

Of the making of many books there is no end; but few books are a cry for humanity, and of the making of such there should be no end. They irritate. They disturb toward what should be. And in their cry, agony usually twists and distorts, as a vision seen through tears. Such a book is Gabriel Moran's RELIGIOUS BODY (Seabury/74). Paradoxically, it is the most rational, the most tightly argued of his nine books, and the most transrational, the most passionate against the perversion of language as a ploy against the human duty and of institution against the human potential.

1. If we "believe" this book we must give up the Bible with its God-demanding-obedience: if we reject the cry of this book, we have already given up the message of the Bible, which is a cry from a cross where all pretense is stripped away and God is naked for us...God undemanding, inviting...God with the authority of meekness, of power that chooses weaknesses to witness to the possibility of a strength otherwise invisible, unavailable. The scribes will reject Gabe's book with an increment of self-righteous smugness; the faithful will hear its cry and recall the cry with which the Bible ends: "Maran(Lord), atha(come)!"...and will, on pain of becoming unfaithful, reject the extreme kenosis, the ascetic emptying out of the biblical world-picture (a god demanding obedience, and rewarding/punishing accordingly).

2. Why does Gabe sacrifice the biblical world-picture? The question opens to his life-message, so I hesitate to give a glib answer; but the answer certainly must include two components: (a) the biblical myth-story-picture (which I believe is the best we humans have for light and life), ironically in spite of its liberation theme, has become (as Paul said of Torah) an instrument of oppression: orthodoxy (the "right" teaching), orthopraxy ("right" conduct), and orthocracy (the "right" power-arrangements); and (b) so entrained in this network of captivity has the biblical myth-story-picture become that (as Marx said of theism) its use is now counterfunctional to its own intention (on which cp. the mid-1960s debate on "a moratorium on 'God'"). I completely agree with (a), and believe we must accept the burden of repristinization rather than despair of freeing the biblical image from its cultural entrapment (as in (b)). Further, I think Gabe is right, that his church, instead of retrogressing after Vatican II into the old Protestantism, should have seized its opportunity to go beyond the 16th-c. divide into a new protestantism (what his subtitle calls "a New Reformation," though his shape of it is too reductionistic-romantic for me).

3. I feel a diagram coming on. In the margins are out-of-bounds extremes, from which (I agree with Gabe) only true community can deliver us.

