

My luncheon companion ("C") described himself as "Not religious, you know; never have been." I ("E") smiled: "A weasel word that--'religious.'" What did it mean, then, when at the Communion close of the retreat you pounded the table with both fists and said, "Now I know why He died!"

C--I was just reporting something, not making any religious claim.

E--Yep, that's what it sounded like, and we all felt. No arrogance. Not even any self-consciousness, though you've been of all men most God-shy--especially God-talk-shy. So what were you reporting?

C--What came to me in a flash of light....what had always been dark, even stupid, before. I pitied the street people and Jews with their "Christ died so you can live." I felt like saying with the crowd in "Jesus Christ Superstar," "He's only a man....only a man": I flatly rejected orthodox Christianity, and was proud of saying so on any occasion of opening for it.

E--I well remember, and the group's patience with you, not putting you down or getting threatened or anxious, even when time and again you rejected the group openly and said you were dropping out. Everybody stuck with you and helped you to work through, like Jacob wrestling with the angel (Gen.32). Lunches, evenings, letters, phonecalls--a group that learned how to care, and you with it, you Dionysiac you!.... This morning, while in private devotion, I decided to do a piece on "Often I have yearned." You, sir, are a first-class yearner. Pestalozzi, who died a failure (in his own eyes) in 1827, was a first-class yearner who failed at everything till 55 and then, having some orphans dumped on him because the war of 1798 had dumped them on him, learned a listening/responding love which he recorded in his journal, and became the father of "modern education" to the extent it's based on taking the child seriously. That gives you 14 more years of failure, if you can stand my little joke--or is it God's?....Not incidentally, the biblical passage from which I lifted this morning that title is Matt.23.37, Jesus' lament: "O Jerusalem,...how often I have yearned..., but you refused."

C--There it is, exactly! Jesus "knew," I'm sure with the kind of reporter-knowledge I was given at the retreat, what Jerusalem, what the city, needed; and people refused to listen. How do you make them listen? If he couldn't, what hope is there for me?

E--In your letter leading up to lunch today, you said "I'm getting a bit nervous about whose's WILL this is: 'not my will' is the scariest of all prayers. I've been praying it hard and it's being answered and the doors keep opening and I'm too scared to go through and more scared not to. I am being drawn closer and closer to God and I am reluctant to admit why--which presupposes I know why, which is true. Ever day since the retreat I've relived my saying 'Now I know why He died!' There's been no reduction in my amazement in my boldness, my coolness, in saying it--something quite impossible, even unthinkable, if it had struck me as some kind of confession of faith, rather than as it did, namely, just reporting a fact."

C--Yes, just reporting a fact. Reality. Very different reality from my old cynical "reality," indeed! Superior reality.

E--(After several recent counseling stories:) You read David Jenkins' WHAT IS MAN? In a release today from the World Council of Churches, ending his 5-year Humanum studies, he says, "We are not seeking a Christian anthropology but a humanizing involvement in human struggles which follows from and leads to the praise of God."

C--Yes, "the praise of God" as motive and goal! Now I understand worship--but what work am I to do? I must get it across--this thanksgiving for Being--but HOW?

E--The knowledge of grace was given you: so will be the opportunity.

C--Before, I said to you "I love humanity so much I'd be willing to be crucified." Then it hit me that I don't have to die to love: he did it for me, so I can live and love with joy eternally!....No altered state of consciousness, but a cosmic moment given, not worked up--the moment of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection....