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Letter to Yourselves

by L. Brent Bozell, Jr.

I very much want to say these things without sounding reproachful or smug. If I fail in this, I wish you would lay it to weak craft, not weak intention. It may be that you deserve reproach; but my credentials, plainly, are not the best for dishing out. After all, I have shared many of your errors and defeats, and have been involved in others that you have managed to avoid. But more important: the reason for opening this discussion is to encourage a common advance toward political wisdom—a prospect that could be badly hurt by recriminations. Would it not be better, then, for you to say these things? It would; but the fact is that you are not saying them, and have sent out no signal that you mean to have them said. There is silence in your ruins.

I.

Historians will differ as to the moment when the movement you lead ceased to be an important force in America. (My own view is that the hour struck in 1964, with Goldwater's defeat.) But there will be no one to dispute that it was all over by November 1968, with Nixon's victory. This is because 1) Nixon in 1968 was your man, and 2) Nixon in 1968 had repudiated you. He was your man in the sense that whatever remained of your energies was committed to his election and whatever remained of your hopes was committed to the success of his presidency. He had repudiated you in the sense that he had pointedly in recognizably rejected every distinctive feature of your movement: that is, everything that set it apart from other political forces in the country. He had rejected everything that gave it an identity—or, more to the point, a being. And since he did this with your full knowledge and thus with your implied assent, He was free to ignore you upon assuming the presidency; and you were powerless to affect his future course. Everything he, and you, have done since the inauguration merely confirms this relationship, or the lack of one. Nixon's resurrection, in a word, was your funeral, and all that has been missing is a suitable oration.

I speak of the distinctive features of the conservative movement in America without venturing any opinion as to what "conservatism" is. Some of you have treated it as an ideology; others as an attitude toward the public life; others as a style. It may be all of these things and more, but here I am concerned only with how it has "come on" to the country as a political movement since it acquired an identity and shape after World War II and the Roosevelt years. I am concerned, if you like, with its program. For this purpose it can be reduced to four propositions, and for three of these there is a convenient symbol, or hero-figure, who dispenses with any need for elaboration. There is anti-statism, as represented by Taft.

There is nationalism, as represented by MacArthur. There is anti-Communism, as represented by (Joseph) McCarthy. The fourth is constitutionalism, which has never had a single champion of the stature of the others, but which may be recalled by thinking of Bricker, or more recently, Thurmond. All of these propositions were faithfully summed up in Goldwater, who ran for president on the strength of them.

Perhaps there is some conservative argument not covered by the above headings; but I think you must agree that should these four propositions be abandoned, and nothing of comparable seriousness put in their place, then the movement itself would be abandoned. And isn't that really what happened? The conservative program was trounced in Goldwater's moment, and had been forgotten by Nixon's; some time in between it was simply abandoned. Again the symbols tell the story. Taft, MacArthur, McCarthy, Goldwater—all former allies of Nixon' s and all honored by you—fell into obsolescence in 1964-68, a final, formal, irrelevance, which their liberal opponents, older or longer dead than they, have so far been spared; and this is because most of you who honor them no longer deemed it profitable to assert what they had asserted, to re-light the torch which they had carried.

Nixon. There is a sentiment among many of your followers to "give him a chance." But this makes sense just to the extent, no more or less, that it makes sense to give you a chance. The political Nixon—however one may size up the "real" Nixon— is a resultant of forces; there is no major political figure in memory of whom this is so palpably true. Therefore he will move away from the course on which he is presently embarked only if you can convince him that it is in his political interest to make your program his. Can you? Do you want to? It seems to me that you have already given the answer; it came last spring, during the season for selecting presidential candidates. Reagan was your natural candidate. He was the obvious heir, as Nixon by that time was not, of Goldwater and the conservative program. What is more, he had flair, style, freshness—qualities that more than offset Nixon's "experience" in the scales of winner-potential. In fact, however, you did not neglect Reagan because he "couldn't win"; there was actually very little talk of that in your conversations. You neglected him because Nixon was early in the field, had initiative, momentum; to push Reagan in the circumstances would have required the kind of energy that carried the day four years before at San Francisco. But you no longer had much energy, which is a function of will, which is in turn a function of conviction. And so candidate Nixon carried you along, hearing scarcely a word from you protesting the policies he was offering the country. Is it sensible to expect that President Nixon will find a better chance to be harassed by your energy?

II.

Let me suggest an explanation for your failure of energy. It is certainly not a matter of laziness or funk. Nor is discouragement the answer quite, although it would be strange if that were not involved. Disillusionment, I think, is the correct explanation; and this is a promising development if the word is properly understood, because it means emancipation from illusions.

What might prompt disillusionment, apart from a direct infusion of grace? Ordinarily it comes from some striking visitation in the order of existence—from the impact of something felt or experienced which shakes one's own being at its roots and calls for a reorientation toward reality. I grant that rational argument may do the trick in some cases, but surely it is the rare man whose illusion can be wrecked by reason alone; in any event, I am unaware of the contemporary argument, unless it has appeared in these pages, which might have turned off the conservative movement.

What has not had to be argued, but has simply happened, is this: your supposed enemy, secular liberalism, has fallen—yet no one imagines that you brought it down; the whole country is writhing in the agonies of its death—yet no one reaches out to you for support; history is burying secular liberalism—yet history is not asking you to furnish a substitute. None of this, I repeat, needs to be argued. If the secular-liberal system is still giving off signs of vitality, like Nixon staggering brightly from press conference to empty press conference, every sensitive person recognizes them to be false signs. They are the busy motions pumped into themselves by rulers severed from an organic constituency. Every truly vital man in the country, every vital force, scorns and condemns this system; secular liberalism has become the universal epithet. Yet none of these men, none of these forces, is inquiring into your system, into the "conservative program." Do you regret that? That is indeed a shattering experience: at the moment of your enemy's finish, and thus at the finish of your own raison d'etre,—not to be wanted. And not very much to want yourselves.

I think this experience can be described even more sharply. Secular liberalism has lost its war for historical existence, but it has not lost any of the battles it has had with you. On every front where your program has confronted secular liberalism's, you have been beaten. Consider (against the background of one of Nixon's press conferences) your campaigns against big government, against Keynesian economics, against compulsory welfare; your defense of states' rights and the constitutional prerogatives of Congress; your struggle for a vigorous anti-Soviet foreign policy; your once passionate stand for the country's flag and her honor. Is there a single field which the secular liberals have had to yield to the secular conservatives? That is one side of the coin. The other is that secular liberalism has, nevertheless, died—and for causes apparently unconnected with your ministrations. Some say it succumbed from existential wounds, an inability to cope with reality. Do you deem yourselves sufficiently close students of reality to have helped significantly to inflict the wounds? Others lay the failure to an organic weakness or "sickness," a self-contained fault of the system. Has your criticism of secular liberalism persuasively diagnosed this sickness? Still others say the basic cause is in the order of ideas. Do you claim to have located the fundamental errors, or to have corrected them? I do not mean, with these questions, to chide you; I concede that men are hard to find in our time who ought to feel any more comfortable with them. The point is simply that, taking both sides of this coin together, it is not surprising you should neither be called, nor offering yourselves, as secular liberalism's heir—that it is not surprising you are disillusioned.

III.

What, then, are the illusions from which events and history are trying to free you? There are, I think, two principal ones, and they are closely related. The first is the illusion of an essential dichotomy between "conservatism" and "liberalism": the belief that they differ significantly in the things that matter. The second is the illusion that politics—the ordering of public life—can proceed without continuing reference to God.

What I have suggested as a way of accounting for the exhaustion of your movement may be a good entry to the first illusion. Is it not clear that what we are dealing with here is not two corpses, but one? What is being discarded by history is a whole approach to man and to politics. This approach has had its better and worse expressions, and I have no doubt that yours was one of the better; but all of these expressions were faulted by a similar flaw, and thus similarly fated to obsolescence when man and his politics cried out for an expression of reality. This is why your moment of distress coincides with secular liberalism's, why it is not traceable to any particular defeat of conservatives by liberals, but to common failure to have anything appropriate to say.

To recognize contemporary conservatism and contemporary liberalism as branches of the same tree would not be disconcerting. After all, commentators on all sides have long acknowledged a common-parenthood: nineteenth-century liberalism. What most of the commentators have stressed, however—and thus what is responsible for the illusion—is the dissimilarities of the offspring. I think it is time to focus on the similarity.

But before doing that, let me acknowledge a strain of contemporary conservatism which is properly linked with the eighteenth century rather than the nineteenth, with Burke and Johnson, say, rather than Mill and Spencer. There is certainly a deep gulf between traditionalist conservatism and libertarian conservatism which has so far resisted all efforts to "fuse" them; and I have no hesitation in admitting a distinct preference for the former—for its essential piety toward history, especially that part of it which God has been in since the Incarnation. It does, however, run the danger of slipping over into positivism, into an intimate friendship with the is or was, and thus of forgetting that Christ came to transfigure history. But the reason I want to acknowledge this strain is not to debate with it, but to point out that despite the redoubtable labors of Mr. Russel Kirk and his associates, it has had a relatively minor impact on the program which you have oppose to secular liberalism. Thus the nineteenth-century liberal remains a just and useful symbol of the common conservative-liberal heritage.

The common heritage, as well as the similarity it has preserved, was succinctly isolated by Robert Fox in a recent review of Professor Mario Pei's book, The America We Lost. The ideal of the nineteenth-century liberal, Fox pointed out, was self-fulfillment. It was not then, as it has become with secular liberalism, an exclusive materialist ideal, preoccupied with wealth, sex and attendant pleasures. It also acknowledged the spiritual dimension and the need for moral discipline, which is the part of the heritage that your branch alone has preserved. Where it abused reality, according to Fox, was in supposing that the

spiritual dimension could be sustained and moral discipline imposed by the naked strength of the individual; it did not recognize that most of the individuals who managed the feat were living off the capital inherited from institutionalized Christianity. Now what this has meant for the present seems perfectly obvious, especially in the light of the gradual erosion of Christian institutions over the past hundred years, and their precipitous collapse more recently. It has meant that the nineteenth-century goal of self-fulfilling the whole man has remained open to a moral elite (and I do mean to include most of yourselves) to realize in their private lives, but has not been accessible to the generality of men and thus ceased to shape and influence the public life of the West. This helps to explain why, with a mass electorate, you have lost every public contest to the secular liberals. They have addressed themselves, far more persuasively than you, to that dimension of life which contemporary politics do indeed help to fill. Their miscalculation was to suppose that nourishment of the material dimension could long sustain any life.

However, it would only fuel an unprofitable delusion to suggest that materialism is a secular-liberal monopoly. The fact is that the main thrust of your quarrel with the secular liberals over the years has been felt in the area of economics. This is hardly surprising, given the parent ideal of self-fulfillment. For the idea of self-fulfillment, however defensible it may be in the abstract, appeared in the nineteenth century laden with certain historical baggage. It emerged as a modern, essentially un-Christian notion, from the Renaissance—which was concerned with the fulfillment of the natural self; and any way you slice it, concentration on the natural self, at the expense of the supernatural self, tends to concentration on the physical self: on the appetites of matter. This is because man's fallen nature, unsupported by grace, tends to animalhood. Thus it was that the Puritan idea of a visible elite, despite all the nonsense propagated since, became the perfect ally of Renaissance Man. Measuring goodness by the acquisition of material riches, it encouraged him to do what comes naturally. It has also encouraged you to continue to promote what comes naturally. As a result, the ghastly infrastructure of the secular city bears your lineaments, even more visibly than the liberals'. Your economics has not fared as well as theirs at the ballot box: Nixon is in the White House. But they have fared well enough to shape the physical surroundings, the social organization and the lifestyle of the country: Reagan says that the oil-drilling on the California shelf must go on to insure "progress," and Nixon is in the White House.

It may be easier now to meet the fatal flaw which I have said is shared by both branches of liberalism. If the nineteenth-century version of self-fulfillment is a modern idea traceable to the Renaissance, it is also a pre-Christian idea, as Miss Madden remarks in this issue, illustrated by the Sophists; in fact, the lineage does not stop until it reaches Adam. And the whole meaning of this historical current is to assert, and reassert, man's ability to fulfill himself, by himself: to assert, and reassert, his self-sufficiency. Which is denied by Christ who says: without Me you can do nothing.

I do not doubt that those of you who are Christians accept this teaching of Christ's. But I do question whether most of you, as public men, take it seriously. I can believe that it seriously affects your private lives, but I deny that it has deeply invaded your politics. This is curious because you would have curious private lives if they were not profoundly influenced by the public thing around you. You get all of the support you need from direct approaches by God to your interior life, from private prayer, from the

Sacraments? If you do, the huge generality of men, including me for one, does not. The public life, as it now exists, is an enormous obstacle to virtue, if not to salvation. It is a fierce agent of Satan. Yet it is meant to provide inducements to virtue and occasions of grace. It is meant to be a place where God is signified in His things.

Many secular liberals are hostile or indifferent to religion, and most conservatives are friendly to it. But over the years their leaders, and you, have developed a common political approach: you have agreed to assign it to the private sphere. Like everything else in modernity, religion has been given a compartment. True, you resisted the recent exclusion of prayer from public schools. But you did so, understandably, without much zest. For you recognized (the constitutional issue aside) that these pre-class recitals were a pathetic expression of the idea that religion belongs in education.

There is the point: at most, liberalism allows that religion belongs in education. It is never admitted that education belongs to religion. The Christian idea of education as a unity designed to impart Truth is emphatically rejected by liberalism, and it has never figured prominently in your program. Thus your criticism of the liberal education system, while usually valid as far as it has gone, has not cut the mustard. It has not proposed a helpful reform of the system because it has not proposed to make going to school an occasion of grace.

To elaborate this argument by further examples is hardly necessary. The argument is that in every field your politics have expressed a relatively unimportant dispute over what the public life should be; they have not acknowledged the Christian teaching that the proper goal of the orderers of the public life is to help open men to Christ. In a word, your politics have been unreal. And they are now suffering the fate which all unrealities must one day suffer.

IV.

So what will you do with yourselves? As long as the illusions keep their hold, three avenues are open to you. They are already in use. You will find a place in the establishment as Nixon has, offering commonsense criticisms and suggestions which may be proximately useful. You will retire, perhaps to care for one of those moribund ideological projects like keeping America a republic because it is not a democracy. Or you will be driven (whether wittingly or no, I do not predict) to swell the ranks of a proto-fascist reaction to the collapse of secular liberalism. This last may have a political future of sorts.

But you will not, along any of those routes, have a permanent impact on the post-modern world. The future belongs only to those who keep in touch with reality—that is, those who manage to keep open to Christ, who is Reality. You are certainly entitled to observe that the old Christian forms for sanctifying the public life have themselves become obsolete, and thus do not provide a sufficient guide for the future. But that is only to say that the quest for new forms will be difficult, and will require all the energy and imagination and grace that are now in us and whatever more time will provide. This is why I am writing to yourselves.

V.

… the essential character of the Gospel is to be the religion of the poor—using that term not to indicate those who are detached from: earthly things, but those who form the great mass of mankind. This view shares St. Augustine's picture of the Church as a net in which all sorts of fish are caught, where the task of separating the good from the bad is for the angels, not for men. On this view of the matter, the Church was most truly itself in the days of Christendom when everybody was baptized and it is this state of affairs which is much to be desired.

Jean Danielou, Prayer as a Political Problem

I have already indicated that the main trouble with liberalism is that it was designed for an intellectual and moral elite—for men who could (or thought they could) take care of themselves. It remains to look into this proposition a little further, to see why one who is disillusioned with liberal politics is naturally drawn to Christian politics.

You should be forewarned, however, that what follows is not an economic argument. It is true that modern elitism has been reflected in economics—explicitly in Calvinism, implicitly in all forms of capitalism (and all forms of socialism!). But it is also true that both the capitalist and socialist branches of liberalism, each after its fashion, have sought to provide the material needs of the "poor"; and thus to a meager extent both systems have expressed Christ. So the real difficulty is not there. Worse still, to enter the debate over which system does a better job of distributing material goods—which has always been a main quarrel between capitalist and socialist liberals—is to enter the liberal dialectic, which is a false dialectic. It is false because it tends to reduce politics to economics, to forget that material wealth is only a small part of what the public life is supposed to provide: what it is for.

The public life is supposed to help a man be a Christian. It is supposed to help him enter the City of God, and meanwhile it is sup-posed to help him live tolerably, even happily, in the City of Man.

To state the problem in this fashion is to plunge into the Chris-tian dialectic; it is also, given the state and contemporary political theory, to enter a new world. In 1965 the French Jesuit, Jean Danielou, wrote a primer for this venture. A tiny volume, little noticed since it was translated into English in 1967, Prayer as a Political Problem could become the most valuable book of our time inasmuch as it sets forth a plausible invitation to restore a politics to a Christian vocation. Father Danielou begins, as any Christian must, with the premise that Christ aims to reach all men, and thereupon urges us "to discover what those conditions are which make a Christian people possible." The indispensable clue he finds in the past, in the centuries when Christianity once before was transformed from a sect into a people:

… the extension of Christianity to an immense multitude, which is of its very essence, was held back during the first centuries by the fact that the social cadres and cultural forms of the society in which it

operated were hostile to it. To cleave to Christianity called then for a strength of character of which the majority of men are not capable. When the conversion of Constantine removed these obstacles the Gospel was made accessible to the poor, that is to say, to those very people who are not numbered among the elite. The man in the street could now be a Christian. Far for from distorting Christianity, this change allowed it to become more truly itself, a people.

In short, it was found that for the great generality of men a Christian civilization was the indispensable medium for communicating the Christian message. For most men, as McLuhan would say, the medium was the message. And so it is today that a Christian people is to be found only where the vestiges of Christian civilization still exist. Danielou mentions “Brittany and Alsace, Italy and Spain, Ireland and Portugal, Brazil and Colombia.” There are a few other such places, but the lesson of two millenia is clear: “It is practically impossible for any but the militant Christian to persevere in a milieu which offers him no support.” This is why “there is laid upon the Church a duty to work at the task of making civilization such that the Christian way of life shall be open to the poor.” This is why the Church of the Poor, as she has proudly described herself through the centuries, is once again called upon to devise and teach a Politics of the Poor.

VI.

A brief reflection on this thesis will suggest any number of ways in which Christian politics is not only quite different from but far deeper and richer than the politics which has dominated the West in recent centuries. But three advantages of the Christian conception, it seems to me, stand out, and provide keys to the others.

The first is that Christianity sees the public life, which is the responsibility of politics, as an extension of the interior life. As Danielou puts it, “there can be no radical division between civilization and what belongs to the interior being of man.” Liberal politics, by contrast, is indifferent to the connection. John F. Kennedy became the liberal par excellence by announcing that his religion would not affect his presidency because it was “a private affair.”

True, the public and the interior are distinct realms and are governed differently. To go no further, the grace that comes to man through private prayer or the Sacraments is of a different order from the grace which is mean t to be found in the public life . But his grace is the favor of the same God and support the same Truth. Therefore disharmony between the two realms is a sign that God has been excluded from at least one of them, and probably both. Even the man who can still cling to God in some interior fashion will admit that he does so not in joy but in anguish, in struggle against a world that conspires at every turn to dry up his spiritual juices. This experience is a sold as modernity. As Danielou recalls, Pascal saw “a conflict, a ripping apart, an abyss between an interior experience which has no outside evidence of its existence and a cold world which contradicts it”; he felt the “tragic coexistence of a deaf world from which God is absent and a heart which is aware of God.” This conflict drove the Jansenists to heresy. It has driven most men back to paganism. “The evidence of the heart,” Danielou says correctly, “is

inaccessible to the mass of men, whose destiny is to be involved in the natural order. The world must speak of God; otherwise, man can normally have no access to him."

The second advantage of the Christian conception is that the public life is not confined to what the state does, or what government does. The public life is whatever is not the interior life. This means that Christian politics is free to regard family and school, play and work, art and communication, the order of social relationships and the civil order, as integral parts of a whole: as integral and therefore mutually dependent aspects of civilization. (Which, of course, every reflective man knows they are.) But more: Christian politics is obliged to take this view of the matter, for the sake of the poor. What point is there in encouraging virtue in the family, and having it undermined in the school and on the street? What point in passing on truth by the unadorned word, only to have it repudiated by art? What point in arranging the departments of government to assure concord and liberty, when the arrangements of the social and economic orders forbid concord and liberty? All of the public life is the proper concern of politics because the poor live in all of it and need the support of all of it.

The liberal conception of politics came into the world with Machiavelli and Bodin, with Hobbes and Locke, and proceeded to reduce the science of politics to the science of the state. This has Jed, on the one hand, to wretched totalitarianism, where the state does everything; and on the other, to wretched libertarianism, where the state does nothing. It has also led to the liberal mind: imprisoned in its little civil cell, _it has never been able to deal intelligently with the wide and rich political ideas of Plato and Aristotle, much less with the Christian elaboration of classical political thought in the Middle Ages. One of the encouraging signs of our time, heralding the fall of liberalism, is that the carefully articulated target of its enemies is not the liberal state, but the liberal system. What is hated is not so much the particular civil arrangements on which liberalism has lavished its attentions, as the whole public experience which liberalism has allowed to occupy the West.

The third advantage is a corollary to broadening the reach of politics. The Christian conception invites single-minded attention to the "quality" of the public life. This idea has recently been co-opted by statist liberals (the phrase is theirs), and generally been denounced by conservative liberals. Both the initiative and the reaction are understandable. Even the custodians of the liberal system can discern the neglect of quality, and see that it is killing the system. And who, but they, wouldn't recoil at the prospect of turning over the cure to themselves: to a presidential commission, or a university, or a Brookings study? But the idea remains valid. Indeed I have greater sympathy for the impulse, however belated and benighted, to attend to quality, than for the impulse to do nothing (except maybe say a prayer) about what everyone knows is corrupting the poor. In any event, the argument here is theoretical, not programmatic. The argument is that the public life cannot provide support for the poor unless it provides sensible expressions of truth and beauty and love—unless it sets up sensible signs of the divine. The argument is also that the signs will never appear unless Christians make a conscious effort, in their politics, to set them up.

You complain that such signs will always be miserable simulacra of what they signify? You are really complaining about the fallen nature of man, about which God has also complained. You will therefore

not be so presumptuous as to cast the City of Man into a reflection, however distorted, of the City of Goo? Then you are abandoning the City of Man, as the Incarnate God did not. You wish to limit the power of those who minister to the public life because of the human tendency to misuse power? You are right to do so. But five centuries of liberalism have infallibly taught that for all its contrived constitutions and laws the one thing liberalism does not provide is effective limitations on power. Has power ever been limited effectively in the West except on God's authority? Is there any better protector of the poor, on the showing of history, than the Church of the Poor?

VII.

We thus return to Danielou who sees that Christianity must reach the poor today through a world shaped by science and technology. The temptation is to withdraw and hide from this fight, to hope it will go away. But it is not likely to. One does not have to share Danielou's view that the developments it represents is "admirable and irreversible" in order to appreciate that it is our lot today, that it is the clay God has given us to mold. Moreover, there are reasons (which are really intuitions) for taking hope from what now seems so forbidding. Danielou, for instance, suspects that the very omnipresence of technology and its sensible oppressiveness will increasingly demonstrate the absence of the spiritual in contemporary life and drive man to seek God, to be religious. Man is coming to see "more clearly how limited is the help technology can give him"—that it "leaves him unprovided for in precisely those situations which have the most importance for him." Frederick Wilhelmsen, on the other hand, has recently written that the "essential dynamism" of the ascendant electronic technology itself forces a synthesis of existence, and thus will draw man in the dawning age to a life of contemplation. What disturbs me most about Wilhelmsen's thesis, however, is the renewed suggestion of elitism. If the dynamism of the post-modern world will free the metaphysician to see God, what in it will free the poor?

I think Danielou has fingered the key. He says that the connection between our technologically organized world and the sacred will be provided by art. The reason why there is no connection today, why the poor are uncared for, is that there is no art. This message makes the point well:

The world of beauty is the world of intermediary hierarchies which are irradiated with the glory that cascades down from the Trinity even into the formless opacity of matter. The beautiful is the world of forms between that which is above, being the sphere of God, and that which has no form at all, being mere matter. The modern world shuts out that intermediate order. It recognizes nothing between scientific thinking and mystical possession, and in so doing denies completely the sphere which it is the function of art to reconstitute by giving back to the universe its depths.

The point can be made otherwise by observing that the beautiful os sensible, not intellectual or moral. Therefore it is always accessible to, and lures the poor. It is no accident that the age of great belief was the age of great art. And the dynamism here moves both ways. If belief nourishes art, it is even clearer, at least for the poor that art nourishes belief.

For this reason it seems certain that a reconstituted Christian civilization will have art as its center. This means, in turn, that Christian politics will have to become centrally concerned with art. The state will always be with us, a necessity and therefore a good. But I think its importance will recede with the disappearance of liberalism, though probably after a final bout with fascism. It is possible that the state's rank in the public life will be taken over by television.

VIII.

I will close this letter by seeming to deny its argument, but the blame for this I will not admit. I lay it to the paradox of Christianity. It is true that Christianity and civilization cannot be kept apart, not if there is to be a Christian people. But it is also true that Christianity is not civilization, and cannot be identified with any civilization, past or future. I once wrote an article arguing that Western Christendom was "God's Civilization." I was wrong about that. Danielou is right in insisting that "Christianity is of quite a different order … It is a divine irruption which cuts through to the very seat of our wretchedness, prizing us loose from this civilization, which can do no more than lighten our load, and bring us out on to a quite different level of existence … The essence of Christianity … is the transfiguration of our woe." Christianity is not the poor seeking a God who is waiting to be found. It is God, in violent action, seeking the poor. And it is only the real poor who can, without the brace of civilization, stand up under the collision. This is why there are probably no short cuts to making a new Christendom. Almost certainly the seeds of Christian politics can be resown only "by creating oases in the prevailing secularism where the Christian vocation can develop." These oases will be peopled, I am sure Danielou means, by the real poor, by those who are "detached from earthly things." Yet I, maybe like you, am not ready for that. I am still a poor politician.