history and nature and future. The theological style I'm using here--the way of "doing theology"--is to work from the common to the Holy [by which is meant both God in himself and our experiencing of him, unconscious and conscious], or from the world to the Word. It's the basic method we use at New York Theological Seminary, plon in the heart of our largest metropolis, where each year we welcome some of you for a term with your chaplain.

We began the lecture with isolation #1: we isolated the lecture subject--"what we can't confine yet want to"--from its actional alternatives. Here now, is isolation #2, separating the experience of unconfinedness-as-experience-of-God from all other aspects of experiencing God. I can only suggest these other aspects:

awe--in addition to awe generated by experiencing unconfinedness: fear, fascination, mystery, immanence, high, aspiration, guilt, shame
order--peace, health, wholeness, appropriateness [the fitting], adequacy, worthiness

love--trust, affection, assurance, dependability, faith, devotion, loyalty, longing

oddness--the extraordinary [as in the generative experiences of the biblical religions: Moses' burning bush and Jesus' resurrection], uniqueness, perfection, the startlingly unexpected

rage--desecration of the inviolate, lese majesty, pollution of the pure [including the environment], frustration

pain--suffering in any of the four energy-systems: spiritual [i.e., decisional], psychic [i.e., imaginal], mental [i.e., conceptual-rational-lineal], physical

joy--delight, ecstasy, play, celebration, festivity

Any of these as FEELINGS can converge with VALUES and LIFE-STYLES on ISSUES, what Wm. James called "living concerns" in which we involve ourselves more or less intelligently and compassionately, which is to say more or less humanly, which is to say--insofar as we are inwardly and situationally shaped by the full biblical heritage--more or less Christianly. Thus Christian commitment and growth occurs in the struggle of intelligent-compassionate involvement with living concerns, one's own and others' and the world's. The knowledge, attitudes, and skills incident to such behavior we call "relevant," and relevant theological education of laity, seminarians, and clergy is education that furthers "doing theology,"

i.e. such reflective involvement in life as will maximize one's growth in such knowledge, attitudes, and skills in the full range of relationships individual and collective.

One caution: One aspect of original sin is our tendency to hybris, to overdoing something. We can specialize in one of the numinous ["holy"] feelings--say, love [as the mystic branch of the counterculture has] or rage [as the militant branch of the counterculture has] or order [as the establishments have] or pain [as Alex in "A Clockwork Orange" does]. Result? Inhuman behavior. And we can apotheosize a particular lifestyle, denigrating all others. Or we can become monomaniacal about a single issue and blind to all others. And we can elevate some value into an idol--making the right and orderly into legalism and lawmorder, pleasure into hedonism and romanticism, the beautiful into estheticism, the good into moralism and perfectionism, the personal into person-worship individually or collectively [love of "Man" as god], the true into intellectualism, the salable into commercialism and materialism, action into actionism [action for action's sake], the sacred into the sacrosanct [as in sacerdotalism (clericalism)], the antisacred into secularism [aggressive atheism, "profanity," "obscenity"], life into vitalism-elanism [even "reverence for life"], and the open into noncommitment [and even esotericism].

Just to illustrate what I mean by "reflective involvement": suppose you find yourself in a person-group-situation [imagine any such: we're all in situations all the time!]. Here's a battery of questions you can ask yourself and possibly others: (1) In this situation, where do I perceive what feelings, values, life-styles, and issues ^{are} present and active, in four-fold convergence? (2) There, how is the Holy being expressed nonverbally? verbally? (3) What Christian action is most appropriate here? (4) What Christian witness [verbal action] is most appropriate? (5) How does Scripture illumine this situation [i.e., with what images, categories, processes, narratives]? (6) In not more than 100 words, what do I see God as trying to do in this situation? (7) Does religion, if present in this situation, help or hinder in this working of God? (8) Can the religion present be reshaped so as to be better the servant of God and man in this situation?

Enough of isolation, claifications, interrogations. Now to

THE UNCONFINABLE AS THREAT

1. "The personal other" is our primary and paradigmatic experience of 'what we can't confine yet want to.' We need free personal relations with the other personal--by which I mean other persons and God-as-personal-and-source-of-persons; therefore, to the extent that we imprison other persons in our own interest, we are self-cancelers: it proves not to be really in our own interest at all. Sexual possessiveness, e.g., seems to be in one's own interest only when one is indulging in adolescent fantasy. Using God would be a nice trick if it didn't turn us into demons--the demonic being the violated power of God working in us as the ground of God's temporary capture, breaking out to our own destruction.

2. How about quasipersonal unconfinables? "King Kong," one of the few everlasting films; "Gollum" in Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings"--and I might add Houdini, the escape artist par excellence, for his tricks had an animal-like quality. What are your candidates for horrible threat or entertainment escape? How about some historical or fictional breakout artists, those creepy unimprisonables? Then there is--and here we come full circle from animal to God--Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven," from whom I cannot escape and then when caught realize I wouldn't want to escape: God as threat become God as promise fulfilled.

3. Then too, you scare yourself, don't you? Something within you stands above you, recognizing your creatureliness and limitedness, your finitude and violations of your powers [the violations the Bible calls "sin" and "sins"], yet seeing impossible possibilities and straining to overpass the boundaries and the boundedness, refusing to accept any limits, trying to demolish all walls, ever ^{apple-}rebel, insurgent, iconoclast in imagination and passion, experiencing time and space as enemies (and yet as friends enabling the self's self-control and milieu-control, both within severe limits). After WWII we tilted from the environment as primary threat [the survival lifestyle] to the interior--man's own depths--as pri-

mary threat [the identity society]. From nature we took over the scary/ business: nature now scares us much less, but peering both at our products and at our depths and potential we scare ourselves more. Result? There is certainly not less fear on the earth than there was in the heart of primitive man, but the unconfined is coming at modern and postmodern man from other sectors of reality. We have no less need to be humble and even placatory. "The wrath of God," whatever that phrase means, is not less, but perceived as other in medium --with a possible convergence in atomic-pollution unlivability and/or detritus-pollution unlivability. Truth to tell, we've been scared ever since the Garden: things have not been going well since the Fall, since we ate that apple. Our dependence on and our alienation from the Source of our life is too deep for pride in mankind, too profound for roseate humanism, too bathetic for faith in "the future of Man."

4. "If God is dead all things are possible" Dostoevsky has Ivan say: man is free to be without limits, D. and Nietzsche saw, only if God is put to death. Then only is an innocent sensuality, a return to antediluvian Eden, possible, free from the oughts of tradition and aspiration, which are repressive of spontaneity. Here I must diverge from my romantic-ecstatic friends, with whom I've offered courses at Esalen Institute and other centers of the human-potential movement: the unconfined threat from the bypassed God who sees our fleshly rejoicing as bereft of his praise and therefore of the essential joy of the whole creation, this threat is instant in my soul. We shall not get away with a joy that is not conscious joy in the Lord of heaven and earth, to whom our Presenceless joy is more threat than is our misery, which attests his neglect by us and his consequent absence. In this I am a biblical man and indeed a Puritan (though certainly no Victorian). Not to feel this ultimate threat is to live in ultimate peril, alienated from the roots of human and natural and historical reality. All of which indicates that I buy into the biblical Weltbild (world-picture and world-story), which I believe to be, among the stories we have available to tell our children, the closest to reality, to life as we experience it on this earth.

5. Whole issues of heady magazines, lately, have been devoted to the subject of man's ultimate earthly threat, viz. death. At the student's request I recently critiqued a U. of Mass. Ph.D. thesis on the history of death-avoidance which concluded by recommending cryonics--freezing us till medical research manages immortality. The pathos of this enterprise points up our human entrapment in mortality, our facing the unconfined demon Death, "the last enemy that shall be destroyed" (the NT says). Well, some things that are historically unconfined are not transhistorically unconfined, and one of these is death: facing the resurrection of Jesus, we Christians conclude that nothing nailed down can be absolutely trusted to stay nailed down: even dead man cannot be trusted to stay dead. But more on this when we get to the unconfined as promise. My point here is that apart from access to the unconfined power of life, we do not succeed in mastering time, and we do end up as occupying only so much space as a handful of dust requires, *temporarily*.

6. On the negative side, "God" is that Gestalt of threats we cannot contain/confine, the God whom therefore we cannot domesticate to our personal or institutional or national purposes--the untamable One. Our very efforts at unity, to the extent they bypass him, trigger his destructive rage--of which the Tower of Babel (Gen.11) is the permanent paradigm. Yet it is also he who puts eternity and infinity and unity within our hearts and sets our hands to the tasks of reconciliation and the emergence of global man! Equally paradoxically, he is the one who comes among us and suffers death from our threats against him: the crucifixion of Jesus is, for us Christians, the unconfined confined within our refusal to let him be unconfined....the most awesome mystery in the history of religion.... Absolutely ruled out here are the two most prevalent religions of Americans, viz. privatistic pietism and the chauvinistic civil religion. Yes, God loves me--and hates me if I do not love my universal brother; yes, God loves my nation--and hates it to the extent it exploits other nations and the good earth....Because of such ruminations, in 1934 I suddenly switched from a career in science, at which I was brilliant, to a career in religion and humane values, in which I am only bright.

As president of a science club in a large educational institution, I was a starry-eyed technocrat in those days when "Technocracy" was spelled with a capital "T." But my diary of that year, age 16, shows my rising doubts about the destiny of our scientific culture and my enlarging fears both about the neglect of what is essentially human and about what we were doing to the earth and its other peoples--all of which doubts and fears lead straight to an evangelical conversion: I became a Jesus freak a few months after Hitler came to power and the dark cloud of holocaust and nihilism began to cover the earth and spread out into a potential mushroom of species genocide. I got good and scared of God and haven't been scared of anything else since. The other side of that fear was and is the profound and growing conviction that God loves me and his whole creation, and that his wrath/threat arises from the frustration of his caring, his passion, his concern, his perpetual and ineluctable intention to redeem, to liberate, all that he has made and called "good," i.e. all that he has made. Whether this comes to one's innermost self suddenly or gradually--and I shall have to say that in my case it was both--it brings, as gifts of "grace," an unshakable peace and joy in God--quite literally, and through no strength of my own, unshakable, for nothing of life's vicissitudes these subsequent 38 years has shaken either this peace or this joy--and I'll not recount the horrors on land, on sea, and in the air that the demons designed to disturb my peace and joy! Oddly, you may think, I'm witnessing to the peace and joy of knowing who and whose I am in the universe and in history and in hope--witnessing, I say, to this peace and joy precisely in view of God as unconfinable threat! Let superficial religion, having given up the dark side of God with its wrath and hell, deal with that fact if it can, as I believe it cannot.

7. And what shall I say of the unconfinable as threat to institutions? Well, to begin with, the Holy is uncomfortable with institutions, like Zorba in a Hilton Hotel (though I am no Zorba freak, I do have fun fantasizing where his rough and spontaneous animality-humanity would be absurd). When we experience the Holy, to remember the experience we confine the experience in a ritual tradition which requires priestcraft as a social mnemonic function, and that priestcraft institutionalizes itself necessarily. What is not necessary is the deterioration of this sacred [i.e., the historical-social deposit of the Holy] into the sacrosanct [i.e., the degenerate sacred]. When this devolution occurs--from sacerdotal hybris and other causes--the Holy rage wells up destructively and bursts out prophetically--the dynamic which is the very root of the Bible. The Holy God is a strong man we cannot bind in his destructivity [when we choose to resist him] or in his creativity [when we choose to serve him, and beyond]....It pains me that I cannot illustrate this with 100 scriptures and with the 100s of 3x5 cards I have with the word "unconfinable" in the upper left corner! In fact, the very abstractness of this lecture pains me, as I hope it doesn't you. I'm trying to help you isolate a category, the unconfinable--and that's not the most concrete task in the world! But there's something very concrete here, viz. my witness: living a life, as are all of us, cribbed, cabined, and confined, I have come to know of Something-Someone ever beckoning me beyond these confines with the Word that informs and directs me to live within these confines a life that suggests more than it is and is therefore becoming more than it has been. Note two words in that sentence: "beyond" and "more." They are profoundly religious words precisely because they allude to what is experienced as unconfined and believed to be unconfinable: they are the words of ultimate terror and joy, of longing and singing. Something-Someone like this has come to me over my gates, and I recognize him best in Jesus Christ and in him celebrate that coming and yearn for its full-coming--what the Bible calls the parousia, the full-presencing of the Holy, the messianic feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb with all the furniture of earth and heaven....Oh yes, institutions. Well, my experience of institutions, other than my gestative schools, has not been particularly happy. My agonic-prophetic spirit has seen me fired from employment as many times as in trouble for political subversive activities, with an occasional overlap of the two. I'm not anti-institutional, but I'm certainly no institutional type; yet I've been as faithful to my local church as to my wife, whom I've

never given any reason to fear genital competition; and I participate in the politics of my society at all levels, and strive for a more responsible citizenship, while participating in movements that threaten status quos....ever seeking the Presence of that Threat, with a capital "T," which breaks through all our pretensions and declares all our orders disorders, our customs prejudices, and our laws tyrannies....that Threat that decries our oppressions and declaims through a farmer's mouth "Let justice roll down like waters, and ~~righteousness~~ like an overflowing stream" (integrity: Amos 5.24).

8. I must not neglect to mention the pathology of the unconfinable: not everything folks think is unconfinable is so. Paranoia, individual or collective, is the fear that the person or group faces an unconfinable threat which, though unreal, marshalls all the human energies to confine it. Result, an infinite regress of anxiety, politically manipulable with horrendous consequences in Nazi Germany and Cold War Amerika. Our biblical heritage offers the prophylaxis well put by the founder of Pennsylvania, "He who fears God need not fear tyrants." And may I add, will not have tyrants to fear? The precondition of a global society is the emergence of human beings with too much dignity to fear their tribes, too much compassion to seize their young to kill the young of one another's tribe --human beings who transcend their parochial governments with a vision and pan-human commitment that relativizes all subglobal government in the interest of humanization--i.e., demands that governments serve truly human ends. I am deeply concerned about the survival of the U.N., but even more I wrestle with the question Do I, face to face with the earth and the God of all the earth and heaven, have an ecumenical heart? and how can I encourage those of my own and other traditions to face the Holy with this question?

9. So many unconfinable threats I can't discourse on. Is population unconfinable, or will we manage to conclude for coercive global conception control soon enough? Is pollution confinable, or will we reach the point of irreversibility before we create adequate world laws for pollution-control? Is crime confinable (I ask myself as I walk Manhattan streets late at night)? Is man's aggressiveness confinable, or is "A Clockwork Orange" prophecy? What about our acquisitiveness [possessiveness] and territoriality? What about such social threats as urban sprawl and city-hall venality? And what about the seemingly unconfinable appetites of the few at the expense of the many, as it applies both to persons and to nations? And the GNP, since infinite growth is impossible on a finite land on a finite planet, Phase III notwithstanding? And what of illusions of the unconfinable, orgasmic and other ecstatic? And what of Superman and the seeming unconfinability of Wagner's Promethean music? And the gnostic dream of escaping human limitations? Then there's that seemingly unconfinable air, est. and antiest. political rhetoric. And establishments' worries that certain liberation movements may not be confinable. And Descartes' "unlimited confidence in the power of intelligence" (Bergson)? Nor have I more time than merely to allude to what the tragic world-view, particularly in drama, contributes to our experience of confinement face-to-face with the unconfinable. And the "counterfeit infinity" (Coleridge) of drugs. And the spiritual experience of sports as they strain not beyond the natural limits but beyond the hitherto limits--one of the joys of yoga, worth all its pains. And the hollow threat of international "containment" and "encirclement" policies. And sci-fi's bursting the bounds, and parallel comic-strip personifications from Buck Rogers on.

10. But in addition to all the unconfinable threats that signal a better way for us and a better world, the threat of what seems absolute evil, inexplicable as even potentially redemptive and re-creative, hangs over us and the world--"the principalities and powers" "we [must] wrestle with," Paul puts it. A razor blade in a Trick-or-Treat Halloween apple....Bonnie and Clyde's uninhibited joy in theft, mayhem, and murder....the end of "Easy Rider"....the Charles Manson family....Alex and his fellow-sadists in "Clockwork Orange"....Hitler....the occasional stirrings in your own heart that horrify you....There remains the mystery of evil conjoint with the mystery of good, the ambivalences of the human heart and the ambiguities of history in spite of Herman Kahn's "surprise-free" projective scenarios. This

"demonic," however, in the biblical monotheism, only seems, and only sometimes seems, unconfined: faith in the one God of light and darkness (Is.45) sees its overthrow: Jesus sees Satan fall from heaven (L.10.18), and John the Revelator sees Satan the devil thrown into the lake of fire along with Death and Hades (Rev.20.7-14), the final doom of evil and therefore the prelude to the new heaven and the new earth (the Bible's last two chapters). Which introduces us to....

THE UNCONFINABLE AS PROMISE

Here I must, for want of time, touch even more lightly than in the case of the unconfined as threat. But if you stand all those threats on their heads they'll make the "V" for victory and peace sign. Because God is good, his threats are frustrated promises: because his power is sufficient to his benevolent purposes, those promises shall not remain frustrated forever. As his threats are unconfined by us, so his promises are unconfined by "the Satan," i.e. the adversary, the resister, the opponent, on or beyond the earth. Faith thus sees trust in God not as a risky investment or as choosing sides in a contest whose outcome is unknown but rather as "an anchor...safe and sure" where "Jesus has gone" (Heb.6.19f), for "to have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see" (11.1) from creation throughout history to our own time (the remainder of the chapter). So "let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way...and run with determination the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end, who did not give up when he faced the cross but rather discounted it for the joy that was waiting for him....Think of what he went through, and you'll not let yourselves become discouraged and give up" (12.1-3).

I've quoted this Letter to the Hebrews passage at some length because it combines the document's central virtue, viz. endurance, with the resurrection theme, viz. joy: if your trust in God is not confined within the limits of what the world calls "what's good for you," you just may well get crucified in some way or other--but if you do, your very existence will not be confined by death. God's inextinguishable covenant appears supremely in Jesus' unconditional loyalty uncontainable by the ecclesial and political authorities without effecting his death, and even then unsuppressible! No wonder those who get into this with Jesus, i.e. those his Spirit gets into, have unsuppressible peace and joy and hope! Against all the forces of death, God means to give victory to life, and he gives as much life here and hereafter as we're willing to open ourselves to. Of this, Easter is the paradigm and therefore central to Christian faith, as Moses experience of an unquenchable fire is paradigmatic and central to Jewish faith (Ex.3, with its two crucial words incised on the main arch of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America: "burning, not-burning-up").

As for the rest of this lecture, here are brief impressionistic notes on the unconfined as promise in God, Jesus, man, nature, society:

GOD--The Creator is the effective, ultimately irresistible Promiser--irresistible within the limits of existence: "In the case of every major promise of the Gospel, ...the unconditioned power of God the Creator stands as the foundation on which Christian confidence is based" (Langdon Gilkey, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, 234). He is unconfined because his power is without remainder: Jasper's "the Comprehensive," Heidegger's "Being," Tillich's "the Unconditioned Transcendent." He is unobjectifiable, unutilizable, and in his being uninterpretable (though not in his action, to the extent he chooses to act toward and in us). Since the boundless can not be given form, Hebrew monotheism was iconoclastic, refusing the neighbors' mythopoeic man-nature-gods continuum with all its qualifyings of God, who is unqualifiable and unconfined by his people (nation), by his symbols, by his creation, by his enemies. Since we can experience God only at the points of tangency he chooses, our language can only hint at what he is in himself, and only partially represent even our experience of him. So it should be no surprise that OT is shy about naming him--in Semitic psychology, a way of controlling (as it is, though somewhat less so, among us): Aquinas well says, on Ex.3.13f, "Only

in this divinely given name [WBE tr.: "I-Will-Be-What-You-Discover-Me-To-Be"] can we express the utter independence of God," his aseity. But is he infinite (in-finite, lit. 'without limits')? Chas. Hartshorne, in my opinion, has wrestled most productively with this, in his "dipolar theism," a yes/no position: yet in 1965 he said [in Eugene H. Peters' *THE CREATIVE ADVANCE* (Bethany/66), p.134] "It is 45 years since the notion of a merely finite God has had any attraction for me." God can self-limit, as can man: God does self-limit, as man does: God limits man more than man wants, but man limits God only within God's intentions. Successive waves as empire desecrated and destroyed the Holy City, Jerusalem, but God never has to say "due to circumstances beyond my control...." Mystical ecstasy vis-a-vis God is unconfined in its symbols, which are superlative: the palms are the highest tribute [to the conqueror], the harps signify and produce the sweetest music, wings [as in Is.6] produce the fastest and highest movement, the titles suggest unbounded devotion [as El Shadday suggests the feeling more than the cerebral dimension of mysterious, illimitable power-might-authority]. Which reminds me of Chrysostom's statement that reason can't "work around" (peri-ergaz.) God, can't "comprehend" (katale'pt.) him. One motif of God-talk--if you don't like God-talk you may want to say one game of God-talk--is just to express the desire to express one's inability to express God, to confine him in human expression. This is the heart of the mystics'--East and West--via negativa, suggesting what God is by limiting oneself to expressing what he isn't. In the West, however, with almost no exceptions till post WWI, man himself has been excluded from this adulative work; but in the East [e.g. in Krishnamurti's *THE FLIGHT OF THE EAGLE* (Harper/71)] the soul of man participates in this unconfinedness of God. ...and even in the West, after the first few centuries, the Greeky notion of the immortality of the soul gives man, even in the confinement of hell, a kind of unconfinedness, specifically the kind the God of the Garden chased him out to keep him from getting.

JESUS--The NT refuses to confine Jesus within his bio-experience (cradle to grave). While there is powerful evidence that death did not confine him, and this being unconfined by death was the genetic event for our Christian faith, the cosmic notion of his preexistence is strong in some NT strands and is indeed required by the orthodox view of the Trinity; as the Christmas carol sings, "Heaven cannot hold him," so incarnation. The Fourth Gospel has its own light-mysticism way of getting at this: God sent Jesus to the earth to be an unconfined, unquenchable light (1.5). And sure enough, Jesus keeps coming back: now, "the kids love Jesus, this we know, for the media tell us so" (23 June 71 XnC ed.). He keeps getting typed--as pacifist, as revolutionary, as guru--and he keeps breaking out of these role-types as you can see him doing in the NT, where no role-types--Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, Lord, Savior, etc.--quite fit him, yet all [as also the now titles] are suggestive of aspects of his being and influence and promise. [When I was doing religion research on the side several years ago for Herman Kahn of the Hudson Institute, he got me on "those Jesus freaks"--some time before the media were hailing Jesus' return.] In Tillich language, Jesus, radiant with Being-Itself, is the supreme manifestation of the Unconditioned in conditioned form--we might say, the earthly counterpoint and counterpart to the illimitable, unconfined Holy. In Jesus the prodigal Father reaches down and up and out, and I respond with an extravaganda of grateful ecstasy, responsive to Jesus' own gratitude and wonder before the grace of God. And as the man-for-others-toward-the-Kingdom-of-God, Jesus is unconditional: he does not let anything deflect him from this dedication, and this is his human transcendence of the ordinary mortal. In fiction he's a lion (C.S.Lewis' *Narnia* volumes) and a tiger (Thos. Howard's *CHRIST THE TIGER: A POSTSCRIPT TO DOGMA* [Lippincott/68])--the forest animals of almost unlimited authority and freedom from management of fellow-creatures and circumstance.

MAN--Had you noticed that when we passed from threat to promise we passed--on our first visual--from "the lecture subject" to "(a) What I can't limit and don't want to"? I couldn't let the lecture be only negative, though it accentuates the negative both in concentrating on a human inability ['what we can't confine yet want

to] and in eliminating discussion of human ability [the other four boxes]. So let's list a few things about mankind that we can't confine and don't want to: (1) The sacrificial love of friends; (2) Things that at first seem unfavorable for wholeness, yet turn out to be fulfilled promises; (3) Situation questions, addressed to us by life itself [by God himself], that bless us and/or others because we can't escape them and do face them courageously and creatively (i.e., imaginatively); (4) Intelligent parental love; (5) Faithful children; (6) Another person with his uncontrollable [by us] variables (but don't we, sometimes, want to?); (7) Divine assignment to good genes, a good society, and good tasks [i.e., self-fulfilling and contributive of human values]; (8) Challenges that press us to our limits with "impossible" demands we manage to meet by transcending our self-imposed limitations and assuming responsibility for becoming more human; (9) Near escapes that shock us back into the joy and grateful celebration of life; (10) Failures, not too expensive, from which we learn lessons we're so grateful for that in retrospect the failure appears as an open door; (11) Humbling experiences that help us both know and accept our limits, yet without humiliating and traumatizing us; (12) The perpetual renewal of our hungers and thirsts; (13) Discoveries of the unconditionality of meaning ["If there is meaning, it is unconditional, and neither suffering nor dying can detract from it. And what our patients need is unconditional faith in unconditional meaning."--Viktor Frankl, *THE WILL TO MEANING*, 156.]; (14) Deprivations we've overcome dramatically [as A. Lincoln, when elected to Congress, had to fill out a form which required him to describe his education, and he wrote one word: "defective"]; (15) A revel in something within conscience but otherwise lacking in restraint and thus a joyful Dionysiac trip; (16) The gift of a good word that sings itself into your heart and keeps singing [like this one from the altar of a retreat house at which recently I was leading a retreat: "Let a green bough grow in your heart, and a singing bird will come."]; (17) Somebody goodmouthing me when I need it and want it; (18) Somebody badmouthing me when I need it and want it. Can you add more?

NATURE--What do I experience in nature that I can't confine and don't want to? Spring! Weather [most of it]. Summer evenings. Thick clean snow. My family's affection [though with neglect I could damp it down]. Curiosity, sensate and intellectual, imaginative and spiritual, about this awesome world that beckons me to adventure and find Presence. Finding natural tasks [Aufgaben] in nature as I confront it inside and outside my skin [Gabe]. Hearing the groanings toward the new nature (Ro.8; though sometimes I wear earplugs). Simple and sophisticated sensations and meditations of the presence of God--nature providing not inspiration [as in all romanticism, including the current American poetic naturalism] but homologies [ontic analogies] and an I-It distance analogous to the I-Thou distance of Providence and pray-er, who in prayer discovers, in receptivity and pledged activity, the world's order and meaning in beauty and duty--because Love lies at the world's root and fount.

SOCIETY--And finally, what do I experience in society that I can't confine and don't want to? "The blessing of Abraham," that adventurer toward the Promise given by the One Abraham couldn't confine and who called Abraham out of the confines of his society into an alternative culture of which he became the nucleus. An open future full of promise (with man's growing compassion, the world "human" revolution, and burgeoning technological powers increasingly humanizable) and threat (evils and mistakes being bigger than ever). Liberation movements that don't wear blinders. People now hard at work on their own esofuture (developing their own interiority in interact with social concerns. People and institutions now hard at work on the exofuture, designing the environment beyond the chaos [like Jeremiah]. Radical professionals. The Whole Earth flag that, by the grace of God and our younger son, flies in front of our house in all seasons. A new consciousness beginning to emerge as a new politics.

This is a start toward your own meditating on this BVR [basic visceral response] I've called in this lecture "unconfineability" and identified as an experiencing of God. Yours is what you do with it.